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Outcomes: A Case of East Africa**



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The Impact of Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships on Educational Outcomes: A Case of East Africa

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Abstract

Purpose: Partnerships among educational development stakeholders have yielded long-term and mutual benefits for all participants involved, depending on the nature of their participation and contribution. Through the Foundation for learning project, the Aga Khan University's Institute for Educational Development, East Africa aims to improve learning outcomes in specific regions of Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania. By focusing on four teacher colleges in the three countries, the Institute aimed to investigate the collaboration and role of educational and development partners, including Ministries of Education and Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) agencies, in implementing the F4L Project. It explores how collaboration within this partnership informs educational practice and theory.

Methodology: A qualitative study involving continuous observations on the outcomes of participation and contributions of the various partners was made.

Findings: Findings from various stakeholders highlight the benefits of the multi partnerships, including capacity building, resource, and expertise sharing, in ultimately enhancing sustainability and the quality of education for all children.

Unique contribution to theory, practice and policy (recommendations): The study shows the value add of engaging in lobbying and advocacy efforts, as well as of shared knowledge which strengthens project planning and minimizes implementation risks. The paper discusses the potential of multi-stakeholder partnerships in improving teacher education and educational outcomes in East Africa through collaboration.

Keywords: *Partnerships, Educational development, Lobbying, Advocacy, Stakeholder engagement*

1 Introduction

Bakuza (2025): Rarieya (2024) highlights the advantages of collaborative approaches in education. Educational partnership, an outcome of such collaboration, occurs when several parties come together for the common good of an institution or the improvement of learning outcomes. Levin et al. (2017) argue that partnerships can pool resources, expertise, and knowledge bases, leading to more effective interventions. Fullan et al. (2007) emphasize the role of partnerships in fostering knowledge exchange and continuous learning among stakeholders. This aligns with the findings of Wambua et al. (2013) who found that school-university partnerships contribute to improved teacher training and professional development. Partnerships in education have emerged as a powerful tool for improving educational outcomes. By bringing together diverse stakeholders, they leverage a wider range of resources, expertise, and perspectives compared to traditional, siloed approaches.

Partnerships allow schools, universities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and government agencies to pool resources. This can provide access to funding, technology, professional development opportunities, and other valuable assets that may be limited for individual institutions (Levin et al., 2017). Partnerships connect stakeholders with complementary areas of expertise. For example, universities can share research findings with educators, while experienced teachers can provide valuable insights to curriculum developers. This cross-pollination of knowledge leads to more informed decision-making and effective interventions (Fullan et al., 2007). For instance, Honing et al. (2018) highlight the success of school-university partnerships in fostering knowledge exchange and improving teacher training. University faculty, experienced educators, and industry professionals can collaborate on workshops, mentoring programs, and leadership development initiatives (Wambua et al., 2013).

The diverse perspectives brought together by partnerships foster innovation and creative problem-solving. Partners can work collaboratively to develop new teaching methods, curriculum approaches, and technology integration strategies (Moser et al., 2018). Ultimately, successful partnerships benefit students the most. By enhancing teacher training, curriculum development, and resource availability, partnerships lay the foundation for improved learning environments and student achievement (Levin et al., 2017). Partnerships can foster stronger connections between schools and communities. Businesses, parents, and community organizations can become active partners in supporting student learning and school improvement initiatives. This builds a broader network of stakeholders invested in educational success (Andrews et al., 2012). Partnerships can leverage combined resources and influence to advocate for policy changes that benefit education. By working together, partners can amplify their voices and create a stronger push for educational equity, resource allocation, and systemic improvements (Stringer et al., 2009).

In addition, partnerships can provide student teachers with real-world classroom experience under the guidance of experienced educators. Universities can also offer professional development

opportunities to teachers and collaborate on curriculum development (Honing et al., 2018). Businesses can offer internships and mentoring programs for students, provide financial support for schools, or host career exploration events. Schools can prepare students with relevant skills needed for future careers (Stringer et al., 2009). Community organizations can offer after-school programs, tutoring services, or volunteer opportunities that enrich students' learning experiences. Schools can create opportunities for students to engage with their communities and develop civic responsibility (Andrews et al., 2012). Thus, partnerships represent a dynamic and collaborative approach to education development. By harnessing the collective strengths of diverse stakeholders, partnerships have the potential to create a more effective and equitable learning environment for all students (Fullan et al., 2007).

