

IMPACT OF PUBLIC–PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS ON THE SUSTAINABILITY OF UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION IN ENUGU STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

*The study investigated the impact of public–private partnerships (PPPs) on the sustainability of Universal Basic Education (UBE) in Enugu State, Nigeria. Two research questions guided the study, while two null hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 level of significance. The study adopted a descriptive survey design with a population of 2,011 respondents comprising 1,200 head teachers and 811 representatives of private partners. From this population, a sample of 201 respondents, made up of 120 head teachers and 81 private partners, was drawn using stratified proportionate random sampling technique. Data were collected using a structured instrument titled: Impact of Public-Private Partnerships on the Sustainability of UBE Questionnaire (IPPPSUBEQ), developed by the researcher. The questionnaire was validated by three experts from Enugu State University of Science and Technology—two in Educational Management and one in Measurement and Evaluation. Reliability testing produced coefficients of 0.79 and 0.81 for clusters one and two, with an overall reliability index of 0.80, confirming its internal consistency. Mean scores and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while hypotheses were tested with the *t*-test. Results showed that PPPs contribute to the provision of infrastructure for UBE in Enugu State to a great extent, especially in classroom blocks, WASH facilities, and ICT equipment. However, the study also revealed that PPPs have only a low extent of impact on funding UBE, particularly in areas such as teacher development, scholarships, and instructional materials. It was recommended that government establish clear policies and enforceable frameworks to guide PPP roles in both infrastructure and funding.*

Keywords: Public–private partnerships, universal basic education, infrastructure development, educational funding

Introduction

Education is widely acknowledged as a key driver of national development, social mobility, and individual empowerment. In recognition of its central role, Nigeria launched the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme in 1999 to provide free, compulsory, and accessible education for every child of school age. Despite these ambitious goals, the programme continues to face serious challenges, including inadequate funding, dilapidated infrastructure, poor teacher quality, and weak policy implementation mechanisms. These obstacles have weakened the sustainability and overall effectiveness of UBE, particularly in states like Enugu, where the demand for quality and equitable education remains high. Education is not only a fundamental human right but also a powerful tool for societal transformation. Nnebedum, Abadi, and Obasi (2019) assert that education provides the moral foundation and equips individuals with the knowledge, skills, and values needed for meaningful participation in society. Similarly, Wey-Amaewhule and Udofia (2022) noted that education fosters holistic human development, encompassing cognitive, physical,

social, and emotional growth. As the cornerstone of both personal and collective progress, primary education under UBE serves as the foundation for lifelong learning and social advancement. These perspectives highlight the critical importance of ensuring the sustainability of Universal Basic Education in Nigeria.

Universal Basic Education is a government reform programme launched in 1999 and backed by the UBE Act of 2004, with the goal of providing free, compulsory, and universal education for Nigerian children aged 6–15 years (World Bank, 2020). It covers nine years of continuous schooling: six years of primary education and three years of junior secondary education, alongside early childhood care and non-formal education components (Universal Basic Education Commission [UBEC], 2023). The programme targets vulnerable groups such as nomadic children, out-of-school youths, children with special needs, and marginalized populations to ensure equitable access (Okoroafor & Nnamani, 2023). Beyond access, UBE seeks to guarantee that learners acquire literacy, numeracy, life skills, and civic values necessary for lifelong learning and national development (World Bank, 2020). It also aligns with Nigeria's obligations under international frameworks such as Education for All (EFA) and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) (UBEC, 2023). The Universal Basic Education (UBE) is designed to guarantee equitable access and completion of nine years of continuous schooling, covering both primary and junior secondary levels (Adeyemi, 2016). The government plays the leading role in this process by ensuring adequate funding, clear policy direction, and effective institutional frameworks for implementation. At the same time, the policy emphasizes the importance of stakeholder contributions parents, communities, private organizations, and development partners in sustaining educational services. Achieving the intended outcomes depends on shared responsibility to overcome barriers such as poor infrastructure, inadequate financing, and limited community involvement (Obioma, 2016), which underscores the relevance of public–private partnership.

