

PUBLIC PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP AS A TOOL FOR SUSTAINING IMPROVEMENT OF SECONDARY SCHOOL IN A PERIOD OF ECONOMIC UNCERTAINTY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study investigated public-private-partnership (PPP) as a tool for sustaining the improvement of secondary school in a period of economic uncertainty in Nigeria. Two research questions guided the study and two hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprised 867 principals of some public and private secondary schools in Anambra State. This population consists of 263 principals of public secondary schools and 604 principals of private secondary schools in the six education zones of the State. The sample for the study was 434 principals of public and private secondary schools in Anambra State. A validated self structured rating scale was the instrument used for collecting data from the respondents. A pilot test was conducted, and the data collected were subjected to Cronbach Alpha analysis to determine the reliability of the instrument. The results indicated coefficient values of .80 for cluster 1 and .86 for cluster 2. The overall reliability coefficient for the entire instrument was found to be .83. Mean and standard deviation were used to analyze the research questions while t-test was used to test the hypotheses. The finding of the study revealed that some of the potential benefits of public-private partnership as a tool for sustaining secondary school improvement in a period of economic scarcity in Nigeria: are that it bridges funding gaps in secondary education and enhances more supportive and active community involvement in secondary education. Furthermore, findings revealed that some of the PPP strategies for sustaining improvement in secondary schools in a period of economic scarcity in Nigeria include engaging private firms in the provision of funds for effective operation of the school and developing clear contracts that specify the responsibilities and obligations of both public and private partners and establishing a clear legal and regulatory framework for PPPs in education among others. Based on these findings, the researchers recommended among others that the federal, state and local governments should show a strong commitment to fostering and promoting public-private partnerships in education.

Keywords: *Public-Private Partnership, Sustainable, Secondary School Improvement, Economic Uncertainty*

Introduction

Nigeria, a country located in West Africa is rich in natural and material resources; oil, natural gas, solid minerals, arable land, and a variety of agricultural goods. Despite its immense resources richness, Nigeria has struggled to translate these assets into long-term economic and social growth, resulting in substantial economic unpredictability and high inflation rates. For decades, Nigeria's principal source of income and foreign cash gains has been oil and natural gas. The country is one of Africa's major oil producers, with huge reserves. The large and diverse natural resource has attracted international investment, but it has also brought obstacles. In a recent report Jaiyeola (2023) expressed concerns over the economic prospects of Nigeria from 2023 to 2025. According to Jaiyeola, various projections point to a pessimistic economic outlook during this period. His assessment sheds light on the challenges and uncertainties that lie ahead for Nigeria's economy.

Economic uncertainty is a state in which numerous events or conditions make predicting or having confidence in the future path of an economy difficult. Uncertainty may originate from a multitude of reasons, including political instability, changing economic conditions and financial market swings. Ayeni and Fanibuyan (2022) opined that micro level economic uncertainty discourages entrepreneurs, causing them to be reluctant when making long-term investments. Individuals and consumers are also more careful about spending their earnings and investments. This attitude of prudence stems from the uncertainty of future economic situations and their possible influence on financial outcomes. Furthermore, this micro-level uncertainty can quickly transcend into bigger or macro-level economic uncertainties (Joets et al., 2017). Uncertainty about the possible returns on investments at the micro level might cause cyclical fluctuations in total investment activity at the macro level. In other words, the unwillingness of individual entrepreneurs to invest in enterprises may cause ripple effects across the economy, impacting negatively on overall investment patterns and economic cycles (Ayeni & Fanibuyan, 2022). These level of economic uncertainties impacts on all enterprises and critically on the quality of education, particularly in secondary schools in Nigeria.

Economic uncertainties have an indirect impact on educational achievements. Lawal et al. (2022) averred that because of the current uncertainty surrounding expenditures on education, many families and guardians find it difficult to provide quality education for their children. School fees, the purchase of uniforms and textbooks, and other needs are determined by relative price levels, household income and credit availability among others. When uncertainty persists in the face of inconsistent income, it affects families' willingness to consume as well as demand for goods and services. Lawal opined that the condition deteriorates when households lack access to finance and the government provides fewer educational opportunities in public schools. In the same vein, reduction in government revenue affects government spending on education. Baneng and Ntshokwe (2020) found that education spending and household income had a substantial impact on school enrollment. According to Anochie and Ude (2015), provision of educational resource is influenced by macroeconomic uncertainties caused by negative internal and foreign shocks that a country must deal with. These shocks include, among other things, trade shocks, political instability, war, policy uncertainty and other disruptions. Anochie and Ude remarked that uncertainty and instability are widely seen as major impediments to public expenditure in

education in developing/transition countries like Nigeria. This has increased the calls for the adoption of innovative funding initiatives like Public-Private Partnership (PPP) for fostering the funding of secondary education in Nigeria.

