



Research–Practice Partnerships in Education in Sudan: Educators’ Perspectives on Opportunities and Challenges

Ahmed Mansour Mohammad Gasmelseed*

Corresponding Author: *ahmednar77@gmail.com

University of Gezira, Wad Madani, Sudan

ARTICLE INFO

Article history

Received 15 March 2026

Revised 27 May 2026

Accepted 2 June 2026

Keywords

Education in Sudan
Educators’ Perspectives
Partnerships
Research–Practice

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine Sudanese educators' perceptions of the RPPs in education, including the difficulties and possibilities they present. The study used a qualitative approach, using interviews as the data collection method, with five educators who have research experience. The participants' responses show that building trust in RPPs relies on shared research priorities, transparent research processes, mutual respect, and active teacher involvement at every stage of the research process. The findings also suggest that effective partnerships require strong communication skills, the ability to connect theory with practice, and clearly defined roles and responsibilities for both researchers and practitioners. However, obstacles such as contrasting priorities, limited time and incentives for teachers, a weak culture of applied research, and insufficient funding may impede the implementation of these joint efforts. It is recommended that policymakers develop explicit policies to promote research collaborations between university researchers and school teachers, and provide the necessary training and assistance to ensure their success.

This is an open-access article under the [CC-BY-SA](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/) license.



Introduction

Research–Practice Partnerships (RPPs) are cooperative projects that connect researchers and practitioners, seeking to promote educational reform and shift power relations to improve educational results [1],[2]. RPPs address unequal power relations in education research through bridging research and practice. They encourage collaboration between researchers and practitioners to address relevant problems, thereby making outcomes more applicable to policy and practice [3].

Obstacles to incorporating research into education include researchers failing to address educators' needs and educators lacking the resources to apply research. In response, research-practice partnerships (RPPs) offer a strategy to close this gap through long-term, mutually beneficial collaboration [4]. Substantial differences in culture, objectives, and professional standards create a multidimensional gap between researchers and practitioners. Design, knowledge sharing, and context transfer are key challenges to incorporating research into teaching [4].

Research-practice partnerships rely on long-term, mutually beneficial collaboration to improve educational systems through joint research [4]. RPPs focus on co-producing relevant research that meets practice priorities through leveraging both research and practitioner expertise. Deliberate work organization, equal decision-making, and strategies to shift power relations help align outcomes with practice partners' interests [5].

In line with these characteristics, a common understanding between researchers and practitioners is essential for successful research-practice collaborations [5]. Connecting educator concerns with research guarantees RPPs are classroom-relevant. Research and methods must solve educator challenges, so not all studies apply. Educators should be involved in all research stages to provide practical classroom insights [5].

Datnow et al. [2] identify key variables specific to RPPs, noting that, in these cooperative efforts, issue definition is a collaborative process involving practitioners. In contrast, in conventional research, the challenge is defined by the researchers. Building on this distinction, partners are assigned distinct duties within a deliberately designed framework that supports the identification of collective issues and the development of solutions. Furthermore, studies should reflect the distinctive characteristics of the school environments where issues arise and empower partners—especially teachers—who are often overlooked. Finally, effective participation should also encourage the use of evidence and important contributions to changes in organizational culture.

The impact of research on practice is still a major concern for all education stakeholders [6]. RPPs serve as a key avenue for making research impactful, despite institutional differences [7]. Research regularly overlooks practitioners' real-world

experiences, making results harder to apply in practice. Building trust between researchers and teachers is essential for the sustainability of RPPs [8].

School leaders act as essential partners through leveraging their unique understanding of professional structures and teachers' lived experiences within their districts or states. Rather than being merely decision-makers to persuade, their perspective is an important resource in cooperative efforts [8]. This study discusses the disconnect between research institutions and schools in Sudan, focusing on the lack of cooperation among educators. Against this backdrop, the study intended to answer the following questions:

1. What are the perceptions of Sudanese educators about the RPPs in education?
2. What are the challenges that stand in the way of applying the RPPs in education in Sudan?

Material and Methods

To explore these questions, this study used a qualitative approach, gathering data through interviews with a purposive sample. The participants' professional backgrounds varied. Two had served as directors of research centers at colleges of education. Two others were teachers and graduate students in colleges of education who also have teaching experience and knowledge of educational research. In addition, one participant was an educational supervisor who had held various administrative positions in schools and the education office.