1.1 Effective Partnership Models

Literature identifies key elements for successful partnerships. For example, Moser et al. (2018) emphasizes the importance of clearly defined roles and responsibilities for each partner. Honing et al. (2018) highlights the need for open communication, trust, and a shared vision among collaborating actors. Additionally, Andrews et al. (2012) suggest that successful partnerships involve long-term commitments and mutual benefits for all stakeholders. While partnerships offer numerous benefits in education, their success hinges on a well-defined structure and collaborative practices.

All partners actively participate in developing a clear and shared vision for the partnership's purpose and desired outcomes. This ensures everyone is working towards the same goals and fosters a sense of collective ownership (Moser et al., 2018). For example, a university-school partnership which aims to improve student achievement in science through innovative teaching methods will require the partners to establish common goals for science proficiency levels and agree on specific strategies to achieve them.

In partnerships, each partner understands their roles and responsibilities within the collaboration. This prevents confusion and duplication of efforts and ensures everyone contributes their unique strengths (Honing et al., 2018). For example, an NGO specializing in technology integration partners with a school district to implement a new online learning platform, the NGO may provide training and technical support, while the school district would identify pilot schools, manage logistics, and provide teacher training.

Partners communicate openly and transparently, fostering trust and mutual respect. Regular communication allows for timely problem-solving, programme or intervention correction, and collaborative decision-making (Andrews et al., 2012). For example, a business-education partnership establishes regular meetings between company mentors and student participants. Mentors openly share feedback with students, while students feel comfortable expressing their questions and concerns.

Effective partnerships acknowledge the need for adaptation. Partners should be willing to adjust strategies and goals based on ongoing evaluation and changing circumstances (Stringer et al., 2009). For example, if a community-school partnership implements a tutoring program after school, based on feedback from students and tutors, the partners adjust the program schedule to better accommodate student needs and volunteer availability.

Successful partnerships require a long-term perspective. Building trust and achieving lasting change takes time and sustains effort from all stakeholders (Andrews et al., 2012). If a university and a teacher training college establish a long-term partnership for professional development, it is expected that they will offer ongoing workshops and mentoring programs for teachers, ensuring a continuous cycle of improvement.

Partnerships need to be mindful of potential power imbalances between stakeholders. Strategies can be implemented to ensure all voices are heard and contributions are valued (Fullan et al., 2007). Partnerships require ongoing investment and resource allocation to ensure long-term viability. Partners should explore sustainable funding models and resource-sharing strategies (Levin et al., 2017). By adhering to these principles and adapting them to specific contexts, educational partnerships can maximize their impact and contribute significantly to improving learning outcomes for all students.

1.2 Challenges and Considerations

Despite the potential benefits, partnerships also present challenges. Wango et al. (2024) acknowledge potential power imbalances and cultural differences that can hinder collaboration. Stringer et al. (2009) highlights the complexities of navigating bureaucratic structures and ensuring accountability within partnerships. Furthermore, as mentioned by Andrews et al. (2012), sustaining partnerships requires ongoing communication, effort, and investment. While partnerships offer a promising approach to educational development, navigating these collaborations comes with its own set of challenges and considerations.

Partnerships can be susceptible to power imbalances, where certain stakeholders may have more influence or resources than others. This can lead to unequal decision-making processes and a sense of marginalization for some partners (Ngwaru et al., 2015). Partners involved may have different goals and priorities. Balancing these competing interests requires open communication, negotiation, and a willingness to compromise (Koomar et al., 2023). Effective communication and coordination are crucial but can be difficult to maintain across diverse partner institutions. This may involve overcoming bureaucratic hurdles, establishing clear communication channels, and fostering trust among partners (Moser et al., 2018). Partnerships require sustained investment of resources (both financial and human) to ensure long-term success. Finding sustainable funding models and ensuring equitable resource allocation are crucial considerations (Levin et al., 2017).