A public–private partnership (PPP) in education refers to a cooperative arrangement where government and private sector actors share resources, responsibilities, and risks in delivering education services or infrastructure (UNICEF, 2020). PPPs are globally relevant because they help address funding gaps, infrastructural deficits, and teacher shortages that governments in many developing countries cannot manage alone (World Bank, 2020). In practice, they introduce innovation, efficiency, and accountability into education systems by leveraging private expertise and ensuring performance-based delivery of services (UNICEF, 2020). They also diversify sources of finance, reducing the heavy reliance on public budgets and making education systems more resilient to economic or political disruptions (World Bank, 2020). In countries like Tanzania, PPPs have been shown to expand access and enhance quality by combining government oversight with private sector capacity (Ngonyani, 2019). When effectively regulated and monitored, PPPs can promote equity, improve learning outcomes, and ensure the sustainability of education systems over time (UNICEF, 2020).

Many schools under the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme in Nigeria suffer from inadequate infrastructure, including dilapidated buildings, lack of classrooms, poor sanitation, and absence of essential facilities such as libraries and laboratories (Musa, Biwai & Isah, 2021). Funding is another major challenge: UBE is chronically under-financed, with government allocations often inadequate and delayed, making it difficult to sustain operations, maintain infrastructure, or pay teacher entitlements (Festus Mrakpor, 2023). The quality and quantity of teachers are

also compromised by poor working conditions and lack of incentives, which undermines curriculum implementation and learning outcomes (Musa, Biwai & Isah, 2021). To address these problems, public–private partnerships (PPPs) have been introduced in various states including Enugu as a strategy to leverage private sector resources, expertise, and investment in infrastructure and funding of educational facilities (Ogakwu & Isife, 2024). However, while PPPs have shown promise in some areas, their impact remains uneven because of weak regulatory frameworks, limited private sector interest in recurrent funding, and insufficient oversight.

Public–private partnerships (PPPs) in education are collaborative arrangements where government and private actors share resources to deliver services, while infrastructure refers to the physical and material facilities that support teaching and learning, such as classrooms, WASH facilities, ICT tools, and furniture. Findings from Enugu State reveal that PPPs make notable contributions to the provision of infrastructure for Universal Basic Education (UBE), with private partners providing additional resources, technical expertise, and faster implementation of projects that improve school environments and encourage enrolment and retention. However, evidence also shows that PPPs have only a modest impact on the direct funding of UBE, as financial contributions toward teacher development, learning materials, and scholarships remain minimal due to weak frameworks and limited private sector interest in recurrent expenditure. This pattern reflects earlier studies such as Itu and Kenigua (2021) and Ulayi, Arikpo, Anthony, and Tawo (2022), who reported that PPPs significantly improve educational infrastructure in Nigeria, while Onuorah, Nwaru, and Enwezor (2018) and Toriola-Coker, Omokungbe, Alaka, Owolabi, and Obisanya (2022) found that their financial role remains limited. Overall, the literature suggests that while PPPs are a reliable mechanism for closing infrastructural gaps in UBE, they cannot substitute government responsibility in sustainable funding.

The concern of this study is that the sustainability of Universal Basic Education (UBE) in Enugu State remains threatened by inadequate infrastructure and poor funding despite government efforts. Public–private partnerships (PPPs), which are expected to complement government by providing financial support and physical facilities, have not significantly addressed these gaps. Many schools still operate in dilapidated conditions with overcrowded classrooms, poor sanitation, and limited learning resources, undermining the quality of teaching and learning. Funding from both government and private partners is often irregular and insufficient, leaving critical needs like instructional materials, teacher entitlements, and maintenance unattended. Consequently, assessing the extent to which PPPs contribute to infrastructure provision and funding becomes essential for strengthening the sustainability of UBE in Enugu State.

Regardless of the critical role of Universal Basic Education (UBE) in promoting literacy, social development, and national progress, studies on its sustainability in Nigeria remain limited, particularly in the context of Enugu State. Existing research has largely focused on general challenges affecting UBE, such as inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, and teacher quality, without adequately examining the role of public–private partnerships (PPPs) in addressing these challenges. While PPPs have been recognized globally as a strategy for improving educational outcomes, there is scant empirical evidence on how such collaborations impact the sustainability of UBE programmes in Enugu State. This gap underscores the need for research that investigates the effectiveness of PPPs in enhancing the

long-term viability, quality, and accessibility of basic education in the state, thereby providing data-driven insights for policymakers and stakeholders.