Table 1. Demographic information of participants

Years of Experience in Education	Position	Institution	Participants
23	Head of Education Research Centre	University of Dongla Faculty of Education	Participant 1
20	School Head	Wad Alnaw School	Participant 2
14	Teacher	Wad Madani Special Education Institution	Participant 3
19	Associate Professor	University of Gezira Faculty of Education	Participant 4
42	Supervisor	Ministry of Education Gezira State	Participant 5

Here are some sample questions from the interview:

1. What elements or methods, in your opinion, help encourage trust between practitioners and researchers?
2. What kinds of abilities or competencies are necessary for both practitioners and researchers to guarantee the success of research collaborations?
3. In your opinion, which educational fields or topics are best suited for starting research collaborations between practitioners and researchers?

4. In your opinion, what are the primary organizational, professional, or cultural obstacles that could prevent researchers and educators from implementing research partnerships?
5. What resources do you think educational policymakers should offer to support research collaborations between practitioners and researchers?

The researcher used thematic analysis to examine the data, following Braun and Clarke's steps to identify emerging themes. They describe thematic analysis as a method to examine various types of data, including secondary sources such as media and transcripts of focus groups or interviews. It can handle large or small data sets and produce data-driven or theory-driven analyses [10].

Results and Discussions

A. RPPs in Education, Sudan: Educators' perspectives

The participants' responses show that building trust between researchers and practitioners depends on certain practices. These practices promote cooperation and mutual understanding. Some participants stressed that research priorities should be identified together. This helps research topics reflect the needs of society and education. One participant explained,

"The most important thing is identifying research priorities so that there is a partnership between researchers and practitioners through research workshops to identify research needs and determine priorities" (Participant 1).

Participants also stressed the urgency for transparency and clarity in research objectives, stages, and outcomes. As one participant said, it is important to

"define the research objectives honestly and ensure that the information is not used against the teacher or the school administratively" (Participant 2).

Building on this, mutual respect also plays a key role. Some participants believe teachers should be viewed as experts in their context, more than just as sources of data. Reflecting this sentiment, one participant stated,

"Researchers should focus on treating the teacher as a context expert and not simply a source of data" (Participant 2).

Active teacher participation at each research stage is another factor in building trust. One participant said that involving teachers in designing and implementing studies creates a sense of partnership, explaining,

"Involving teachers in designing and implementing studies should not be limited to their role as respondents only, but rather as partners" (Participant 3).

Additionally, participants stressed the need to honor practitioners' professional contributions to the research process and their practical knowledge, and to ensure frequent meetings and ongoing contact between researchers and practitioners.

In addition to practices that promote cooperation, participants' responses also showed that the success of research partnerships requires a set of skills among both researchers and practitioners, as well as shared skills between the two. Building on this, one participant explained that some of the most important required skills include

"observation skills, reading and writing skills, and the ability to link theory with practice" (Participant 1).

Participants said researchers need effective communication skills and insight into school culture. They must simplify research so findings are practical and clear for educators. One participant explained,

"Researchers should present results in practical, useful terms, as statistical language is often unclear for practitioners" (Participant 1).

The participants' responses further revealed diversity in the educational areas that could serve as starting points for research partnerships between researchers and practitioners. Some participants pointed out the significance of conducting research in the economics of education. One participant noted that this field still requires further research, explaining that

"The economics of education is one of the fields where we find very few studies despite its connection to the quality of education in light of economic obstacles" (Participant 1).

Participants also said school curricula ought to match society's cultural identity. One participant stressed,

"Align curricula with the identity, culture, customs, and traditions of society" (Participant 1).

Other issues that arose included education in rural areas, the function of education in peacebuilding after conflicts, and the use of educational technologies in resource-scarce settings.

Some participants pointed out the importance of research on education in emergencies, especially in crises and conflicts, as well as in other contexts of difficult circumstances. The necessity to

"Develop innovative ways to ensure the continuity of education in displacement areas" was stressed by one participant (Participant 2).

Participants also stressed the importance of studying issues related to special education and psychosocial support for students. In this regard, one participant noted that

"Special education and the difficulties it encounters represent a top priority in light of the increasing disabilities and learning difficulties resulting from wars" (Participant 2).

According to participants, successful research partnerships require clear roles and responsibilities for researchers and practitioners.

Throughout the design, analysis, implementation, and application stages of the research process, they stressed the essentiality of incorporating all stakeholders and clearly defining their roles (Participant 1).

Participants further explained that researchers are responsible for methodological and analytical aspects, while practitioners are responsible for field implementation and providing feedback on proposed solutions. One participant stated,

"The teacher should be a partner in formulating the research questions from the first day" (Participant 2).

Effective partnerships demand exact agreements, clearly defined duties, and ongoing oversight.

