

Building A Sustainable Educare Model for Rivers State's Rural Communities

Dr. Nnordee Bariagara King David, Ph.D¹; Dr. Wifa, Wisdom Neeka²; David Ep-nyobari Rita³

Registrar General, Awedu Institute of Business Management and Leadership

***Corresponding Author:** Dr. Nnordee Bariagara King David, Ph.D

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17661660>

Article History	Abstract
Original Research Article	<i>Education remains a cornerstone of sustainable human and socio-economic development, yet children in the rural communities of Rivers State, Nigeria, continue to face profound educational inequities. Despite ongoing national and global efforts to advance inclusive and equitable quality education, structural barriers such as poverty, infrastructural deficits, teacher shortages, and policy inconsistencies persist. The EDUCARE Model, Empowering Disadvantaged and Underprivileged Children through Access, Reform, and Equity, was conceived to address these multidimensional challenges by integrating education, social protection, and livelihood empowerment within a unified and sustainable framework. This study seeks to design and evaluate a context-specific EDUCARE Model tailored to the realities of vulnerable children in rural Rivers State. The primary objective is to examine the interconnections among educational access, learning quality, child well-being, and governance sustainability, and how these collectively influence educational development through livelihood empowerment. The study adopts a conceptual and empirical synthesis approach, drawing from global, continental, and national literature to identify gaps and propose adaptive strategies for rural education reform. The analysis is theoretically grounded in Human Capital Theory, Systems Theory, and the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework, offering a multidimensional analytical foundation for model development. Findings reveal that sustainable rural education requires more than enrollment; it demands systemic integration of access, quality, well-being, and governance. Persistent challenges include decaying infrastructure, unmotivated teachers, inconsistent policies, and neglect of health and nutrition in schooling. Empirical evidence supports community-based education planning, teacher retention incentives, policy continuity, and livelihood-focused curricula as catalysts for lasting improvement. The study concludes that a sustainable EDUCARE Model must be holistic, inclusive, and locally adaptable, merging educational reform with social protection and economic empowerment. In Rivers State, the model provides a transformative pathway for building resilient, equitable, and quality education systems aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 4.</i>
Received: 10-11-2025	
Accepted: 17-11-2025	
Published: 20-11-2025	
Copyright © 2025 The Author(s): This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial use provided the original author and source are credited.	
Citation: Dr. Nnordee Bariagara King David, Ph.D; Dr. Wifa, Wisdom Neeka; David Ep-nyobari Rita. (2025). Building A Sustainable Educare Model for Rivers State's Rural Communities. UKR Journal of Economics, Business and Management (UKRJEBM), Volume 1(9), 109-115.	Keywords: EDUCARE Model, Rural Education, Child Well-being, Governance Sustainability, Livelihood Empowerment, Inclusive Learning, Rivers State, Sustainable Development.

Introduction

Globally, the quest to achieve inclusive and equitable quality education has advanced considerably, yet rural children continue to experience multidimensional barriers that impede access, learning, and long-term development. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2024) emphasizes that nearly 244

million children worldwide remain out of school, with rural and conflict-affected zones carrying the highest proportion of the excluded. Similarly, the World Bank (2023) defines learning poverty, the inability of ten-year-olds to read and understand simple text, as a central threat to sustainable human capital formation, affecting more than 70 percent of

children in low-income countries. Contemporary research further reveals that digital transformation alone is insufficient to bridge the rural gap unless accompanied by investments in teacher training, localized content, and community engagement (Molina & Rogers, 2022).

At the continental level, Africa continues to battle with entrenched inequities in educational access, quality, and retention. The African Union's Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 16-25) identifies foundational learning, gender equity, and rural inclusion as key priorities for achieving the African Vision 2063 (African Union, 2023). According to the Global Education Monitoring Report (UNESCO, 2024), sub-Saharan Africa still accounts for 30 percent of the world's out-of-school population, with rural learners often doubly disadvantaged by poverty, distance, and inadequate teacher deployment. Recent studies underscore that sustainable models must integrate education with nutrition, livelihood, and social protection programs to yield measurable learning outcomes (Oketch & Rolleston, 2023). These continental dynamics make the concept of an EDUCARE Model, an integrated framework of access, reform, and equity, particularly relevant as a prototype for resilient rural learning ecosystems.