Statement of the Problem

In an ideal situation, Universal Basic Education (UBE) in Enugu State should be adequately funded and supported with modern infrastructure to ensure quality and equitable access to education for all children. Public–private partnerships (PPPs) are expected to complement government efforts by providing financial resources, physical facilities, and other critical support needed to sustain UBE. Ideally, schools should have well-equipped classrooms, libraries, laboratories, and other learning facilities that create a conducive environment for teaching and learning. Adequate funding from both the government and private sector should also guarantee regular maintenance of infrastructure, provision of instructional materials, and payment of teachers' entitlements. If these expectations are met, UBE would not only achieve its objectives but also contribute to reducing illiteracy, promoting skill development, and fostering national growth. The synergy between the public and private sectors should therefore serve as a strong pillar for the sustainability of UBE. This creates the framework for an education system that is inclusive, effective, and capable of meeting the needs of learners in Enugu State. However, the reality shows that PPPs have not significantly addressed the challenges of infrastructure and funding in the sustainability of UBE in Enugu State. Many schools still operate with dilapidated buildings, inadequate classrooms, poor sanitation facilities, and lack of functional libraries or laboratories, which undermines effective teaching and learning. Funding from both the government and private partners is often irregular, insufficient, or poorly managed, making it difficult to sustain quality education delivery. Without strong financial backing and adequate infrastructure, UBE faces the risk of declining standards and inability to meet its core objectives. This situation contributes to persistent challenges such as overcrowded classrooms, poor student performance, and low morale among teachers. If urgent action is not taken, the sustainability of UBE in Enugu State may remain threatened, and the vision of providing free, quality, and compulsory basic education for all children could remain unfulfilled. Therefore, examining the extent to which PPPs impact infrastructure provision and funding for UBE is critical to understanding and addressing the gaps in the system.

Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of the study was to ascertain the impact of public–private partnerships on the sustainability of universal basic education in Enugu State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. assess the role of public–private partnerships in the provision of infrastructure for Universal Basic Education in Enugu State.
2. examine the impact of public–private partnerships on the funding of Universal Basic Education in Enugu State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. To what extent do public–private partnerships contribute to the provision of infrastructure for Universal Basic Education in Enugu State?
2. To what extent do public–private partnerships impact the funding of Universal Basic Education in Enugu State?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of headteachers and representatives of private partners on the extent to which public–private partnerships contribute to the provision of infrastructure for Universal Basic Education in Enugu State.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of headteachers and representatives of private partners on the extent to which public–private partnerships impact the funding of Universal Basic Education in Enugu State.

Methods

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. According to Nworgu (2018), this design allows for the systematic collection and analysis of data to make valid inferences about the entire population. The population was 2,011 respondents comprising 1,200 headteachers and 811 representatives of private partners. From this population, a sample of 201 respondents, made up of 120 headteachers and 81 private partners, was drawn using stratified proportionate random sampling technique. Data were collected using a structured instrument titled “Impact of Public-Private Partnerships on the Sustainability of UBE Questionnaire (IPPPSUBEQ)”, developed by the researcher. The questionnaire was validated by three experts from Enugu State University of Science and Technology—two in Educational Management and one in Measurement and Evaluation. Reliability testing produced coefficients of 0.79 and 0.81 for clusters one and two, with an overall reliability index of 0.80, confirming its internal consistency. Mean scores and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while hypotheses were tested with the t-test. The decision rule was that a mean score of 2.50 and above was accepted as great extent (GE), while a mean score below 2.50 was regarded as low extent (LE). For hypothesis testing, a p-value greater than 0.05 led to the retention of the null hypothesis, while a p-value less than 0.05 resulted in its rejection.

Results

Research Question 1: To what extent do public–private partnerships contribute to the provision of infrastructure for Universal Basic Education in Enugu State?

