

Collaborative Partnership Strategies and Sustainable Quality Education in Public Primary Schools in Kenya

Author: Peris Kiprono

Abstract

This study explored the role of collaborative partnership strategies in promoting sustainable quality education in public primary schools in Kenya. Guided by three objectives, the study sought to investigate how school community linkages contribute to quality education, assess the extent to which public private partnerships influence educational outcomes and identify barriers to effective collaboration. Drawing on Co-production theory and Collaborative Governance theory, the study employed a desktop research methodology, analyzing secondary data from academic journals, policy documents, and empirical studies. It focused on three key areas: the contribution of school community linkages, the role of Public Private Partnerships and the barriers that hinder effective collaboration. The findings revealed that active community involvement in school governance, development planning and learner support enhanced educational outcomes, resource utilization, and accountability. Public Private Partnerships were also found to strengthen education delivery through infrastructure development, teacher training and digital learning

resources, particularly in marginalized regions. The study also identified critical challenges such as limited stakeholder coordination, unclear role definition, and capacity gaps as major impediments to effective partnership implementation. The study concludes that collaborative strategies can significantly improve the quality and sustainability of basic education in public primary schools when supported by clear policy frameworks, inclusive stakeholder engagement, and targeted capacity building. These insights provide practical guidance for policymakers, school leaders, and development partners seeking to foster effective, equitable, and locally responsive education systems through school community linkages and public private partnerships.

Key words: School community linkages, public private partnerships, collaborative partnerships, sustainable quality education and public primary schools.

1.0 Introduction

To fully appreciate the role of collaborative partnerships in achieving sustainable quality education, it is essential to explore the context within which these partnerships emerge and operate. This section therefore aims to have a closer examination of the prevailing educational dynamics, global development agendas and regional practices which provide a foundation for understanding how

strategic collaborations can be harnessed to drive long term educational improvement and equity. The section further explicates the purpose of the study.

1.1 Background of the study

Globally, the pursuit of sustainable quality education is closely tied to collaborative strategies that bridge schools with key stakeholders, as emphasized in Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4). Evidence shows that school community linkages significantly enhance learner engagement, accountability, and inclusivity, especially in under resourced settings (UNESCO, 2021). Community participation in school development committees, school feeding programs, and volunteer driven interventions has been found to improve learner retention and academic outcomes. A good example is in Bangladesh and Nepal where parental involvement and community monitoring were strongly associated with improved literacy rates and reduced dropout among disadvantaged learners (Arnal, Roseveare, & Vázquez, 2023). These findings underscore the transformative role of localized collaboration in delivering contextually responsive education systems.

In the African context, Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) have emerged as critical in complementing government efforts in expanding access and improving education quality. Successful PPP models in countries like Ghana and Uganda have

demonstrated how private sector investment in infrastructure, teacher training, and digital learning tools can catalyze sustainable educational reforms (Wane, Wangenge-Ouma, & Tiyambe Zeleza, 2020). In Ghana's "Partnership Schools for Liberia" pilot, privately managed schools with public funding showed measurable gains in student achievement compared to traditionally managed schools (Romero, Sandefur, & Sandholtz, 2021). These regional experiences point to the value of structured and transparent PPP arrangements in bridging equity and quality gaps, especially in marginalized public-school settings.

In Kenya, various policy frameworks such as the Basic Education Act (2013), the National Education Sector Strategic Plan (NESSP) 2023 - 2027 and the Kenya Vision 2030 emphasize the importance of multi-stakeholder collaboration in achieving quality education. According to Omollo & Nyongesa (2023), School community linkages have been instrumental in mobilizing local resources for infrastructure development, addressing cultural barriers to education, and promoting school attendance. Wambua & Mugambi (2023) reiterates that despite these efforts, disparities persist, particularly in rural and underserved regions where weak community engagement and donor fatigue limit sustainability. There remains a gap in

understanding how these partnerships can be systematically integrated and scaled to deliver long - term educational improvements.