"Defining responsibilities from the beginning via a written agreement and apportioning tasks based on areas of expertise helps in guaranteeing the success of the partnership," (Participant 4).

B. RPPs in education in Sudan: Challenges and prospects

In spite of these strategies, the participants' responses revealed that implementing research–practice partnerships between researchers and practitioners in education may face several organizational, professional, and cultural challenges. Some participants noted differences in priorities between researchers and practitioners, which may affect cooperation between the two groups. In this regard, one participant explained that one of the most prominent challenges facing these partnerships is the

"Difference in priorities and agendas between researchers and practitioners" (Participant 1).

Limited time and incentives for teachers remain major barriers to research participation. Participant 2 remarked,

"The limited time available for teachers and the lack of incentives make participation in research difficult."

Participants noted a weak culture of applied research inside educational institutions. Research is sometimes seen as an academic activity disconnected from real school life. One participant said,

"The weakness of the culture of applied research in educational institutions leads to the existence of many studies that are not related to reality" (Participant 1).

Participants also mentioned other organizational challenges. These include a lack of helpful policies, limited research funding and resources, and logistical problems, such as difficulty accessing some schools.

Looking towards solutions, participants believe that supporting research partnerships requires decision-makers to provide a helpful organizational and institutional environment that promotes cooperation between researchers and practitioners. Some participants pointed out the importance of developing explicit policies that encourage this type of collaboration. One participant pointed out the need to

"Develop explicit policies to support research partnerships" (Participant 1).

Funding and administrative support are important for joint research. Participant 1 advocated that decision-makers should “provide budgets for field research and facilitate researchers’ access to schools.”

Discussion

Research–Practice Partnerships (RPPs) have become an increasingly important approach in educational reform because they bridge the divide between academic research and educational practice. Through collaborative engagement, researchers and practitioners work together to address authentic educational problems, generate evidence-based solutions, and improve educational outcomes in sustainable ways. Participants in the present study recognized that such partnerships are highly valuable because they connect theoretical knowledge with practical realities in schools. This finding supports earlier research suggesting that RPPs create mutually beneficial relationships in which researchers gain contextual understanding while practitioners receive access to research-informed strategies for improvement [1], [6], [12].

The participants also emphasized that collaboration between researchers and practitioners contributes significantly to solving educational problems by integrating academic inquiry with practitioners accumulated professional experience. Similar conclusions were reported by Coburn and Penuel, who argued that RPPs foster long-term collaboration capable of producing practical and context-sensitive educational knowledge [13]. Furthermore, Farrell et al. explained that partnerships help educational systems become more adaptive and evidence-oriented because practitioners actively participate in identifying research priorities and interpreting findings [14]. Such collaborative structures move educators beyond being passive recipients of policy and position them as co-constructors of educational innovation.

Despite these advantages, participants identified multiple obstacles that hinder effective partnerships. Organizational, cultural, and professional differences often impede collaboration between researchers and practitioners. Denner et al. [7] found that issues related to trust, institutional hierarchy, and professional culture frequently complicate collaborative research processes. Similarly, Sjölund et al. [4] noted that unclear role distribution and unequal authority structures can weaken partnership sustainability. Teachers and researchers frequently operate under different timelines, priorities, and accountability systems, making communication and coordination difficult. These differences contribute to the persistent gap between educational theory and classroom practice.

Another major challenge identified by participants concerns the absence of educational policies and institutional mechanisms supporting research partnerships. Weak incentives and limited funding reduce practitioners’ motivation to engage in collaborative research activities. McGeown and Sjölund [5] similarly reported that sustainable RPPs require structural support,

including financial resources, policy commitment, and institutional leadership. Without these supports, partnerships often remain temporary initiatives rather than becoming embedded within educational systems. Additionally, heavy teacher workloads significantly limit educators' opportunities to participate in research activities. Teachers are often overwhelmed by instructional responsibilities, administrative tasks, and assessment obligations, leaving insufficient time for collaborative inquiry [15].

Participants also highlighted the importance of equipping educators with research competencies and professional skills necessary for effective participation in partnerships. This finding reflects the broader understanding that teacher education should not end after initial certification but must continue throughout professional careers. Continuous professional development is essential for strengthening educators' research literacy, reflective practice, and data-informed decision-making. Datnow et al. [2] emphasized that teacher participation in RPPs becomes more meaningful when educators possess the skills necessary to interpret evidence and contribute actively to collaborative inquiry. Likewise, Santagata et al. argued that sustained professional learning opportunities enhance teachers' capacity to integrate research into classroom practice [16].

