




OPERATIONAL STRATEGIES AND SUSTAINABILITY FACTORS INFLUENCING IMPLEMENTATION OF EDUCATION INTERVENTION IN HONDURAS, CENTRAL AMERICA: AVANZADO LIBROS PROJECT

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ABSTRACT

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This study examined operational strategies and sustainability factors on education intervention projects in Honduras, Central America. The study's purpose was to determine the role of project planning, capacity building, government investment and stakeholder engagement played in implementing educational interventions. Adopting a survey design and census method, relevant data was collected using structured questionnaires distributed to 132 project implementers of the Honduras ACL project. With response rate of 87%, the study findings revealed that all for variables exerted a significant influence, moderated by the policy environment indicated strong positive correlations were shown between the implementation of educational interventions and each of the four variables: In conclusion, the study recommends that to successfully implement educational interventions, it is essential: project implementers and benefactors understand the importance of clear and inclusive implementation plans, and the need for capacity need assessments and relevant capacity building; and not only stakeholders but also governments become involved.

Contribution/Originality: Project planning and management tools may be considered the solution to project implementation for various sectors; however, development projects to improve the vicinity may not be viable in the longtime if the required actions are not taken. Project sustainability involves several steps; beginning with ensuring the project aligns with the needs of and is acceptable to both government and society, followed by providing short-term benefits to and being fully engaged with the society. These steps increase the likelihood that intervention initiatives be well implemented and integrated into existing networks and systems in sectors such as education.

1. INTRODUCTION

The World Bank Annual Report (2017) declared two goals that would guide its development work worldwide; eradicating extreme poverty by 2030 and boosting shared prosperity, defined as increasing the per capita real income of the poorest 40% of each country's population. The Agenda 2030 (2015) had emphasized the central principle of leaving no one behind; progress has been slower in education than in other sectors. Population growth is still high, especially in developing countries where young people are three times more likely to be unemployed than adults, while children are overrepresented among the poorest of society; only one third of all countries spend

between 15 per cent and 20 per cent of total government expenditure on education, as recommended in the Education 2030 Framework for Action (United Nations, 2019).

The Incheon Declaration and SDG 4 (2015) stated that; the vision for education was to transform lives by recognizing the important role it plays as a main driver of development and in achieving other proposed Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This new vision is compassed within proposed SDG 4 “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” and its corresponding indicators and targets. The United Nation (2019 report) has noted that, over 265 million children are currently out of school, 22% of which are of primary school age, and that, even those attending school, lack basic literacy and numeracy skills. Inter-America Dialogue (2017) posits that:

“In order to compete in the global economy, it is important to build the skill set of the labor force in order to be able to adapt to the complexities of production and markets. Education has a significant role in building the human capital necessary to compete and integrate people in a modern society. Specifically, education enrollment, quality and attainment impact the future of the labor force”

Although Honduras categorized as a low income country, the situation has improved in recent years with the gradual growth in public investments, exports and remittances. Moderate economic growth of 41% was seen in 2017 and an increase of 3.6% was expected in 2018 (UNESCO Institute for Statistics UIS Online, 2018). UIS (2018) in its ranking noted that, Honduras adult literacy rate was 88.99%. Wome were at 89.05% and men 88.93 granting Honduras number 87 in global literacy. However, Education 2030(2015) report noted that; literacy must now be seen as an enabler and facilitator of the 17 SDGs

There are three stages to the Honduran education system: primary, lower secondary and upper secondary; primary education is further subdivided into three cycles: cycle one comprises grades 1-3, cycle two grades 4-6 and cycle three grades 7-9 The school year runs from February to November for all 12,412 public schools, which serve 1,876,000 children across primary and secondary education; 1,217,000 million which are in primary education. In 2014, the net enrollment rates were 95% in primary and 73% in lower secondary schools, in the latter covering the final years of compulsory education for 12-15 year olds, and 53% in upper secondary schools. The completion rates in the same year were 79% in primary, 43% in lower secondary, and 31% in the upper secondary which teach 16-18 years old. By 2017, primary school enrollments had increased to 95.22%, but had decreased to 54.96% in secondary schools; primary school completions had also risen to 85.56% (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2017).