Measuring the impact of partnerships can be complex. Partners need to establish clear evaluation metrics and processes to track progress and demonstrate the effectiveness of their collaboration (Andrews et al., 2012). Partnerships involving stakeholders from diverse cultural backgrounds may encounter communication challenges due to differing expectations, communication styles, and decision-making processes. Partners need to be sensitive to these differences and build cultural understanding (Moser et al., 2018). Building and maintaining successful partnerships requires ongoing time investment from all stakeholders. Partners need to ensure they have the capacity and resources to dedicate to the collaborative effort (Honing et al., 2018).

Strong leadership and facilitation are essential for guiding the partnership and ensuring all voices are heard. Partners should identify individuals with the necessary skills to navigate complex dynamics and keep the collaboration on track (Oluga, 2015). Partnerships may not always be permanent. Developing clear exit strategies helps manage potential disruptions and ensures a smooth transition if circumstances change or the partnership reaches its intended goals (Andrews et al., 2012).

This research delves into the partnerships forged within the Foundations for Learning (F4L) Project, specifically examining the collaboration between Aga Khan University, Ministries of Education in the target countries, and other Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) agencies. By analyzing how these actors work together, the study seeks to understand how such partnerships contribute to both theoretical advancements in education and practical improvements in teaching and learning.

2. Research Design

The study used descriptive research design. This design aims to provide a rich and detailed description of the collaborative processes within the F4L Project partnerships. It prioritizes understanding the lived experiences and perspectives of the stakeholders involved (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The descriptive survey adopting qualitative research design was employed with purposive sampling to get specific information from the partners represented. Outcomes of Advisory Committee meetings involving all the partner agencies were documented to feed into the data. One-on-one and focus group interviews were conducted to complement the survey alongside the review of documents.

2.1 Sampling

Purposive sampling was used in the study. This sampling strategy focuses on selecting participants with specific knowledge and experience relevant to the research question. The study targeted representatives from each partner group within the F4L Project. This comprised faculty members from the Aga Khan University, officials from the Ministries of Education (from each of the four countries), and teacher trainers and student teachers from the participating teacher colleges.

2.2 Data Collection Methods

In-depth interviews were conducted with key stakeholders to gain a deeper understanding of their perspectives on collaboration within the project. Both individual and focus group interviews were utilized to capture diverse viewpoints and explore shared experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The experiences sought were about the nature of involvement in the project activities and the resultant gains. Project documents, reports, communication records, and policy guidelines related to the F4L Project and partnership development were reviewed to gain a broader context and triangulate data collected through interviews and questionnaires (Yin, 2018).

2.3 Data Analysis

The qualitative data obtained were analyzed concurrently, with each source informing the other to draw the themes discussed in this paper. This method involves identifying recurring themes, patterns, and meanings within the data that relate to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The thematic analysis allowed the researchers to understand the shared experiences and perspectives on collaboration within the F4L Project.

2.4 Trustworthiness and Rigor

The research team shared preliminary findings with participants to ensure their perspectives were accurately represented (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Data collected through various methods (interviews and document review) was compared to ensure consistency and enhance the validity of the research findings (Flick, 2014). The researchers maintained reflective journals to document assumptions, biases, and decision-making processes throughout the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3. Findings

The study presents the issues about partnerships in education, working together to enhance the educational system as learned from different colleges in Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania. Partnerships have emerged as a prominent strategy in contemporary educational development efforts.

3.1 Pedagogical Approaches

The partners' common focus was the influence of collaboration on curriculum development within the teacher colleges, ensuring alignment with national standards, and incorporating innovative approaches. The partners had worked together to ensure that they came up with a curriculum that would respond to the current educational needs, which would impact student teachers. Borrowing from respective partners' experiences increased the variety of approaches and methodologies in teaching, which could be used to improve student learning and cater to diverse learning styles. A college principal commented:

“... the fact that we want to transform the education system in the country, the educational changes proposed in the Teachers Professional Development Cycle (TPDC) model, need to be reflected in the curriculum we use. When our esteemed partners Aga Khan

[University] approached us to collaborate on the project, after the needs assessment was conducted, we sat down to see how the project design would benefit us...