In Nigeria, the educational landscape reflects both promise and persistent disparities. Despite national reforms under the Universal Basic Education Act (UBEC, 2019) and the Education for Change Strategy (Federal Ministry of Education, 2022), over 10.5 million Nigerian children remain out of school, the majority in rural and northern regions (UNICEF Nigeria, 2024). Structural challenges, ranging from teacher shortages and poor infrastructure to weak monitoring systems, continue to undermine rural education quality (Omoike, 2023). Nevertheless, recent innovations such as the Nigeria Learning Passport (World Bank, 2023) and state-level e-governance platforms signal a readiness to pilot integrated and sustainable models that link learning with livelihood and welfare support. This context provides the intellectual and operational justification for conceptualizing a sustainable EDUCARE framework for Rivers State's rural communities.

Within Rivers State, a complex interplay of socio-economic and infrastructural factors shapes educational outcomes. While the government's deployment of digital monitoring tools such as RIVEMIS has improved data collection, rural schools still face deficits in facilities, qualified teachers, and consistent funding (Eze & Amadi, 2024). Moreover, cultural norms and household poverty constrain parental engagement and continuity of schooling, especially among vulnerable children. Hence, an EDUCARE Model tailored to the Rivers context must integrate educational access, child welfare, and local livelihood strategies into a coherent and sustainable system.

The variables underlying the EDUCARE Model include Access, Quality of Learning, Child Well-being, Household Livelihood, and Institutional Governance. Sub-variables such as teacher availability, nutritional support, parental income, and community participation interact in complex feedback loops that determine learning sustainability (Bashir & Yusuf, 2023). For instance, improved household livelihoods reduce child labour and absenteeism, while enhanced nutrition strengthens cognitive performance. Conversely, inadequate governance or inconsistent policy enforcement can neutralize gains in other domains. The EDUCARE framework therefore conceives these variables as *interdependent pillars* within a systemic educational ecosystem.

The motivation for this study stems from both an empirical gap and a policy necessity. Empirically, existing research has yet to produce an integrated, context-specific model that fuses education with social protection and livelihood empowerment in Nigeria's rural south (Chukwu & Emenike, 2023). From a policy standpoint, the convergence of federal digital initiatives, international financing from the World Bank's Adolescent Girls Initiative for Learning and Empowerment (AGILE), and Rivers State's administrative modernization provides a timely opportunity to test and institutionalize a sustainable EDUCARE Model. This study therefore seeks to design and evaluate a framework capable of advancing inclusive, equitable, and durable learning outcomes for vulnerable children across rural communities in Rivers State.

Objective:

This study aims to design and evaluate a sustainable EDUCARE Model tailored to the needs of vulnerable rural children in Rivers State. Specifically, it seeks to establish the interrelationships among educational access, learning quality, child well-being, and governance sustainability, and how these factors collectively influence educational development through livelihood empowerment.

Literature Review

Concept of the EDUCARE Model

The term EDUCARE derives from the integration of *Education* and *Care*, representing a model that promotes Empowering Disadvantaged and Underprivileged Children through Access, Reform, and Equity. In academic terms, the EDUCARE concept reflects an evolving paradigm that sees education as a comprehensive social investment, not merely a classroom activity. Scholars such as Ngugi (2022) and UNESCO (2024) affirm that education in vulnerable contexts must integrate *learning, care, and community support* to ensure both academic and social inclusion.

The EDUCARE Model emphasizes that learning for children in rural communities should go beyond literacy to

include child well-being, nutrition, safety, livelihood exposure, and emotional development. It aligns with the idea of “whole-child education” proposed by Darling-Hammond (2023), which argues that children learn best when their social, emotional, and physical needs are met alongside cognitive growth.

Educational development: refers to the measurable improvement in children’s learning outcomes, academic performance, well-being, and future opportunities resulting from effective educational systems and interventions.

This variable captures the overall educational progress of vulnerable children in rural communities of Rivers State. It includes indicators such as access to schooling, learning achievement, attendance, retention, literacy levels, and readiness for livelihood engagement. In the EDUCARE Model, educational development is viewed not only as the outcome of schooling but also as a product of social protection, equity, and empowerment. Improved education leads to reduced child vulnerability, enhanced community resilience, and sustainable socio-economic growth.

Educational access: refers to the degree of opportunity, availability, and inclusiveness that enables children, especially those in rural and disadvantaged settings, to enroll, attend, and complete school without socio-economic or physical barriers.