Consequently, the Honduran government aimed to provide free books to all schools in the country through the ministry of education (Secretaría de Educación del Estado de Campeche -SEDUC) which responsible for financing and supervising not only the writing and publication but also the efficient distribution of the teaching and learning materials (TLMs) for grades 1-9 (Edition, Others, Educatives, & Rivera, 2017). However, weaknesses in the book supply chain have resulted in insufficient numbers of reading materials being provided on time, within budget and of the required standards.

Against this, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), along with other benefactors, civil society, and the private sector, funded the *Avanzando Con Libros* (ACL) project to support the Honduran government’s aim of improving reading outcomes in basic education grades 1-6, in the departments targeted(USAID/Honduras (2015-2019). ACL supports the procurement of TLMs for the USAID-funded *De Lectores a Líderes* (DLAD) project.

This study highlights the issues related to project planning, government investment, capacity building, and stakeholder engagement that determine the success and sustainability of implementing educational interventions. A survey was undertaken of education in Honduras, Central America, which has a per capita income of approximately USD-600 and an economic freedom score of 60.2, making its economy ranked 93rd in the Index of Economic Freedom (Edition et al., 2017). However, its freedom has dropped by 0.4 points, scores in trade freedom, judicial effectiveness and government integrity declining than the significant rise for fiscal health. Although below the

global average, Honduras is just above the regional average for the Americas, being ranked 20th among 32 countries.

2. PROJECT PLANNING, GOVERNMENT INVESTMENT, AND IMPLEMENTATION OF EDUCATIONAL INTERVENTIONS

Project implementation is the most demanding phase, since it involves the actual building blocks that ensure success. One of the tools for success of a project are the lack goals or consensus on goals, as well as key team members failing to understand the goal and expected outcomes. Therefore, a detailed project plan is essential to clarify the goals, specific roles, and key deliverables, as is obtaining the full support of all stakeholder. A crucial part of this phase include: aligning the project goals with organizational strategy; developing scope management, resource allocation, communication and risk management plans; and stakeholder analysis⁹Project Management Institute, 2013.

This for educational projects, all the educational partners and stakeholders must agree to accept the project's statement of work on the specific activities, deliverables and time schedule required. According to the [Education Development Centre \(2018\)](#) USAID and the other partners invested USD 69 million to support education in Honduras, mainly to foster a culture of reading while simultaneously transforming the country's classrooms and communities. Education projects; depend on good communication, as stipulated in the communication plan, among all the stakeholders to ensure effective project management. *The Project Management Book of Knowledge (PMBOK, 2013)* indicates that 75%-90% of the time is spent on project management; the time taken for each unit of work "work packages," being allocated in the "work breakdown structure" (WBS) of the scope management plan. The fact that a study by [Fong and Kwok \(2009\)](#) found most contact in Hong-Kong, compared under a clan culture at both project and organizational levels facilitates project management, as this cultural model depends upon open and honest communication, respect for colleagues, trust, and cohesive relationships.

Although economists and other researchers are often disappointed that most of their findings are regularly ignored by government and policymakers, this does not always be the case in education. International organizations fully endorse the importance of education for economic and social development. Two of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) adopted at the United Nations Millennium Summit in September 2000 focus on education. Even more importantly, policymakers in developing countries generally agree that important benefits come from investment in human capital; resulting in considerable increase in their funding for education. In addition to the governments of developing countries now spending about USD 700 billion per year on education, and parents' expenditure on their children's education is likely to be on the same order of magnitude ([Glewwe, 2013](#)).

3. CAPACITY BUILDING, STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT, AND IMPLEMENTATION OF EDUCATIONAL INTERVENTIONS

In an increasingly fast-paced global economy, education policies must adapt to new, economic, social as well as individual needs. Thus, educational policies, programs, and facilitative teaching practices that focus on improving learning outcomes and relevant skills acquisition should be developed and implemented to adequately prepare students for contemporary challenges, as is the case in Honduras. Capacity building, is a broad concept that includes empowering individuals, organizations, or societies with the capability to implement or manage change ([Hilderbrand, 2014](#)). A Capacity needs assessment (CAN) thus undertaken in 2016, aiming to determine the ability of individuals and institutions in solving the inevitable challenges to be faced during the implementation of educational interventions ([OECD, 2016](#)); and enabled stakeholders to develop appropriate measures.