However, the implementation of collaborative partnerships continues to face significant barriers, such as unclear roles among stakeholders, inconsistent policy enforcement, resource constraints, and limited community ownership (Kinyua & Mwangi, 2022). According to Karamperidou, Romero, Sandefur, and Shiraishi (2023) fragmented communication channels between schools, private actors, and local governments often hinder the development of trust - based partnerships. In addition, Njenga and Chege (2022) note that some PPPs have been criticized for lacking transparency and inclusivity, raising questions about accountability and equity. Addressing these barriers is essential for creating sustainable and impactful collaborative ecosystems that can drive quality learning outcomes across Kenya's public primary schools.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Access to basic education in Kenya has improved significantly over the years, yet the challenge of ensuring sustainable quality education in public primary schools persists. National education policies emphasize the importance of inclusive and collaborative approaches to school development, but school

community linkages remain weak and inconsistent, especially in rural and marginalized areas. Existing literature reveals that many public primary schools lack formalized structures for engaging parents, local leaders, and civil society organizations in governance and instructional support (Njenga & Chege, 2022). Mutua and Mwangi (2021) further add that without strong community involvement, efforts to improve learner outcomes and infrastructure tend to be fragmented and unsustainable. Furthermore, secondary sources highlight that where such linkages exist, they are often informal and underutilized, limiting their potential to influence educational quality meaningfully (Makori & Chebet, 2022).

Similarly, Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) which are advocated in Kenya's education sector plans are not yet fully mainstreamed into public primary education. Documented studies show that while some PPPs have successfully contributed to school improvement, others operate with limited public oversight, raising concerns over transparency and equity (Romero et al., 2021). A review of recent empirical findings also points to persistent barriers to effective collaboration, including mistrust, lack of coordination frameworks, and capacity disparities among stakeholders (Omollo & Nyongesa, 2023). Given these concerns, there is a clear knowledge gap regarding

the effectiveness, structure, and challenges of collaborative partnership strategies in Kenya's public primary schools. This desktop research, therefore seeks to synthesize and critically analyze existing literature to assess how collaborative strategies influence the achievement of sustainable quality education and to identify barriers that hinder their successful implementation.

1.3 Objectives of the study

- 1) To investigate how school community linkages contribute to sustainable quality education
- 2) To assess the extent to which Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) contribute to the achievement of sustainable quality education.
- 3) To identify key barriers to effective collaborative partnerships in achieving sustainable quality education

1.4 Research Questions

- 1) How do school community linkages contribute to the achievement of sustainable quality education in public primary schools in Kenya
- 2) To what extent do Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) influence achievement of sustainable quality education

- 3) What are the major barriers affecting the effectiveness of collaborative partnerships in achieving sustainable quality education

2.0 Literature Review

This section aims to look into the theoretical framework that informed the research and exploring the views of other authors.

2.1 Theoretical Review

This study is supported by two theoretical frameworks namely; Co - production Theory and Collaborative Governance Theory. Combining these frameworks offers a multi - dimensional perspective through which comprehensive or multifaceted lenses can be used to analyze the possibility of re - inventing collaborative partnerships to facilitate sustainable education landscapes.

Co - production Theory, originally proposed by Elinor Ostrom and later expanded by Brandsen and Honingh (2016), emphasizes that public services are most effective when citizens and institutions jointly participate in service design and delivery. The theory emerged from the recognition that service users possess localized knowledge and motivation that, when integrated with formal institutions, leads to more relevant, sustainable, and equitable outcomes. In the

context of basic education, this theory challenges the traditional top - down model of schooling and promotes the active participation of parents, community leaders, and civil society in managing school level functions, supporting teaching and learning, and co - monitoring outcomes (Joshi & Moore, 2020). Dumay, Guthrie, and Rooney (2019) further note that the purpose of this theory is to democratize public service delivery and bridge the implementation gap through meaningful engagement of all actors, mainly at the ground level.