PPPs are government services or private business ventures that are formed and run through a partnership between the government and one or more private sector enterprises. According to Ndagi (2013), PPP is a contractual agreement between a public sector agency and a for-profit private company in which resources and risks are pooled for the aim of delivering a public service or developing public infrastructure. PPP agreements are becoming more popular and accepted as a viable and successful technique of mobilising extra financial resources and reaping the advantages of private sector efficiency. PPP is an infrastructure delivery model that combines the private sector's effective managerial knowledge and funding with the public sector's supervisory and regulatory capabilities (Toriola-Coker et al., 2020). Untari (2016) stated that the primary characteristics of PPP are: efficiency advantages via proper risk and responsibility sharing; the public sector maintains primarily sovereign functions and the private bears; and those for execution, lifecycle and private investment as critical components of the PPP incentive; structures; long-term contractual connection; and innovation, namely through output, service levels, and payment methods as a new means of specifying the services to be provided. PPP allows schools to access additional financial resources from private sector partners.

This can lead to improved infrastructure, better-equipped classrooms, and the availability of modern teaching tools and technology. In addition, private partners often bring in expertise, infrastructure development and management. They can help build, renovate, or maintain school facilities, ensuring that they are conducive to learning and meet safety standards (Osei-Kyei & Chan, 2015). PPP arrangements can provide opportunities for teacher training and professional development, which can enhance the skills and effectiveness of educators (Ukpoko, 2019). These PPP initiatives can be applied in secondary education. In Nigeria, educational institutions are owned by both the public and private sectors. The public sector includes three levels of government: federal, state, and local, whereas the private sector includes individuals, groups of people, organisations, communities, or missionary bodies working together to establish and run educational institutions (Ukpoko, 2019). Meeting the goals of secondary education, according to the Federal Republic of Nigeria's (2013) is the educational period that follows primary education and precedes higher education. Its major goal is to prepare students for both further education and life after graduation. Secondary education's effectiveness in meeting its goals is dependent on a variety of factors, including the availability of necessary facilities, the maintenance of rigorous standards and quality, financial support for students, the cultivation of discipline among both staff and learners, the provision of well-equipped laboratories, and the involvement of additional teaching staff through the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) (Ukpoko, 2019). These factors can lead to improvement of secondary schools.

Improvement of secondary schools refers to ongoing activities and policies aimed at improving the overall quality and performance of secondary education institutions. School Improvement encompasses school-level adjustments undertaken to favourably impact student learning and necessitates a joint effort that is dependent on culture and environment that promotes development and learning for teachers and the organisation (Feldhoff et al., 2016). School Improvement is a systematic approach to producing change and growth in schools and it

investigates ways to improve student accomplishment by concentrating on the teaching-learning process and the environments that support it (Kalman, 2020). The major purpose of such enhancements is to give students a more holistic educational experience. The extent to which PPP improves schools has not been empirically proven in secondary schools in Anambra State. It is against this background that investigated the potentials of PPP as a tool for sustaining secondary school improvement in a period of economic scarcity in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Secondary education in Nigeria serves as an important link between elementary and secondary education. It is an important step in the educational journey which provides students with the needed information and abilities for their future academic and career endeavours. Despite its significance, however, it seems that the failure of secondary education in Nigeria to accomplish its objectives has become increasingly apparent, with far-reaching implications for the nation's educational system and growth. The continuous underfunding of public secondary schools by government agencies at all levels is a major contributor to this failure. The lack of financial support has affected secondary education in Nigeria, especially in terms of people and material resources. Dilapidated classrooms, inadequate instructional materials, and a dearth of qualified teachers have become hallmarks of many public secondary schools across the country. These glaring deficiencies not only hinder the overall quality of education but also undermine the realization of the essential goals of secondary education, such as preparing students for higher learning, developing critical thinking skills, and fostering holistic personal development. In light of the prevailing circumstances plaguing Nigeria's public secondary education system, it is imperative to explore potential solutions that can mitigate the impact of underfunding. It is against this background that the study investigated the potentials of PPP as a tool for sustaining secondary school improvement in a period of economic scarcity in Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study was to investigate public-private partnership as a tool for sustaining secondary school improvement in a period of economic scarcity in Nigeria. Specifically, the study tried to:

- vii. Ascertain the potential benefits of public-private partnership as a tool for sustaining improvement of secondary schools in a period of economic scarcity in Nigeria.
- viii. Determine public-private partnership strategies for sustaining improvement of secondary schools in a period of economic scarcity in Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the potential benefits of public-private partnership as a tool for sustaining improvement of secondary schools in a period of economic scarcity in Nigeria?
2. What are the public-private partnership strategies for sustaining improvement of secondary schools in a period of economic scarcity in Nigeria?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

10. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of principals of public and private secondary schools in the potential benefits of public-private partnership as a tool for sustaining secondary school improvement in a period of economic scarcity in Nigeria.
11. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of principals of public and private secondary schools in the public-private partnership strategies for sustaining secondary school improvement in a period of economic scarcity in Nigeria.

Method

The descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The study was carried out in Anambra State. The population of this study was 867 principals of public and private secondary schools in Anambra State. This population consists of 263 principals of public secondary schools and 604 principals of private secondary schools in the six education zones of the State. The sample for the study was 434 principals of public and private secondary schools in Anambra State. The sample of the study was determined using simple random sampling technique. The researchers determined 50% percent of the population through randomization. This was made up of 132 public secondary schools principals and 302 private secondary schools principals representing 50 percent of the population. A self structured rating scale was used in collecting data from the respondents. The rating scale is titled "Public-Private Partnership for Secondary School Improvement Scale (PPSSSIS)" and has two main sections- A and B. Section A contains one item on respondents' biographical information covering ownership of school. Section B contains 19 items arranged in two clusters. Cluster 1 contains 9 items on potential benefits of PPP for fostering secondary school improvement, Cluster 2 consists of 10 items on PPP strategies for fostering secondary school improvement. Respondents were asked to rate these items using a 4-point rating scale which includes response options such as "Strongly Agree (SA)," "Agree (A)," "Disagree (D)," and "Strongly Disagree (SD)."

To establish the validity of the instrument, input was sought from three experts in the faculty of education at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. A pilot test involving 20 principals of public and private secondary schools in Enugu metropolis, Enugu State, was conducted, and the data collected were subjected to Cronbach Alpha analysis and to determine the reliability of internal consistency of the instrument. The results indicated coefficient values of .80 for cluster 1 and .86 for cluster 2. The overall reliability coefficient for the entire rating scale was found to be .83, signifying a high level of internal consistency among the questionnaire items. The researcher administered the questionnaire by personally visiting the respondents in their offices. Respondents were given ample time to complete the instrument, and the researcher retrieved it on the spot. In cases where immediate retrieval was not possible, arrangements were made for collecting the questionnaires at a later date. Out of the 434 questionnaires distributed, 396 were returned in good condition and were used for data analysis. This amounted to 91% questionnaire return rate. The data collected through the questionnaire were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Specifically, mean and standard deviation were used to analyze the research questions. Items with a mean rating of 2.50 or higher were considered to have positive response, while those with mean ratings below 2.50 received negative response. T-test was employed at a significance level of 0.05 for testing hypotheses. A p-value equal to or

greater than the alpha value of 0.05 indicated no significant difference, leading to the acceptance of the hypothesis. Conversely, a p-value less than 0.05 indicated a significant difference, resulting in the rejection of the hypothesis.

Results

Research Question 1

What are the potential benefits of public-private partnership as a tool for sustaining improvement of secondary schools in a period of economic scarcity in Nigeria?