Once the relevant stake-holders, individuals, organizations and society are equipped with the knowledge, competencies, and tools to manage change. Effective capacity building will be complete and educational

interventions can be successfully implemented. At the individual level, capacity building is also as human resources development which aims to equip individual stakeholders with change management skills through such various methods as in-service training, sharing knowledge and experiences, and mentoring. (Hilderbrand, 2014).

A group of individuals form an organizational culture; therefore, building and developing an organization's capacities to achieve its objectives is as important as that of individuals. At this level, policies, procedures, rules and regulations, and systems are formulated for the educational intervention, while a mission, strategy, leadership, governance, and project implementation, as well as the required competencies are imparted to the stakeholders (OECD, 2016). Williamson (2014) stated that good policies and regulations are useless if individual teachers are demotivated or do not understand the goals of the program, while an empowered society is inefficient if the government is apathetic. According to Bester (2015).

Capacity Building is more likely to be effective if it is driven by programme countries, and based on an acknowledgement that there are existing capacities that can be strengthened. Country contexts differ and there should be room for flexibility and innovation in supporting capacity development efforts of programme countries. It is also essential to invest in the on-going development of capacities of staff in country offices to support the development of national capacities. (pg.v)

According to the OECD (2016) a country's responsibilities include providing material resources and staff to develop standards and records of achievement; and reviewing and supervising the preparation of guidance manuals. Cross-sectoral collaboration and partnerships are also highlighted as many challenges outside the school setting will arise; parental and wider community involvement will play a critical role in addressing issues around digital and emotional well-being. Collaboration between schools and other sectors can take different forms, as will now be examined. First, schools act as the anchor within their communities. Where partnerships are basic and limited to individual initiatives of schools or a particular agent in the community. Second, schools, develop second schools, develop entrepreneurial relationships with different members of the community, where partnership are more dynamic by collaborating in joint initiatives and sharing knowledge-based expertise with policymakers and public services. Finally, schools become fully involved in community life through a variety of corporate social responsibility activities, such as providing outreach programs in the community or opening their facilities to the general public. These partnerships are stronger to depending on the joint effort of both schools and their communities; are often strategic collaborations aimed at expanding schools' capacity to develop and improve digital skills (OECD, 2019). However, the nature of all partnerships depends heavily on the authority and expertise of the individuals involved as well as the resources, available. Moreover, collaboration can be supported with formal feedback channels or accountability measures, collaborative learning practices, dedicated time and ongoing funding, and professional responsibility, agency and trust (OECD, 2019).

Such stakeholders have the right to not only express their opinions on the execution of a project but also claim compensation in the event of a project failing (Kerzner, 2001). Both the Association of Project Management (2013) and the *PMBOK Guide* indicates that stakeholders analysis and integration is key to successful project management: Table 1 below presents a stakeholder analysis based on influence a interested ,regardless of their level influence ,need to and interest: Those with a high level of influence to be closely managed ,while those with less interested ,regardless of their level of influence ,need to kept satisfied. Those with little influence require less effort.

With regard to educational projects, a consensus among all stakeholders, from top to bottom, to participate is essential; this will then improve inclusion and facilitate stakeholder engagement and management. In terms of this particular educational project in Honduras, its success also relies on the relevant stakeholders having a clear understanding of the book supply chain, for which a streamlined process is crucial. Overall, the involvement of partnership and stakeholders ensures successful project implementation and sustainability .Project sustainability takes into account the social, economic, and environmental impacts on current and future generations, aligning the project goals with local conditions and priorities, which includes maintaining environmental stability and

minimizing environmental damage (Morfaw,2014).In addition, diverse sources of funding increase sustainability ,while monitoring and adapting to potential opportunities for funding and resources ,such as for training, can prove useful post project.