The significance of ongoing teacher learning has also been supported by studies examining professional learning communities and inquiry-based teacher development. Ross and Bruce demonstrated that collaborative professional inquiry strengthens teacher agency and instructional improvement [17]. Similarly, Van Dusen et al. found that participation in collaborative research communities increases educators' confidence and professional identity as reflective practitioners [18]. These findings suggest that research partnerships can function not only as mechanisms for educational reform but also as powerful tools for teacher empowerment and professional growth.

Another important issue identified by participants concerns curriculum development. Participants agreed that curricula represent one of the most important areas that can be addressed through collaborative research partnerships. Stable and contextually relevant curricula are essential for preparing responsible citizens and ensuring educational continuity despite political changes. This reflects educators' awareness that curriculum reform should be informed by both empirical evidence and classroom realities. Research by Fullan emphasizes that sustainable educational reform requires meaningful collaboration among policymakers, researchers, and practitioners during curriculum development processes [19]. Furthermore, curriculum-oriented RPPs have been shown to support educational innovation while maintaining responsiveness to local contexts and student needs [20].

The findings additionally reveal the importance of intermediaries in facilitating partnerships between researchers and practitioners. Participants suggested that individuals

such as teacher-researchers, graduate students, or educators connected to universities could help bridge the gap between academic institutions and schools. Such intermediaries possess familiarity with both educational research and classroom realities, enabling them to facilitate communication and collaboration more effectively. This finding aligns with studies emphasizing the strategic role of boundary spanners in educational partnerships [21]. These intermediaries can help establish trust, coordinate activities, and reduce misunderstandings between practitioners and researchers.

Power relations and inclusivity also emerged as critical issues influencing partnership effectiveness. Datnow et al. [11] found that unequal power distribution may shape whose voices are prioritized within collaborative decision-making processes. Similarly, Tanksley and Estrada [3] argued that issues of race, positionality, and authority significantly affect the dynamics of research-practice partnerships. Effective RPPs therefore require equitable participation, shared ownership, and mutual respect among all stakeholders. Ackerman and Skoog-Hoffman [8] further emphasized that successful partnerships depend heavily on relationship-building, transparent communication, and collaborative trust-building strategies.

In addition, methodological rigor remains essential for ensuring the quality of collaborative educational research. Braun and Clarke [9], [10] highlighted the importance of thematic analysis as a rigorous qualitative approach for identifying patterns and interpreting participants' experiences within educational research contexts. Their framework supports systematic interpretation of complex social phenomena, including collaborative educational partnerships. Applying rigorous analytical methods enhances the credibility and usefulness of research findings for both practitioners and policymakers.

Overall, the findings indicate that research-practice partnerships possess substantial potential to improve educational systems, strengthen teacher professionalism, and address persistent educational challenges. However, successful implementation requires supportive policies, institutional commitment, sustainable funding, ongoing professional development, and mechanisms that promote equitable collaboration. When effectively supported, RPPs can narrow the gap between research and practice while fostering evidence-informed educational transformation.

Conclusion

The study intended to explore Sudanese educators' perceptions of the RPPs in education, the challenges, and opportunities. Participants confirmed the existence of some short-term partnerships between researchers from university research centers and schools. However, for long-term partnerships to be established, ongoing support from educational institutions is essential, along with educational policies that require participating parties to ensure these cooperative efforts appropriately address the challenges teachers face in schools.

The results showed a clear lack of trust and isolation between researchers and practitioners. This was repeatedly emphasized by several participants, who stressed the need for mutual respect between the parties through joint sessions and seminars. Comparable initiatives would strengthen the relationship and contribute to the partnership's long-term success by enhancing participants' ability to fulfill their roles effectively.

The results illustrated the most important topics participants deemed necessary to initiate partnerships. These included developing sustainable curricula that avoid past shortcomings and strengthen positive aspects. Furthermore, the current situation in Sudan, notably regarding education during disasters, poses a major challenge to maintaining instructional continuity.

Participants also identified several obstacles that could hinder the success of collaborations between researchers and practitioners in education. The most significant impediment is the lack of sufficient time and motivation for teachers to engage in research, as well as the shortage of funding for research activities. Despite this, study participants are strongly aware of the importance of partnerships in bringing education out of the dark tunnel.