Access is the entry point to any functional education system. It includes factors such as proximity of schools, affordability, gender equality, availability of teachers, and provision of learning materials. In rural areas, access is often hindered by poor infrastructure, long travel distances, poverty, and cultural attitudes. According to UNICEF (2024), equitable access ensures that no child is excluded due to their background or circumstances. Within the EDUCARE framework, expanding access means providing *inclusive, affordable, and community-driven schooling systems* that remove all barriers to participation.

Learning quality: refers to the standard, relevance, and effectiveness of the teaching and learning process, including curriculum content, teacher competence, instructional materials, and assessment methods.

Quality education ensures that learners acquire not only knowledge but also critical thinking, problem-solving, and practical life skills. It addresses both teaching input (teachers, curriculum, facilities) and learning outcomes (skills, understanding, values). Darling-Hammond (2023) argues that quality learning transforms education from rote memorization to meaningful understanding. In rural contexts, poor-quality education often leads to functional illiteracy and dropout. The EDUCARE Model therefore emphasizes teacher training, learner-centered pedagogy,

and curriculum reform as central to achieving quality and relevance in rural education.

Child well-being: is the state of physical health, nutrition, safety, and emotional stability that supports a child’s capacity to learn effectively and participate actively in education.

A child’s well-being directly affects their learning outcomes. Malnutrition, illness, or emotional distress can lead to poor concentration and irregular attendance. WHO (2023) and UNESCO (2024) affirm that well-being is a prerequisite for effective education, particularly in low-income and rural environments. The EDUCARE Model integrates well-being by promoting school health programs, feeding initiatives, psychosocial support, and safe learning spaces. By addressing health and emotional needs, the model enhances children’s motivation, attendance, and cognitive growth.

Governance and sustainability: refer to the structures, policies, and accountability mechanisms that guide education delivery and ensure its long-term continuity and effectiveness.

Good governance ensures that educational programs are well-coordinated, adequately financed, transparent, and inclusive. Sustainability ensures that reforms endure beyond donor funding or political cycles. The Global Partnership for Education (2024) defines governance as “the set of institutions, rules, and processes that determine how education systems are managed.” Within the EDUCARE Model, governance includes policy formulation, stakeholder participation, and community ownership. Sustainable governance promotes accountability, continuity, and scalability of successful rural education programs.

Livelihood empowerment: refers to the capacity of education to equip learners with practical skills, entrepreneurship competencies, and employability attributes that enable them to sustain productive livelihoods.

This variable serves as the bridge between education and socio-economic outcomes. It reflects how improved access, quality, and child well-being translate into future income, self-reliance, and community development. The World Bank (2023) identifies livelihood empowerment as the long-term return on investment in human capital. Within the EDUCARE framework, education is not an end in itself but a tool for preparing children to contribute meaningfully to society through employable skills and innovation.

The EDUCARE Model integrates four independent variables, educational access, learning quality, child well-being, and governance sustainability, that collectively

influence the dependent variable, educational development, through the mediating role of livelihood empowerment. When governance provides a stable structure, access widens, learning quality improves, and child well-being is strengthened; these in turn empower learners with livelihood skills that reinforce sustainable educational and community outcomes.

Education and Rural Development

Education has long been considered a key driver of rural transformation and poverty reduction (World Bank, 2023). However, in regions such as Rivers State, rural children face multiple barriers, distance from schools, poor infrastructure, untrained teachers, and socio-economic exclusion (Adebayo & Olanrewaju, 2022). The EDUCARE framework thus identifies *educational access* and *learning quality* as foundational variables. According to the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF, 2024), rural education reform must include not only school construction but also *inclusive learning environments* and *community participation*.

Studies by Oketch and Rolleston (2023) also reveal that effective education systems in Africa require community alignment, where parents, traditional leaders, and teachers collaborate to support local education initiatives. This community-centered approach strengthens ownership and ensures that children’s learning reflects local realities.

Child Well-being and Educational Outcomes

Child well-being, comprising nutrition, health, and psychological safety, is increasingly recognized as a strong determinant of learning achievement (WHO, 2023). Poor nutrition and health challenges among rural children often

result in low concentration and absenteeism. Therefore, EDUCARE promotes *nutrition-sensitive schooling*, school health programs, and emotional care services as part of the educational system. When children are well-fed and psychologically supported, their attendance and academic outcomes improve significantly (UNESCO, 2024).