The critical factor in this project is the progress in improving student's educational outcomes in developing countries, which requires more than addressing basic school ad teacher characteristics. There are several approaches that can be broadly categorized three broad types of policies. First, changing students characteristic before beginning, and perhaps when attending, primary school, which involves early childhood, especially pre-school, development and child health and nutrition programs. Second, polices offering better incentives to change students and their parents behaviors, may be more effective on demand side of education. Third, supply-side policies that change schools' and teachers' characteristics to improve educational outcomes but going beyond management structure to the incentives offered to teachers and school administrators (Glewwe, 2013).

Finally, of interest is the *Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2016-2025(CESA16-25)*, which views education as a national priority requiring not only the strong determination of politicians but also heightened awareness among all stakeholders. The strategy advocates national, regional, and continental level approaches to create a standardized tool for educational management, monitoring, and evaluation, based on reliable data and statistics for uniform performance indicators.

4. STUDY OBJECTIVES

- i) To examine the influence of project planning on the implementation of educational interventions in (ACL) project, in Honduras, Central America.
- ii) To examine the influence of capacity building on the implementation of educational interventions in the ACL project, in Honduras, Central America.
- iii) To establish the role played by government investment and stakeholder engagement in the implementation of educational interventions in the ACL project, in Honduras, Central America.
- iv) To determine the influence of stakeholder engagement on the implementation of the educational interventions in the ACL project, in Honduras, Central America.

4.1. Theoretical e Framework

The study is based on outcomes theory, which was developed by was developed by Duignan (2009) as a conceptual basis framework for thinking about and working with outcome systems in project interventions. It is related to strategic plans, management by results, result chains and results-based management systems; Realizing the interrelationship between the project interventions and performance's, this study is concerned with project delivery, it is clearly underpinned by outcomes theory, since the focus is on evidence-based and best practice in achieving the projects objectives ,as well as identifying ,prioritizing ,and measuring the required results, along with the accountability of the parties involved.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A survey design was adopted and structured questionnaire used to collect data from a sample population of 132 respondents.

Table-1. Sampling framework

Cluster	Sample Population
Project Managers and Implementers	50
Finance and Administration	12
Human Resources	12
Procurement	25
Other	33
Total	132

All the respondents were directly engaged with the ACL project in the six target Honduran departments; Atlàntida, Cortezés, Santa Baárbara, Francisco Morazáon, Lempira, and La pPaz in Honduras.

6. RESULTS

A total of 113 questionnaires were completed, giving response rate of 87%.

Table-2. Descriptive analysis for the implementation of educational interventions.

Statements	*SDF (%)	NF (%)	AF (%)	SAF (%)	Total F (%)	M	SD
a) Projects implemented to stakeholder satisfaction	2 (1)	17 (15)	27 (24)	63 (56)	113 (100)	4.27	0.71
b) Projects implemented within scope	0 (0)	13 (12)	34 (30)	52 (46)	113 (100)	4.10	0.71
c) Projects implemented to government satisfaction	0 (0)	23 (20)	33 (29)	53 (47)	113 (100)	4.06	0.70
d) Projects implemented on time	0 (0)	14 (12)	28 (25)	0 (0)	113 (100)	4.05	0.68
e) Projects achieving quality defined standards	0 (0)	23 (20)	23 (20)	59 (52)	113 (100)	3.99	0.70
f) Projects implemented within allocated budgets	0 (0)	(27) (24)	(30) (27)	(70) (6)	(113) (100)	3.4.07 4.07	0.70.70 .706
Composite Mean and Standard Deviation						4.07	0.706

Note: *SD-Strongly Disagree- Disagreed, N- Neutral, A- Agreed, SA- Strongly Agreed, and M-Mean, SD- Standard Deviation.

As can be seen in Table, the ACL project was implemented to the stakeholders' satisfaction (mean = 4.27, standard deviation = 0.71), which would contribute to the overall success of the project.

Table-3. Influence of project planning on implementation of educational interventions.