The assumption behind co - production theory is that shared ownership, accountability, and complementary effort between providers and users lead to higher service efficiency and improved satisfaction. This claim has been tested in education systems where community supported schools show better learner attendance, improved infrastructure, and greater financial transparency. In Kenya, for instance, studies have demonstrated that schools where parents and local stakeholders are involved in decision making and resource planning experience improved educational quality, learner retention, and sustainability of programs (Maina & Mwaura, 2021). In South Asia, co - produced educational interventions have yielded better learning outcomes in marginalized regions (Aslam & Kingdon, 2020). These findings provide proof of the theory's practical value. Steen, Brandsen,

and Verschuere (2022) however cautions that co - production if unchecked may cause ineffective collaboration especially when power imbalances, weak institutional support, or stakeholder fatigue disrupt meaningful engagement all of which remain key barriers in Kenya's public school system.

Collaborative Governance Theory on the other hand was formulated by Ansell and Gash (2008) to explain how government actors and non-state stakeholders can jointly make and implement decisions in formal, consensus - based processes. The theory arose from efforts to understand cross sector collaboration in addressing complex policy challenges, particularly where no single actor holds enough authority or capacity to solve problems alone. In the education sector, this theory is applicable to multi - stakeholder partnerships involving government agencies, donors, Non - Governmental Organizations (NGOs), private entities, school management committees, and community members. According to Saito, Brossard, and Paviot (2022), the purpose of this theory is to promote shared responsibility, legitimacy, and effectiveness in policy design and implementation. This is particularly relevant in public primary education in Kenya, where diverse stakeholders are increasingly involved in governance, infrastructure support and resource delivery.

At the heart of collaborative governance is the assumption that interdependent actors, when brought together through structured platforms and guided by mutual trust and shared goals, can generate collective value. This has been observed in education contexts where Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) and community institution collaborations lead to sustained improvements in infrastructure, teaching quality, and inclusive participation. Empirical studies in Liberia and Ghana have demonstrated that structured collaboration between public authorities and private actors can result in measurable gains in learner performance and school accountability (Romero et al., 2021). In Kenya for instance, successful collaborative initiatives between county governments and schools have enabled targeted interventions such as school feeding programs, ICT integration, and inclusive education (Wambua & Mugambi, 2023). These cases support the enabling power of collaborative frameworks in overcoming fragmentation, mobilizing diverse resources, and fostering sustainable quality education.

2.2 Empirical Studies

School Community Linkages and Sustainable Quality Education

Empirical evidence affirms that strong school community linkages contribute significantly to the realization of sustainable quality education. Indicators of

these linkages include community involvement in school development planning, parental involvement in learner progress and participation in school governance structures such as Boards of Management. A study conducted by Mutua and Mwangi (2021) in Kangundo Subcounty, Machakos County, revealed that primary schools which actively involved parents in academic days, discipline committees and school improvement planning recorded improved learner discipline and academic performance. Similarly, research by Njenga and Chege (2022) in Kiambu County showed that community organized initiatives such as school feeding programs and local fundraising for classroom construction enhanced learner retention and reduced absenteeism in public schools. In Turkana County, a case study of Nomadic Education Centres indicated that collaboration with elders and faith-based organizations was crucial in sustaining learning among pastoralist communities, highlighting the cultural sensitivity aspect of community school partnerships (Makori & Chebet, 2022). Kinyua and Mwangi (2022) further demonstrated that structured community forums enhanced transparency in school resource management, contributing to increased trust and sustained support from local stakeholders.

In an urban context, Wanjiru and Otieno (2023) examined public primary schools

in Nairobi County and found that schools that maintained consistent parent teacher communication channels, digital feedback platforms and regular school based open days experienced improved parental satisfaction and learner achievement. The study emphasized the importance of leveraging urban technological infrastructure to strengthen school community engagement and promote accountability.

Public Private Partnerships and Quality Education Delivery

Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) are increasingly recognized for their contribution to improving the quality and equity of education in low and middle income countries, including Kenya. Indicators of effective PPPs include joint financing of school infrastructure, support for teacher training, digital learning resource provision and co - managed education projects. A study of the MPESA Foundation Academy in Kiambu County conducted by Omondi and Kiplang'at (2012) demonstrated how a private sector funded institution, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education (MoE) has provided holistic education to disadvantaged learners through Information and Communications Technology (ICT) enabled classrooms, mentorship, and wellness programs.