Much as the quality of education directly impacts individual and societal well-being, achieving optimal learning outcomes hinges on various factors, including qualified teachers, well-resourced schools, and effective curriculum design. It also emerges that traditional, siloed approaches to education development often face limitations. This study recognized the growing emphasis on partnerships as a powerful strategy to address these challenges. Partnerships unite diverse stakeholders, leveraging their combined expertise, resources, and influence. This collaborative approach can lead to more effective interventions, improved resource allocation, and a stronger foundation for educational reform.

During the project, partners developed educational resources as one of the mechanisms for sharing best practices among teacher colleges, and primary schools, such as joint lesson observations, peer coaching, or online knowledge-sharing platforms. The mentorship structures in place increased the level of confidence of the participants in the various practice areas such as administration, classroom teaching, and outreach support to schools. One respondent explained:

"..... we jointly developed educational resources that have been used with us and the college to attend to different educational needs. The partner colleges in Uganda are currently using the practicum guide we together developed to assess the student trainee during the practicum..."

The school leaders implemented the mentorship practices acquired from working with the colleges, whilst the Aga Khan partners exchanged ideas on significant teacher preparation areas such as gender-responsive practices, implementation of competence-based curriculum, and integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in their practices amidst the challenges experienced.

3.2 Improved Learning Outcomes

The partnership between the university and the teacher colleges resulted in improved teacher preparation emanating from the enrichment of the teacher education curriculum, having incorporated innovative teaching methods and pedagogical approaches (Rarieya et al 2024). It was intended that this would expand the learner's ability to understand and easily gain knowledge for better performance. Improved learning outcomes were realized from the implementation of improved processes in teacher preparation, effective professional development structures, and a supportive learning environment (Wambua et al., 2013). The project provided an opportunity for structured ongoing professional development for the teacher educators and equipped them with skills in reflective practice and action research, which in turn was cascaded to the primary school teachers, ensuring they stayed updated on the most current educational practices and research. One of the college principals noted:

“.....the current results for the national examination show that performance has improved significantly for two years at our college after this intervention. We have observed a lot of changes in teaching and knowledge among the learners. When AKU worked with us to identify areas for capacity building during the needs assessment study, we proposed we need to enrich tutors' knowledge, practicum assessment.....”

The aforementioned collaboration created a more supportive learning environment within the teacher colleges and practicum schools through shared resources, expertise, and best practices (Moser et al., 2018). The colleges realized the need to actively engage the teachers and administrators of the primary schools where the student teachers conduct their practicum if they were to achieve the learning outcomes they desired. They had to put into play a more sustainable and effective model of practicum by building the host teachers' mentoring capacities for a more supportive learning environment.

3.3 Mutual Benefit

Partners establish a clear and shared vision for the project's long-term goals (e.g., improved procedures in teacher preparation, and enhanced student-teacher and school-student learning outcomes). This fosters a sense of collective ownership and commitment, ensuring everyone works towards the same objectives (Moser et al., 2018). Partners collaboratively develop project plans, allocate resources, and make decisions. This participatory approach fosters trust, transparency, and a sense of shared responsibility for the project's success (Wango, 2024). Developing long-term relationships with their partners helped the colleges develop trust in the partnership and maintain the momentum for change. A principal noted:

“...we can count several achievements, from improved pedagogical skills to enhanced institutional capacity to achieve college plans and goals. This collaboration has also focused on professional development in ICT, Inclusive education, and STEM.”

Partnerships also provide opportunities for capacity building within each stakeholder group (Rarieya et al., 2024). In this case, the Aga Khan University shared research and teaching expertise with teacher educators, while the Ministries of Education offered professional development opportunities for the primary college teacher educators. A college tutor remarked:

“...the educational knowledge and skills we are getting from AKU are upskilling us and this is reflected in the performance of the student trainee... this is demonstrated in the number of mini-maker space rooms established in the schools during their teaching practice....”

The colleges embraced the intervention activities which were in line with the expectations of the ongoing reforms in education, especially focusing on competency-based curriculum, integration of ICT and Gender and Inclusion. These were essential for the colleges in developing champion teachers and teacher educators.