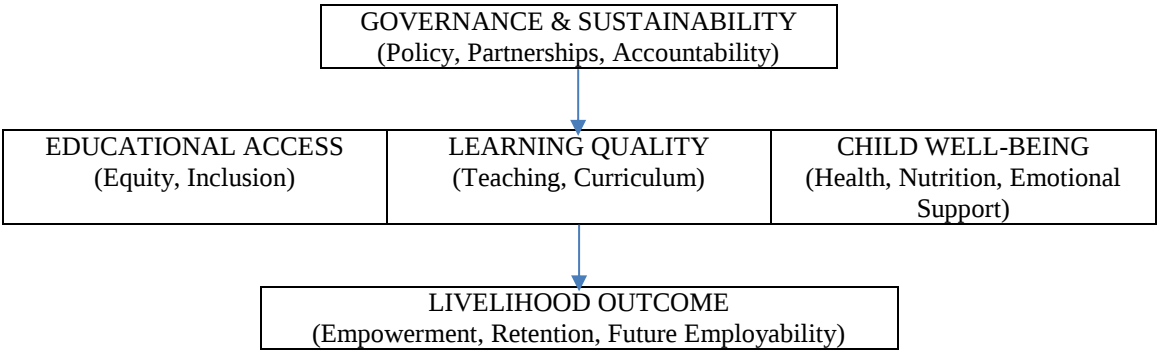
Governance and Sustainability in Education

A sustainable education model requires good governance, policy consistency, and community accountability. Governance refers to how policies, resources, and actors interact to deliver educational outcomes (GPE, 2024). Sustainability, on the other hand, emphasizes the continuity of programs beyond external funding. The EDUCARE Model incorporates these governance principles by advocating for *multi-sectoral partnerships*, between government, civil society, and the private sector, to ensure lasting educational transformation in rural areas.

In the EDUCARE Model, four key variables, Educational Access, Learning Quality, Child Well-being, and Governance Sustainability, are interrelated. Access and quality form the learning base, while child well-being acts as a moderating variable that enhances learning success. Governance sustainability serves as the structural and policy framework that supports the entire system. Together, these elements form a holistic ecosystem that promotes inclusive and equitable education for rural children.

Conceptual Framework

Below is the conceptual framework illustrating the relationship among the key variables in the EDUCARE Model for Rivers State’s rural communities:



- ❖ *Educational Access* ensures that rural children can attend school without barriers.
- ❖ *Learning Quality* ensures that teaching and curriculum are relevant and effective.
- ❖ *Child Well-being* reinforces attendance, performance, and emotional stability.
- ❖ *Governance and Sustainability* provide the enabling environment and resources.

The combined impact leads to *Livelihood Outcomes*, skills, employability, and community development.

Synthesis of Literature and Identified Gaps

The reviewed literature consistently highlights the interdependence of education, social protection, and livelihoods in achieving sustainable development. However, three key research gaps are evident:

- 1. Fragmentation of Interventions:** Most educational initiatives in Nigeria remain sector-specific, addressing either access or quality without integrating social protection and livelihood support.
- 2. Lack of Contextual Models:** There is a dearth of conceptual and empirical models designed specifically for *rural Southern Nigeria*, particularly the Niger Delta region, where environmental, cultural, and infrastructural challenges intersect uniquely.
- 3. Limited Sustainability Frameworks:** Existing studies have not established robust frameworks for community participation and institutional governance necessary to sustain educational interventions beyond donor cycles.

The EDUCARE Model seeks to fill these gaps by developing a localized, evidence-based, and community-driven framework that integrates education with social protection and livelihood empowerment for vulnerable children in rural Rivers State.

Empirical Review

The empirical evidence surrounding educational sustainability and rural development has progressively evolved across global, continental, and national contexts. Globally, extensive research confirms that sustainable education systems are fundamental to breaking cycles of poverty and exclusion (UNESCO, 2024; OECD, 2023). For instance, a longitudinal study by Hanushek and Woessmann (2023) revealed that improvements in basic education quality significantly increase national productivity and social stability. Similarly, the World Bank (2023) identified that investments in early childhood and primary education in vulnerable settings yield the highest return on human capital development. These studies affirm that access, quality, and governance collectively determine the sustainability of rural education models.