According to USAID (2021), the Tusome Early Grade Reading Program, a flagship

PPP between USAID and the Ministry of Education, significantly improved literacy outcomes in lower primary through structured teacher support, provision of textbooks, and digital monitoring. Similarly, Twaweza East Africa (2022) found that multi-stakeholder education projects that included telecoms, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and faith-based organizations helped introduce ICT infrastructure, school health services, and capacity building initiatives for teachers. Njogu and Muriithi (2023) also observed that public schools partnering with local businesses for school feeding, ICT labs, and sanitation facilities were more likely to retain learners and maintain instructional time. These studies support the transformative potential of PPPs but also point to the need for policy clarity and transparent partnership frameworks to ensure equity and sustainability.

Additionally, a study by Wambua and Mugambi (2023) in Kitui County found that collaboration between local cement companies and public primary schools resulted in improved sanitation facilities and school compound greening initiatives. These PPP models demonstrated that private sector involvement can bridge funding gaps and bring innovation, particularly when implemented with adequate oversight and public alignment (Wane et al., 2020).

Barriers to Effective Collaborative Partnerships in Education

While collaborative strategies promise transformative results, multiple empirical studies highlight significant barriers to effective partnerships in public primary education. Common indicators of such barriers include poor stakeholder coordination, mistrust, inadequate policy frameworks, and asymmetries in power and decision making. A study in Homa Bay County by Omollo and Nyongesa (2023) found that unclear roles among school committees, local NGOs, and education officers led to duplication of efforts and resource wastage in school - based feeding programs. Another study by Maina and Mwaura (2021) in Bungoma County, point out that teachers in public primary schools expressed concern over tokenistic involvement of communities. The teachers argued that decisions were often made centrally by headteachers without genuine consultation thereby limiting shared ownership and long-term sustainability of school projects.

Additionally, Makori and Chebet (2022) conducted a research in Kajiado County and highlighted that language barriers, political interference and inconsistent donor engagement hindered sustained partnerships in schools located in marginalized pastoral communities. Dumay et al. (2019) further stated that without proper stakeholder mapping and

inclusive planning mechanisms, PPPs and community partnerships risk reinforcing inequalities rather than bridging them. These findings collectively suggest that overcoming these barriers requires not only policy clarity but also capacity building, transparency and inclusive governance structures.

3.0 Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research approach based on a desktop review design. It aimed at analyzing and synthesizing existing empirical studies, policy documents, program evaluation reports, and scholarly literature related to collaborative partnership strategies in education. The methodology was chosen to allow in depth exploration of documented experiences and outcomes associated with school community linkages and public private partnerships (PPPs), particularly within the context of public primary education in Kenya.

Data for the study were collected through a systematic review of secondary information obtained from credible sources. These included peer reviewed journal articles, government reports, international organization publications and education focused NGO reports , as well as previous academic theses and reports. The selection of literature was guided by relevance to the research objectives and the Kenyan context.

To ensure accuracy, data were analyzed thematically. Key themes aligned to the study objectives, such as partnership outcomes, stakeholder roles and barriers to collaboration were identified and categorized. Thematic patterns were then interpreted to draw conclusions and recommendations on how to strengthen collaborative frameworks for sustainable quality education in Kenya's public primary schools.

3.1 Findings of the Study

Influence of School Community Linkages on Sustainable Quality Education

The study established that school community linkages significantly enhance sustainable quality education through increased parental engagement, community led infrastructure projects and local participation in governance. This is supported by research undertaken by Mutua and Mwangi (2022) in Kangundo Sub County, Machakos County where they found out that schools that actively involved parents in decision making and co - managed development plans recorded improved learner discipline and academic performance. Additionally, Njenga and Chege (2022) found that community driven initiatives such as school feeding programs and infrastructure support improved learner retention and satisfaction. Furthermore, in Turkana County, Makori and Chebet (2022) highlighted how engagement with elders

and cultural leaders helped sustain education among nomadic learners by adapting school schedules to local lifestyles. These findings confirm that community ownership and localized support are key to sustaining education in diverse socio-economic contexts.