Limitations

The study included a small number of participants; therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to all of Sudan. In addition, the study relied solely on interviews as the data collection method, thereby reflecting participants' personal views.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

- [1] L. Wentworth, "Writing about educational research related to Research–Practice Partnerships," *AERA Open*, vol. 11, no. 1, pp. 1–23, 2025.
- [2] A. Datnow, Wishard Guerra, S. Cohen, B. Kennedy, and J. Lee, "Teacher sensemaking in early education research–practice partnership," *Teachers College Record*, vol. 125, no. 2, pp. 66–98, 2023.
- [3] T. Tanksley and C. Estrada, "Toward a critical race RPP: How race, power and positionality inform Research Practice Partnerships," *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, vol. 45, no. 4, pp. 397–409, 2022.
- [4] S. Sjölund, J. Lindvall, M. Larsson, and A. Ryve, "Mapping roles in research-practice partnerships – a systematic literature review," *Educational Review*, vol. 75, no. 7, pp. 1490–1518, 2021.
- [5] S. McGeown and S. Sjölund, "Research-practice partnerships in education: Benefits, challenges, methodological considerations and key enablers for change," *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, vol. 00, pp. 1–13, 2025.
- [6] W. R. Penuel, E. M. Furtak, and C. C. Farrell, "Research-practice partnerships in education: Advancing an evolutionary logic of systems improvement," *Die Deutsche Schule*, vol. 113, no. 1, pp. 45–62, 2021.
- [7] J. Denner, S. Bean, S. Campe, J. Martinez, and D. Torres, "Negotiating trust, power, and culture in a research–practice partnership," *AERA Open*, vol. 5, no. 2, pp. 1–11, 2019.

- [8] C. Ackerman and A. Skoog-Hoffman, "School-level learnings from the field: Insights in establishing a collaborative research-practice partnership," Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2020.
- [9] V. Clarke and V. Braun, "Teaching thematic analysis: Overcoming challenges and developing strategies for effective learning," *The Psychologist*, vol. 26, no. 2, pp. 120–123, 2013.
- [10] V. Braun and V. Clarke, *Successful Qualitative Research: A Practical Guide for Beginners*. London, UK: Sage, 2013.
- [11] A. Datnow, E. Zala-Mezö, N. Turriago, and B. Kennedy, "Power and voice in research-practice partnerships: A cross-national study of RPP meetings," *Journal of Educational Change*, vol. 26, pp. 425–450, 2025.
- [12] B. J. Fishman, W. R. Penuel, A.-R. Allen, B. H. Cheng, and N. Sabelli, "Design-based implementation research: An emerging model for transforming the relationship of research and practice," *National Society for the Study of Education*, vol. 112, no. 2, pp. 136–156, 2013.
- [13] C. E. Coburn and W. R. Penuel, "Research–practice partnerships in education: Outcomes, dynamics, and open questions," *Educational Researcher*, vol. 45, no. 1, pp. 48–54, 2016.
- [14] C. C. Farrell, J. Harrison, and B. Coburn, "What the hell is this, and who the hell are you? Role and identity negotiation in research-practice partnerships," *AERA Open*, vol. 10, pp. 1–13, 2019.
- [15] M. Opfer and D. Pedder, "Conceptualizing teacher professional learning," *Review of Educational Research*, vol. 81, no. 3, pp. 376–407, 2011.
- [16] R. Santagata, M. Guarino, and L. White, "Professional learning in research-practice partnerships," *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, vol. 56, no. 3, pp. 233–249, 2024.
- [17] R. H. Voelkel and J. H. Chrispeels, "Understanding the link between professional learning communities and teacher collective efficacy," *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, vol. 28, no. 4, pp. 505–526, 2017, doi: 10.1080/09243453.2017.1299015.
- [18] D. L. Butler and L. Schnellert, "Collaborative inquiry in teacher professional development," *Teaching and Teacher Education*, vol. 28, no. 8, pp. 1206–1220, Nov. 2012, doi: 10.1016/j.tate.2012.07.009.
- [19] M. Fullan, *The New Meaning of Educational Change*, 5th ed. New York, NY, USA: Teachers College Press, 2020.
- [20] C. A. Eden, O. N. Chisom, and I. S. Adeniyi, "Parent and community involvement in education: Strengthening partnerships for social improvement," *International Journal of Applied Research in Social Sciences*, vol. 6, no. 3, pp. 372–382, 2024.
- [21] A. Cooper, "The role of intermediaries in knowledge mobilization," *Evidence & Policy*, vol. 10, no. 1, pp. 29–50, 2014.

Authors



Ahmed Mansour Mohammad Gasmelseed    is an academic at the University of Gezira, Sudan, specializing in educational policy, educational leadership, and teacher professional development. His research examines educational management, technical and vocational education and training (TVET), migrant entrepreneurship, and diaspora engagement in development. He has published studies on teacher competencies in Sudanese public TVET institutions, education and business ownership among African migrants, and contemporary issues in educational management and policy. (email: ahmednar77@gmail.com).