At the continental level, African-based studies demonstrate that rural education sustainability is hindered by infrastructural inadequacy, low teacher motivation, and governance inefficiencies (AfDB, 2023; ADEA, 2024). In Kenya, Mutua and Karanja (2022) found that the introduction of community-based learning hubs significantly improved retention rates among marginalized children. Likewise, in South Africa, Mokoena and Chikoko (2023) showed that policy decentralization and parental involvement foster sustainable learning environments in underdeveloped provinces. These findings underscore the

importance of contextual adaptation, suggesting that Africa's educational sustainability must integrate community ownership, local governance, and continuous teacher capacity building.

Within the Nigerian context, several empirical studies expose the stark rural–urban disparities in educational access and quality. Eze, Onyekwere, and Ajah (2023) discovered that over 40% of children in Rivers State's rural areas either drop out or never enroll due to poverty, cultural factors, and distance from schools. Similarly, Adedeji and Bello (2024) identified that inadequate teacher deployment, poor funding mechanisms, and obsolete infrastructure undermine sustainable education delivery. A recent empirical analysis by Okoli and Tamuno (2024) further revealed that rural education sustainability correlates strongly with effective governance and teacher professional development, emphasizing that long-term reforms must address both systemic and community-level variables.

Across these studies, the common thread is the recognition that education for vulnerable rural children must transcend mere school attendance, it requires multi-dimensional support encompassing health, nutrition, social protection, and economic empowerment. This aligns with UNICEF's (2024) report, which proposes that sustainable rural education systems should combine education with livelihood development and community engagement.

Theoretical Framework

The EDUCARE Model is underpinned by multiple theoretical perspectives that collectively explain the interconnections among education, social protection, and rural development.

Human Capital Theory

Rooted in the works of Schultz (1961) and Becker (1964), Human Capital Theory posits that education is an investment that enhances individuals' productivity, economic value, and societal contribution. In the context of rural Rivers State, this theory explains how expanding educational access for vulnerable children directly strengthens the community's long-term economic resilience. When learners acquire literacy, digital skills, and vocational competencies, they not only escape the cycle of poverty but also contribute to the productive base of the local economy (Omoike, 2023). Thus, the EDUCARE Model operationalizes human capital development by ensuring that educational interventions are both inclusive and economically purposeful.

Social Protection and Capability Theory

Amartya Sen's Capability Approach (1999) expands the lens beyond economic value to human freedoms, what individuals are able to *be* and *do*. The EDUCARE Model

draws from this theory by recognizing that children in rural Rivers require more than schooling; they need *capabilities*, health, nutrition, and safe environments, to translate education into meaningful life outcomes. UNICEF (2024) reinforces this view, asserting that sustainable education outcomes cannot be divorced from broader social protection systems. The EDUCARE Model therefore treats social protection measures (school feeding, health support, and household assistance) as integral to learning continuity.

Systems Theory

According to Bertalanffy's General Systems Theory (1968), social phenomena operate as interdependent systems, where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Applied to education, this means that reforms targeting a single component (e.g., curriculum or infrastructure) may fail unless connected to other subsystems (teacher welfare, governance, and community support). The EDUCARE Model adopts this systems perspective, recognizing education as a dynamic web of interrelated sub-systems, *Access, Quality, Welfare, and Governance*, whose synchronization determines sustainability (Bashir & Yusuf, 2023).

Sustainable Livelihood Theory

The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (DFID, 1999) posits that individuals' ability to sustain their well-being depends on access to assets, human, natural, financial, and social capital. In rural education contexts, children's learning is strongly mediated by household livelihoods. When families struggle economically, children are often withdrawn from school to support income generation. The EDUCARE Model therefore incorporates livelihood enhancement as a protective mechanism against school dropouts, aligning with recent empirical work linking livelihood stability with school retention (Eze & Amadi, 2024).

Challenges

Findings reveal several persistent challenges to achieving a sustainable EDUCARE model in rural communities:

- 1. Infrastructural Deficit:** Most rural schools in Rivers State lack classrooms, libraries, and sanitation facilities, creating poor learning conditions (Eze et al., 2023).
- 2. Teacher Shortage and Low Motivation:** Qualified teachers are often unwilling to work in remote areas due to poor welfare, limited housing, and lack of incentives (Okoli & Tamuno, 2024).
- 3. Governance and Policy Inconsistency:** Education policies frequently change with political

administrations, leading to discontinuity of projects and funding instability (Adedeji & Bello, 2024).