Contribution of Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) to Sustainable Quality Education

Findings from the desktop review revealed that well-structured PPPs enhance education outcomes by supplementing government efforts in infrastructure, training and digital learning. A case in hand is a study undertaken by Omondi and Kiplang'at (2021) who found that the M-PESA Foundation Academy's PPP model significantly boosted learner access to ICT enabled education and holistic development. In Nairobi's informal settlements, Romero et al. (2021) observed that the Bridge International Academies model provided standardized curriculum delivery and regular teacher monitoring, though with concerns around affordability and teacher welfare. Wambua and Mugambi (2023) also documented how collaboration between local businesses and schools in Kitui led to improved sanitation and school greening efforts. These cases underscore the effectiveness of PPPs in resource constrained environments, provided there is accountability and alignment with public education goals.

Barriers to effective Collaborative Partnerships in Public Primary Education

Despite policy provisions, the study identified multiple barriers to successful collaborative partnerships, including; lack of clarity in stakeholder roles, weak coordination mechanisms and limited stakeholder capacity. This is supported by a research carried out in Homa Bay County by Omollo and Nyongesa (2023) who reported that uncoordinated roles between NGOs and school management committees which led to duplication and conflict in project implementation. On the same note, in Bungoma County, Maina and Mwaura (2021) found that teachers viewed community involvement as superficial due to limited consultation and decision-making power. Lastly, Makori and Chebet (2022) observed that political interference and inconsistent donor engagement in Kajiado County undermined long-term partnerships. These findings highlight the need for structured engagement frameworks, clear role definition, and capacity building to strengthen collaboration in public primary schools.

3.2 Recommendations

From the findings of the study, the researcher made the following recommendations:

- 1) To strengthen school community linkages for sustainable quality education, there is need to

institutionalize structured community engagement frameworks within public primary schools.

- 2) Schools should regularly involve parents, community leaders, and faith-based organizations in participatory forums such as School Development Committees, Education Days, and school-based planning processes. This will foster a culture of transparency, shared accountability, and trust between schools and their surrounding communities.
- 3) The Ministry of Education (MoE) should provide capacity building for Boards of Management (BoM) and head teachers on principles of collaborative governance, conflict resolution, and stakeholder alignment.
- 4) To enhance the role of Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) in advancing sustainable quality education, the government should establish a transparent and standardized framework to guide stakeholder engagement, performance monitoring, and accountability. This includes creating national PFP guidelines specific to the education sector that outline roles, funding mechanisms and reporting obligations for private actors and development partners

- 5) To overcome barriers to effective collaborative partnerships, the study recommends that policy makers and school leaders invest in clear role definition, coordination mechanisms, and communication platforms among education stakeholders. The lack of clarity and fragmentation reported in various counties highlights the urgent need for stakeholder mapping, joint planning, and feedback structures that ensure all actors are working toward common goals

4.0 Conclusion

This study set out to examine how collaborative partnership strategies contribute to sustainable quality education in public primary schools in Kenya, focusing on school community linkages, Public Private Partnerships (PPPs), and the barriers to effective collaboration. Through a desktop review of recent empirical and theoretical literature, it became evident that inclusive stakeholder engagement particularly from parents, local leaders, civil society, and private actors enhances learner outcomes, infrastructure development, and overall school effectiveness. Schools that nurture active community participation and localized support structures experience stronger accountability, increased resource mobilization, and improved

learner retention. These findings align with Co-production Theory and Collaborative Governance Theory, both of which underscore the importance of shared responsibility and consensus driven engagement in public service delivery.

However, the study also highlighted that many public primary schools face structural and operational challenges that undermine effective collaboration. These include unclear stakeholder roles, weak coordination, limited institutional capacity, and inconsistent policy implementation. While PPPs and community involvement offer promising models, their sustainability and equity depend heavily on transparent frameworks, capacity building, and inclusive planning. The findings therefore call for deliberate efforts by the Ministry of Education, school leadership, and development partners to strengthen collaborative mechanisms that are context sensitive, accountable, and aligned with national education goals. A shift towards a more participatory and networked governance in the education sector is essential to achieving not only access but sustained quality basic education across Kenya.