3.4 Continuous Learning

Partners establish mechanisms for knowledge exchange, such as workshops, seminars, and joint research projects. This allows for sharing best practices, disseminating research findings, and staying updated on current educational trends (Levin et al., 2017). In addition, the interventions which were modeled on co-delivery and collaborative learning allowed teacher educators and senior leaders to work together, a fact which is crucial for sustainability beyond the project. A college principal pointed out:

.. AKU and our college have conducted a study on the e-portfolio for tutors and student teachers to explore the understanding of the development of the e-portfolio. The findings have helped our senior administrators to know the level of the college on the e-portfolio development and the use of ICT...

Meetings were organized to bring together representatives from the four countries and they provided opportunities for benchmarking and exchange of ideas for the targeted project participants and stakeholders. The meetings provided the foundation for subsequent improvements in the delivery and management of the project each year. This is because quite a bit of reflection, introspection and re-planning occurred during the meetings. It was evident that partnerships can encourage a culture of reflective practice, where stakeholders regularly assess the project's effectiveness and adapt strategies based on continuous learning and feedback (Mutura et al., 2024).

3.5 Resource Mobilization

Partners can leverage their combined resources to secure funding from a wider range of donors and government agencies. This allows for more robust financial support for the project's activities (Levin et al., 2017). Partners with access to technology (e.g., AKDN agencies) provided resources like computers, software, and internet connectivity to enhance teaching and learning within the teacher colleges and practicum schools. One of the project implementing staff explained;

.. we are currently training the college administrators on resource mobilization to enable us to apply for funds as a consortium. The college is critical in such interventions at the grassroots level as they work closely with the community, and the schools. So, preparing them with this training will open rooms for more resource mobilization opportunities...

Partners can contribute human expertise from diverse fields. The Aga Khan University provided education specialists, while the Ministries of Education offered curriculum development experts. The other AKDN entities complemented the partnership by supporting the teacher educators and student teachers in their areas of expertise in Early Childhood Education and primary school teacher development.

3.6 Lobbying and Advocacy

The study explored how partners work together to influence educational policies that benefit teacher training and improve overall education systems in the target countries. During the implementation of the project, it was reported how critical it is to attain government priorities through lobbying. AKU has been working with stakeholders and the government on different platforms to ensure the educational policies are achieved by conducting several studies and disseminating the findings of these studies. For example, an AKU staff reported:

“.... You can’t get rid of advocacy when implementing a mega project like F4L. We are conducting several research studies that inform the government about the issues on the ground. We communicate to them and strategies are put in place for the benefit of the community and learners....”

Different partners have different social and business capital that complement what others are lacking. As a result, working with other partners can help expand the scope of networking for future collaborative opportunities.

Recommendations

The foregoing study has exemplified the diverse benefits of engaging in educational partnerships. However, to ensure their successful implementation, it is crucial to address potential challenges (Bakuza, 2025). These include clearly defining roles and expectations for all partners to prevent mismatches between desired goals and practices. In addition, it is important to foster a collaborative environment through shared interest assessments (Koomar, 2023). The shared interest will sustain the partnership when and if it undergoes rough moments. Strategic planning is also key to the success and sustainability of a partnership (Wango, 2024). Strategic planning helps the partners to identify the milestones they need to achieve and compels them to be focused on the project goals. The study also showed the important role that partnerships play in lobbying and advocating for the project goals and outcomes. Continued lobbying and advocacy efforts are essential to influence decision-makers and improve conditions for teacher education. Further, creating a conducive environment for knowledge sharing is vital to strengthen project planning and minimize implementation risks.

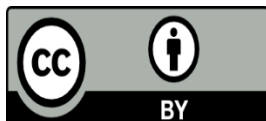
Conclusion

The study demonstrates the promising potential of collaborative partnerships in enhancing educational outcomes. Through the Foundation for Learning Project, stakeholders developed a sense of shared ownership, mutual benefit, and long-term commitment. The emphasis on ongoing learning, knowledge sharing, and capacity building was a major asset. This study highlights the significant contribution of partnerships to educational development in East Africa by fostering teamwork, knowledge sharing, and resource mobilization, ultimately leading to improved teacher preparation and eventually, better student learning outcomes.

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