Statements	*SDF (%)	DF (%)	NF (%)	AF (%)	SAF (%)	Total F (%)	M	SD
a) Organization has clearly understood goals	0 (0)	0 (0)	24 (21)	8 (7)	81 (72)	113 (100)	4.17	0.213
b) Goals have support of all employees	0 (0)	17 (15)	21 (18)	28 (25)	47 (41)	113 (100)	4.15	0.163
c) Organization has a detailed implementation plan	3 (2)	7 (3)	13 (12)	54 (47)	36 (32)	113 (100)	4.10	0.617
d) Organization has a resource allocation plan	0 (0)	14 (12)	21 (19)	45 (40)	33 (29)	113 (100)	4.08	0.714
e) Organization has a communications plan	0 (0)	8 (7)	17 (15)	39 (35)	49 (44)	113 (100)	4.06	0.757
f) Organization has a detailed risk management plan	0 00	13 (12)	15 (13)	45 (40)	40 (36)	113 (100)	3.84	0.745
Composite Mean and Standard Deviation							4.06	0.61

Notes: *(SD-, Strongly Disagreed; D-, Disagreed; N-, Neutral-; A-, Agreed; A-, Strongly Agreed; M-, Mean; SD-, Standard Deviation.

Table 3 reveals that that from the initiation to the status update meetings on the daily operations of the project; the project goals were clearly explained (mean = 4.17, standard deviation = 0.21).

Table 4 shows the effect of capacity building; the majority of the respondents agreed that they were fully informed and engaged with the project before any training was undertaken (individual mean = 4.27, standard deviation = 0.62); undertaken while members of the project team confirmed they had acquired the necessary project team confirmed they had acquired the necessary technical skills (individual mean = 4.10, standard deviation = 0.72).

Table-4. Influence of capacity building on implementation of educational interventions.

Statements	*SDF (%)	DF (%)	NF (%)	AF (%)	SAF (%)	Total F (%)	M	SD
a) Engagement of staff before training/workshops	2 (1)	4 (2)	17 (15)	27 (24)	63 (56)	113 (100)	4.27	0.617
b) Project team has possess the necessary technical skills	0 (0)	14 (12)	13 (12)	34 (30)	52 (46)	113 (100)	4.10	0.720
b) Staff are sponsored for technical training	0 (0)	4 (3)	23 (20)	33 (29)	53 (47)	113 (100)	4.06	0.711
c) Organization conducted a skills assessment	0 (0)	0 (0)	14 (12)	28 (25)	71 (63)	113 (100)	4.05	0.211
d) Training outcomes are integrated into manuals	0 (0)	8 (7)	23 (20)	23 (20)	59 (52)	113 (100)	3.99	0.833
e) Workshops are tailor-made	0 (0)	7 (6)	27 (24)	30 (27)	49 (43)	113 (100)	3.98	0.631
Composite Mean and Standard Deviation							4.075	0.621

Note :*(SD-, Strongly Disagreed, D-, N-, Neutral, A-, Agreed; SA-, Strongly Agreed; M-, Mean; SD- Standard Deviation.

Table-5. Government investment on implementation of educational interventions.

Statements	*SDF (%)	DF (%)	NF (%)	AF (%)	SAF (%)	Total F (%)	M	SD
a) Government is interested in success of project	2 (1)	4 (2)	17 (15)	27 (24)	63 (56)	113 (100)	4.13	0.621
b) Work plans aligned with strategic plans.	0 (0)	14 (12)	13 (12)	34 (30)	52 (46)	113 (100)	4.00	0.917
c) Private, public partnerships favored	0 (0)	0 (0)	14 (12)	28 (25)	71 (63)	113 (100)	3.95	0.689
d) Government has provided financial resources	0 (0)	4 (3)	23 (20)	33 (29)	53 (47)	113 (100)	3.87	0.747
e) Government has provided technical resources	0 (0)	7 (6)	27 (24)	30 (27)	49 (43)	113 (100)	3.77	0.600
Composite Mean and Standard Deviation							3.98	0.71

Note :*(SD-, Strongly Disagreed; D-, Disagreed; N-, Neutral; A-, Agreed; A-, Strongly Agreed; M-, Mean; SD-Standard Deviation)

With regard to the government’s involvement, presented in Table 5 the respondents agreed that the government was very interested in the project’s success (individual mean = 4.13, standard deviation = 0.62). Success. There was also agreement that both the government and project team had aligned the strategic and work plans (individual mean = 4.00, standard deviation = 1.00. In addition, respondents agreed that private, public partnerships were favored (individual mean = 3.95, standard deviation = 0.69).