References

- Accountability Journal, 32(2), 532–555.
- Ansell, C., & Gash. A. (2008). Collaborative governance in theory and practice. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 18(4), 543–571. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/mum032>
- Arnal, E., Roseveare, D., & Vázquez, Á. (2023). *Collaboration in education: Enhancing quality through community partnerships*. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/5e431d1e-en>
- Aslam, M., & Kingdon, G. (2020). *Parental engagement and school outcomes in low-income countries: Evidence from South Asia*. *Comparative Education Review*, 64(2), 225–248.
- Brandsen, T., & Honingh, M. (2016). Distinguishing different types of co-production: A conceptual analysis based on the classical definitions. *Public Administration Review*, 76(3), 427–435. <https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12465>
- Dumay, J., Guthrie, J., & Rooney, J. (2019). Stakeholder theory and accountability in public education. *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, 32(2), 532–555.
- Joshi, A., & Moore, M. (2020). Institutionalized co-production: Unpacking the relationship between service delivery and state legitimacy. *IDS Working Paper*, 547.
- Karamperidou, D., Romero, M., Sandefur, J., & Shiraishi, T. (2023). *Public-private partnerships in education: New evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa*. Center for Global Development.
- Kinyua, B., & Mwangi, S. (2022). Community-based education partnerships and quality learning in rural Kenya. *East African Journal of Education Studies*, 4(1), 19–31.
- Maina, C., & Mwaura, P. (2021). Mapping stakeholder influence in public primary education: A Kenyan perspective. *International Journal of Educational Policy Research and Review*, 8(3), 100–109.
- Makori, A., & Chebet, L. (2022). Applying systems thinking in school governance: Lessons from Kenyan education reform. *African Journal of Educational Management*, 6(2), 95–110.
- Mutua, L., & Mwangi, P. (2021). Community participation and

- learner performance in public primary schools: A case of Kangundo Sub-County. *Kenya Journal of Education Planning, Economics and Management*, 13(1), 77–89.
- Njenga, G., & Chege, F. (2022). Community participation and educational outcomes in Kenyan public primary schools. *East African Journal of Education and Social Sciences*, 3(4), 123–131.
- Njogu, J., & Muriithi, M. (2023). Enhancing education quality through stakeholder collaboration: A case of public primary schools in Kenya. *East African Journal of Education and Social Sciences*, 4(1), 12–21.
- Omollo, D. & Nyongesa, S. (2023). *Challenges in implementation of stakeholder collaboration in public schools in Kenya*. *Journal of African Educational Studies*, 5(1), 52–68.
- Omondi, M., & Kiplang'at, J. (2021). Public-private partnership and provision of quality education: A study of M-PESA Foundation Academy. *Journal of Contemporary Education Research*, 5(4), 115–127.
- Romero, M., Sandefur, J., & Sandholtz, W. (2021). *Can outsourcing improve Liberia's schools? Final results from a randomized evaluation of Partnership Schools for Liberia*. Center for Global Development.
- Saito, M., Brossard, M., & Paviot, L. (2022). *Monitoring quality education through participatory approaches*. UNESCO IIEP.
- Steen, T., Brandsen, T., & Verschuere, B. (2022). The dark side of co-production: A systematic literature review. *Public Management Review*, 24(4), 622–642.
- Twaweza East Africa. (2022). *Citizen agency and school improvement in East Africa: Lessons from Uwezo and Sauti za Wananchi*.
- UNESCO. (2021). *Global education monitoring report: Non-state actors in education—Who chooses? Who loses?* Paris: UNESCO Publishing.
- USAID. (2021). *Tusome Early Literacy Program Endline Report (2014–2021)*. Nairobi: USAID Kenya.
- Wambua, M., & Mugambi, F. (2023). *Sustainability of education programs in Kenyan primary schools: The role of community-based partnerships*. African

Journal of Development and Sustainability, 2(3), 44–59.

Wane, W., Wangenge-Ouma, G., & Tiyambe Zeleza, P. (2020). *Reimagining public-private partnerships in African education*. African Education Review, 17(1), 9–29.

Wanjiru, L., & Otieno, M. (2023). *Urban school–community linkages and learner performance in Nairobi County*. International Journal of Educational Development in Africa, 11(1), 78–93