Table 1: Mean scores and standard deviation of headteachers and representatives of private partners on the extent to which public–private partnerships contribute to the provision of infrastructure for Universal Basic Education in Enugu State

S/N	Items	Headteacher s 112		Private Partners 79		Overall 191		Dec
		\bar{x}	SD	\bar{x}	SD	\bar{x}	SD	
1	Provision of classroom blocks through joint funding	2.60	0.88	2.59	0.91	2.60	0.90	GE
2	Renovation of dilapidated school	2.52	0.93	2.55	0.92	2.54	0.93	GE

	facilities					3	2	
3	Supply of instructional materials	2.54	0.89	2.57	0.90	2.55	0.90	GE
4	Development of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities	2.53	0.91	2.58	0.93	2.55	0.92	GE
5	Provision of ICT equipment.	2.56	0.89	2.56	0.94	2.56	0.91	GE
Cluster Mean/SD		2.55	0.90	2.57	0.92	2.56	0.91	GE

Table 1 shows the mean scores and standard deviations of headteachers and private partners on the extent to which public-private partnerships contribute to the provision of infrastructure for Universal Basic Education in Enugu State. The overall cluster mean was 2.56 with a standard deviation of 0.91, which indicates that the contributions were generally rated as being to a great extent. The highest mean score was recorded for the provision of classroom blocks through joint funding (M = 2.60, SD = 0.90), while the lowest was for the renovation of dilapidated school facilities (M = 2.53, SD = 0.92). The standard deviation values, ranging between 0.88 and 0.94, reveal that the responses from both headteachers and private partners were relatively consistent. The finding of the study therefore shows that public-private partnerships contribute to the provision of infrastructure for Universal Basic Education in Enugu State to a great extent.

Research Question 2: To what extent do public-private partnerships impact the funding of Universal Basic Education in Enugu State?

Table 2: Mean scores and standard deviation of headteachers and representatives of private partners on the extent to which public-private partnerships impact the funding of Universal Basic Education in Enugu State

S/N	Items	Headteacher s 112		Private Partners 79		Overall 191		Dec
		\bar{x}	SD	\bar{x}	SD	\bar{x}	SD	
6	Joint provision of financial resources to support UBE programmes	2.44	0.92	2.41	0.90	2.43	0.91	LE
7	Contribution of funds for teacher professional development	2.42	0.90	2.39	0.88	2.41	0.89	LE
8	Support for provision of teaching materials through funding	2.43	0.91	2.40	0.89	2.42	0.90	LE
9	Financial assistance in school renovation	2.45	0.92	2.38	0.90	2.42	0.91	LE
10	Establishment of scholarships for pupils under UBE	2.41	0.90	2.42	0.88	2.42	0.89	LE
Cluster Mean/SD		2.43	0.91	2.40	0.89	2.42	0.90	LE

Table 2 presents the mean scores and standard deviations of headteachers and private partners on the extent to which public–private partnerships impact the funding of Universal Basic Education in Enugu State. The overall cluster mean was 2.42 with a standard deviation of 0.90, indicating that the impact of partnerships on funding was to a low extent. The highest mean score was observed in the financial assistance in school renovation and rehabilitation projects ($M = 2.42$, $SD = 0.91$), while the lowest mean was for contribution of funds for teacher professional development and training ($M = 2.41$, $SD = 0.89$). The standard deviation values, which ranged from 0.88 to 0.92, show that responses were fairly consistent among both headteachers and private partners. The finding of the study therefore reveals that public–private partnerships impact the funding of Universal Basic Education in Enugu State only to a low extent.

Hypotheses

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of headteachers and representatives of private partners on the extent to which public–private partnerships contribute to the provision of infrastructure for Universal Basic Education in Enugu State.

Table 3: Summary of t-test analysis of the mean responses of headteachers and representatives of private partners on the extent to which public–private partnerships contribute to the provision of infrastructure for Universal Basic Education in Enugu State

Group	N	\bar{x}	SD	df	p-value	Decision
Headteachers	112	2.55	0.90	189	0.88	H ₀₁ not rejected
Representatives of Private Partners	79	2.57	0.92			

Table 3 shows the t-test result comparing the mean responses of headteachers and private partners on the extent public–private partnerships contribute to UBE infrastructure in Enugu State. The mean scores were 2.55 ($SD = 0.90$) for headteachers and 2.57 ($SD = 0.92$) for private partners, with a degree of freedom of 189. The p-value was 0.88, which is greater than the 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis was not rejected, indicating that there is no significant difference between the responses of the two groups.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of headteachers and representatives of private partners on the extent to which public–private partnerships impact the funding of Universal Basic Education in Enugu State.