Table 1

Mean Rating of Respondents on the Potential Benefits of Public-Private Partnership as a Tool for Sustaining Improvement of Secondary Schools in a Period of Economic Scarcity in Nigeria (N=396)

S/No.	Item Statement	Mean	SD	Remarks
1.	PPPs can help bridge funding gaps in secondary education.	3.33	.87	Agree
2.	Helps to mitigate issues related to infrastructural deficiencies in secondary schools	2.92	.82	Agree
3.	Offers access to cutting-edge technological resources that can be integrated into the educational process	2.73	.97	Agree
4.	Can lead to improved access to skilled teaching professionals since private organisations may hire well-trained educators	2.69	1.01	Agree
5.	Leads to better resource management in the use of public funds by reducing wastages	2.82	1.00	Agree
6.	Enhances more supportive and active community involvement in secondary education	3.26	1.04	Agree
7.	Aligns secondary education curriculum with the needs of the job market.	2.65	1.07	Agree
8.	Provides students with practical skills which enhance their career opportunities.	2.71	1.12	Agree
9.	Ensures that the educational system stays flexible and adaptable during economic downturns.	2.57	.87	Agree
	Cluster Mean	2.85		Agree

Data in Table 1 revealed that the respondents agree on all items (1-9) as the potential benefits of public-private partnership as a tool for sustaining improvement of secondary schools in a period of economic scarcity in Nigeria, with mean ratings ranging from 2.57 to 3.23. The standard deviation scores ranging between .82 to 1.12 reveals that the respondents' opinions were related. The cluster mean of 2.85 indicated that some of the potential benefits of public-private partnership as a tool for sustaining improvement of secondary schools in a period of economic scarcity in Nigeria are that it bridges funding gaps in secondary education, enhances more supportive and active community involvement in secondary education, help to mitigate issues related to infrastructural deficiencies in secondary schools and leads to better resource management in the use of public funds, reducing wastage.

Research Question 2

What are the public-private partnership strategies for sustaining improvement of secondary schools in a period of economic scarcity in Nigeria?

Table 2

Mean Rating of Respondents on the Public-Private Partnership Strategies as a Tool for Sustaining Improvement of Secondary Schools in a Period of Economic Scarcity in Nigeria (N=396)

S/No.	Item Statement	Mean	SD	Remarks
10.	Establishing a clear legal and regulatory framework for PPPs in education	3.12	.84	Agree
11.	Identifying the specific needs of each secondary school in terms of infrastructure	3.05	.82	Agree
12.	Involving all relevant stakeholders, including the government, private sector, educators, parents, and the local community in the purchase of instructional materials.	2.95	.76	Agree
13.	Carefully choosing partners based on their expertise.	3.00	.93	Agree
14.	Developing clear agreements that specify the responsibilities and obligations of both public and private partners	3.21	1.12	Agree
15.	Engaging private firms in the provision of funds required for adequate funding of the operations of the school	3.23	.86	Agree
16.	Engaging the school alumni in the construction of classrooms in the school.	3.11	.85	Agree
17.	Encouraging the leadership of the host community to provide instructional materials for public schools	2.89	.91	Agree
18.	Allowing public secondary school teachers to teach STEM subjects in private schools	3.17	.85	Agree
19.	Leveraging the expertise of private partners to facilitate the integration of e-learning resources into schools	3.00	.83	Agree
	Cluster Mean	3.11		Agree

Data in Table 2 revealed that the respondents agree on all items (10-19) as the public-private partnership strategies for sustaining improvement of secondary schools in a period of economic scarcity in Nigeria, with mean ratings ranging 2.89 and 3.23. The standard deviation scores ranging between .82 to 1.12 reveals that the respondents' opinions were related. The cluster mean of 2.85 indicated that some of the public-private partnership strategies for sustaining improvement of secondary schools in a period of economic scarcity in Nigeria include engaging private firms in the provision of funds for effective operation of the school, developing clear contracts that specify the responsibilities and obligations of both public and allowing public secondary school teachers to teach STEM subjects in private schools among others.

Hypothesis 1

There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of principals of public and private secondary schools in the potential benefits of public-private partnership as a tool for sustaining improvement of secondary schools in a period of economic scarcity in Nigeria.

Table 3

Summary of t-test Analysis on the Potential Benefits of Public-Private Partnership as a Tool for Sustaining Improvement of Secondary Schools in a Period of Economic Scarcity in Nigeria

Variable	N	X	SD	df	α	t-cal.	p-value.	Decision
Public Principals	114	2.75	.82					
Private Principals	282	3.00	.85	394	0.05	1.28	.199	Not Significant

Data in Table 3 showed that the p-value of .199 is greater than .05 alpha level of significance. This means that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of principals of public and private secondary schools in the potential benefits of public-private partnership as a tool for sustaining improvement of secondary schools in a period of economic scarcity in Nigeria, therefore the hypothesis was accepted.