Table-6. Influence of stakeholder engagement on implementation of educational interventions.

Statements	*SDF (%)	DF (%)	NF (%)	AF (%)	SAF (%)	Total F (%)	M	SD
a) Relevant stakeholders are involved in projects	0 (0)	0 (0)	22 (19)	36 (32)	55 (49)	113 (100)	4.17	0.213
b) Team members are fully aware of book supply chain management	3 (2)	60 (53)	17 (15)	14 (12)	43 (38)	113 (100)	4.15	0.613
c) Collaboration is maintained among stakeholders	3 (2)	7 (3)	13 (12)	54 (47)	36 (32)	113 (100)	4.10	0.617
d) Stakeholders are involved at different levels	0 (0)	8 (7)	17 (15)	39 (35)	49 (44)	113 (100)	4.06	0.757
e) Information is freely shared with partners	0 (0)	40 (36)	15 (13)	58 (51)	0 (0)	113 (100)	3.84	0.745
Total							4.06	0.61

Note :*(SD, Strongly Disagreed; D, Disagreed; N, Neutral; A, Agreed; SA, Strongly Agreed; M, Mean; SD, Standard Deviation.

As shown in Table 6, respondents agreed that the relevant stakeholders had been involved in the projects (individual mean = 4.17, standard deviation = 0.21), and collaboration maintained (individual mean = 4.1. In

contrast, there was no consensus respondents with a mean of 4.15 and a standard deviation of 0.61 did not agreed that the project team members were fully aware of and efficiently managing the book supply chain (individual mean of= 4.15, standard deviation = 0.61).

Table-7. Spearman's rank correlation.

Statements	Project Planning	Capacity Building	Government Investment	Stakeholder Engagement
Project Planning	0.822* 1.000			
Capacity Building	0.478	1.000		
Government Investment	0.477	0.333	1.000	
Stakeholder Engagement	0.777	0.207	0.690	1.000

The co-efficients in [Table 7](#) reveal a strong positive correlation between each of project planning (0.822, two-tailed test), capacity building (0.478, two-tailed test), government investment (0.477), and stakeholder engagement (0.777) and the implementation of educational interventions.

7. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study accord those of [Naoum and Fong \(2006\)](#) whereby the WBS is clearly defined in the scope management plan and the outcomes achieved correlate with clarity of the project goals and plans.

This study finding illustrates a strong correlation of 0.478 between capacity building and the implementation of educational interventions. Similarly, [Hilderbrand \(2014\)](#) noted that capacity building or development was a broad concept that directly influenced project management and sustainability. Furthermore, [Williamson \(2014\)](#) emphasized that, capacity building was essential for stakeholders while well-designed policies and regulations should be aligned with work plans and teacher incentives.

Stakeholder analysis and involvement is also confirmed as influencing the implementation of educational interventions by this study involvement. As previous researchers, such as [Kerzner \(2001\)](#) have demonstrated, the participation of all stakeholders in a project is crucial in ensuring that the required outcomes of that project area attained.

Finally, this study further supports [Hilderbrand \(2014\)](#) revealing that capacity building at an individual level which includes in –service training sharing knowledge and experiences, and mentoring, equips each individual with skills required to manage and incorporate ideas.

8. CONCLUSIONS

Education systems in most developing countries are struggling in the face of various challenges. However as is evident from this study, most of their governments are working, often in partnership with other development agencies, to ensure that development projects are delivered within the constraints of time, cost, resources, and quality standards. Moreover, it highlights how various operational strategies can positively influence the implementation of educational interventions.

Having examined the four variables of project planning and management, capacity building, government investment, and stakeholder engagement, this study has established that all have a strong positive correlation with and influence on project implementation. Therefore, governments, policy-makers, and project developers should design policies and regulations that stipulate that organizations should adopt in which their operational strategies t to align with these four variables.

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