Table 4: Summary of t-test analysis of the mean responses of headteachers and

Group	N	\bar{x}	SD	df	p-value	Decision
Headteachers	112	2.43	0.91	189	0.82	H ₀₂ not rejected
Representatives of Private Partners	79	2.40	0.89			

representatives of private partners on the extent to which public–private partnerships impact the funding of Universal Basic Education in Enugu State

Table 4 shows the t-test analysis comparing the responses of headteachers and private partners on the extent to which public–private partnerships impact UBE funding in Enugu State. The mean scores were 2.43 (SD = 0.91) for headteachers and 2.40 (SD = 0.89) for private partners, with a degree of freedom of 189. The p-value was 0.82, which is higher than the 0.05 significance level. This means that H_{02} was not rejected, indicating no significant difference between the two groups' responses.

Discussion

The finding indicates that public–private partnerships make a significant contribution to the provision of infrastructure for Universal Basic Education in Enugu State. Evidence from the study shows that classroom blocks, WASH facilities, ICT equipment, and furniture benefit from joint public–private efforts. This suggests that PPPs are filling gaps left by government-only funding and project execution. Respondents emphasized that private partners bring in additional resources, technical expertise, and faster implementation, which improves the quality of school infrastructure. These contributions also create better learning environments, which in turn encourage higher student enrolment and retention. While this finding reflects a great extent of contribution, it does not mean that infrastructural needs are fully met, as shortfalls in scale and maintenance still exist. PPPs are seen as a reliable means of closing infrastructure deficits in the Universal Basic Education system in Enugu State. This finding agrees with Itu and Kenigua (2021), who reported that PPPs play a strong role in infrastructural development across Nigeria, and with Ulayi, Arikpo, Anthony, and Tawo (2022), who found that collaboration through PPPs significantly improves infrastructure in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

The finding also shows that public–private partnerships impact the funding of Universal Basic Education in Enugu State only to a low extent. This means that although private partners provide some financial support, the contributions are minimal compared to the overall needs of the system. Areas such as teacher professional development, grants, scholarships, and the funding of learning materials receive little attention from PPPs. This low level of contribution may be linked to the absence of clear funding frameworks, lack of regulatory enforcement, or reduced private sector interest in recurrent educational expenditure. In practice, many private partners prefer to channel their support into visible infrastructure projects rather than direct financial contributions. The implication is that depending solely on PPPs for funding will leave significant gaps that the government must address through alternative and sustainable financing strategies. In summary, PPPs play only a modest role in UBE funding in Enugu State. This finding is in line with Onuorah, Nwaru, and Enwezor (2018), who found that PPPs helped bridge some financial gaps in secondary schools but their impact remained limited, and with Toriola-Coker, Omokungbe, Alaka, Owolabi, and Obisanya (2022), who reported that while PPPs aid in revenue generation and infrastructure support in higher institutions, their funding contributions remain low compared to the financial demands of the education system.

Conclusion

In line with the findings, the study concluded that public–private partnerships significantly contribute to the provision of infrastructure for Universal Basic Education in Enugu State. Classroom blocks, WASH facilities, ICT equipment, and furniture have been enhanced through collaborative efforts between the government and private partners. However, the study revealed that the impact of these partnerships on funding aspects of UBE, such as teacher development, scholarships, and instructional materials, is still very low. This shows that while PPPs are effective in addressing infrastructural gaps, they are less reliable in sustaining financial support for educational programmes. Therefore, strengthening policy frameworks and creating incentives for private sector investment in both infrastructure and funding are necessary to achieve the goals of Universal Basic Education.

Recommendations

In line with the findings, the following recommendations were proffered:

1. Government should develop clear policies and enforceable legal frameworks that define the roles of private partners in both infrastructure development and funding, ensuring accountability and sustainability in PPP arrangements.
2. Tax reliefs, recognition awards, and corporate social responsibility benefits should be introduced to encourage private organizations to extend their contributions beyond infrastructure to include consistent funding support for UBE programmes.
3. Partnerships should not only focus on physical infrastructure but also target critical areas such as teacher professional development, provision of instructional materials, and scholarships, to ensure balanced support for the overall growth of UBE.

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