Hypothesis 2

There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of principals of public and private secondary schools on the public-private partnership strategies for sustaining improvement of secondary schools in a period of economic scarcity in Nigeria.

Table 4

Summary of t-test Analysis on the Public-Private Partnership Strategies as a Tool for Sustaining Improvement of Secondary Schools in a Period of Economic Scarcity in Nigeria

Variable	N	X	SD	df	α	t-cal.	p-value.	Decision
Public Principals	114	3.05	.94					
Private Principals	282	3.13	.87	394	0.05	.80	.418	Not Significant

Data in Table 4 showed that the p-value of .418 is greater than .05 alpha level of significance. This means that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of principals of public and private secondary schools in the public-private partnership strategies for sustaining improvement of secondary schools in a period of economic scarcity in Nigeria, therefore the hypothesis was accepted.

Discussion

The finding of the study indicated that some of the potential benefits of public-private partnership as a tool for sustaining improvement of secondary schools in a period of economic scarcity in Nigeria include: it bridges funding gaps in secondary education, enhances more supportive and active community involvement in secondary education, helps to mitigate issues

related to infrastructural deficiencies in secondary schools and leads to better resource management in the use of public funds by reducing wastages. This finding is in agreement with Toriola-Coker et al. (2020) who remarked that a public-private partnership (PPP) is a collaborative infrastructure delivery model that combines the private sector's effective management knowledge and financial resources with the public sector's supervisory and regulatory capacities. Untari (2016) corroborated the findings when he revealed that PPP partnerships allow schools to acquire extra financial resources from private sector partners. This access may lead to improved infrastructure, better-equipped classrooms, and the availability of cutting-edge teaching materials and technology. Similarly, Osei-Kyei and Chan (2015) asserted that private partners frequently bring expertise in infrastructure development and management, which can be used for tasks such as building, refurbishing, or maintaining school facilities to ensure they are conducive to learning and meet safety standards. Ukpoko (2019) stated that PPP partnerships can provide possibilities for teacher training and professional growth, thereby improving educational outcomes.

The test of hypothesis revealed no significant difference in the mean ratings of principals of public and private secondary schools on the potentials benefits of public-private partnership as a tool for improvement of sustaining secondary schools in a period of economic scarcity in Nigeria. This finding indicated that public and private secondary school principals agree on the potentials benefits of public-private partnership as a tool for sustaining secondary school improvement in a period of economic scarcity in Nigeria.

Secondly, finding of the study indicated that some of the public-private partnership strategies for sustaining improvement of secondary schools in a period of economic scarcity in Nigeria include engaging private firms in the provision of funds for adequate operation of the school, allowing public secondary school teachers to teach STEM subjects in private schools, developing clear contracts that specify the responsibilities and obligations of both public and private partners and establishing a clear legal and regulatory framework for PPPs in education among others. This finding is in agreement with Ukpoko (2019) who reported that PPP strategies can be applied in secondary schools in the area of infrastructural provisions, financing, instructional resource provision and recruitment of teachers. Untari (2016) asserted that it implies that the government's function as a provider of services and infrastructure will transition to that of a creator of an environment in which the private sector and other parties may actively engage. Untari further stated that government in collaboration with private parties should be capable of increasing confidence between individuals in society and government since it is a key component in the formation of social capital. Furthermore, finding of the study revealed no significant difference in the mean ratings of principals of public and private secondary schools on the public-private partnership strategies for sustaining improvement of secondary schools in a period of economic scarcity in Nigeria.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the researchers concluded that public-private partnership is a veritable tool for sustaining secondary school improvement in a period of economic scarcity in Nigeria. The study has revealed the potential benefits that PPP agreements may bring to the educational environment, emphasising the critical role that private sector participation plays in

improving secondary education quality and accessibility. Public-private partnerships may supply important financial resources, modernise infrastructure, equip classrooms with cutting-edge technology, and give educational administration knowledge, all of which are critical components for improving the quality of education in Nigeria.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on the findings of the study:

22. The federal, state and local governments should show a strong commitment to fostering and promoting public-private partnerships in education. This commitment should be reflected in clear rules, regulations, and incentives to support private sector participation in education.
23. Stakeholders such as government agencies, private firms, educators, parents, and local communities should work closely together in the development and execution of PPP programmes. Engaging all stakeholders ensures that the interests of students and the community are prioritized for sustaining improvement of secondary schools.

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