- 3. Socio-Cultural Barriers:** Early marriages, child labor, and cultural perceptions of education, especially for girls, reduce school attendance and retention (UNICEF, 2024).
- 4. Economic Constraints and Poverty:** Parents' inability to afford uniforms, books, and transport limits children's participation in education (World Bank, 2023).
- 5. Inadequate Integration of Child Well-being:** Many schools neglect the health, nutrition, and psychosocial needs of learners, thereby weakening concentration and performance (WHO, 2023).

Recommendations

To overcome the above challenges, empirical studies suggest several strategic interventions aligned with sustainable education principles:

- 1. Community-Based Educational Planning:** Decentralizing education governance to empower communities ensures accountability and long-term sustainability (Mokoena & Chikoko, 2023).
- 2. Teacher Motivation and Retention Schemes:** Implementing rural allowances, professional development programs, and housing incentives can attract and retain qualified teachers (Mutua & Karanja, 2022).
- 3. Integrated Child Support Services:** School feeding programs, health screening, and psychosocial support should accompany educational initiatives to enhance learning outcomes (UNICEF, 2024).
- 4. Policy Continuity and Accountability Frameworks:** Establishing education trust funds and legislative mechanisms will ensure program continuity beyond political cycles (Adedeji & Bello, 2024).
- 5. Curriculum Reform and Livelihood Empowerment:** Incorporating entrepreneurship, digital literacy, and vocational education within the curriculum fosters long-term self-reliance (World Bank, 2023).
- 6. Public-Private and NGO Partnerships:** Collaboration with non-state actors can provide infrastructural development, technology support, and scholarship opportunities (AfDB, 2023).

Conclusion

Empirical evidence consistently demonstrates that sustainable education in rural communities cannot be achieved through conventional schooling models alone. It

requires a holistic, integrative approach that addresses educational access, learning quality, governance, and child well-being simultaneously. The proposed EDUCARE Model therefore emerges as a strategic framework that links education with social protection, community participation, and livelihood empowerment. In the context of Rivers State, this model offers a blueprint for transforming rural education from vulnerability to sustainability, anchored on inclusivity, equity, and resilience. Future research should empirically test the EDUCARE framework through pilot interventions, longitudinal tracking, and impact evaluations to validate its long-term effectiveness in enhancing educational development among vulnerable children.

References

1. Adedeji, K., & Bello, S. (2024). *Educational governance and policy continuity in Nigeria's basic education sector*. *Journal of African Educational Policy and Reform*, 12(3), 45–62.
2. African Development Bank (AfDB). (2023). *Education for resilience and inclusive growth in Africa: Policy brief*. Abidjan: AfDB Publications.
3. Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA). (2024). *Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 16-25) Implementation Report 2024*. Addis Ababa: African Union Commission.
4. Eze, M. O., Onyekwere, A. C., & Ajah, L. N. (2023). *Socioeconomic barriers to rural education in Rivers State: A gendered perspective*. *Nigerian Journal of Rural Education Studies*, 8(2), 110–128.
5. Hanushek, E. A., & Woessmann, L. (2023). *The economic impact of educational quality: Global evidence and policy implications*. *World Development*, 165,
6. Mokoena, M., & Chikoko, V. (2023). *Decentralization and school sustainability in South Africa: The role of parental engagement*. *African Educational Research Review*, 17(4), 67–85.
7. Mutua, N. W., & Karanja, P. M. (2022). *Community-based learning hubs and educational retention in rural Kenya*. *International Journal of Educational Innovation*, 9(1), 24–41.
8. Oketch, M., & Rolleston, C. (2023). *Education and community livelihoods in Sub-Saharan Africa: Towards a holistic inclusion model*. *Comparative Education Review*, 67(2), 201–220.
9. Okoli, J. C., & Tamuno, T. A. (2024). *Governance, teacher motivation, and sustainable rural education in Nigeria: Empirical insights from Rivers State*. *Journal of Education and Sustainable Development*, 15(1), 89–107.
10. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2023). *Education for a sustainable future: Policy responses to global learning inequities*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
11. UNESCO. (2024). *Reimagining education for human and planetary sustainability: Global education monitoring report 2024*. Paris: UNESCO Publishing.
12. UNICEF. (2024). *Education and social protection for every child: Integrating learning, health, and nutrition*. New York: UNICEF Publications.
13. World Bank. (2023). *Transforming education for equitable human capital development*. Washington, DC: World Bank Publications.
14. World Health Organization (WHO). (2023). *Health and learning: Integrating school-based health services into education systems*. Geneva: WHO Press.