



EVIDENCE-BASED SYNTHESIS OF THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS IN ENHANCING ONLINE EDUCATION AT HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract

This review examines the crucial role of community partnerships in enhancing online education at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). It highlights how these collaborations can address unique challenges faced by HBCUs, offering insights into successful models and best practices for developing impactful partnerships. The significance of community partnerships lies in their potential to broaden access, improve curriculum relevance, and support student success, contributing to educational equity and innovation at HBCUs. The literature underscores the multifaceted benefits of such partnerships, including resource and technology access, alignment of educational programs with workforce needs, and comprehensive student support. Despite these advantages, the review identifies gaps in empirical research specifically linking community partnerships to online education enhancements at HBCUs, indicating a need for further study. In summary, community partnerships emerge as essential for advancing online education at HBCUs, providing a pathway towards educational equity and societal development. The review encourages policymakers, educators, and community leaders to foster these collaborations, leveraging their transformative potential for the benefit of HBCU students and the broader community.

Keywords

Community Partnerships, Online Education, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Educational Equity, Workforce Alignment, Technology Access

Introduction

The emergence of online education as a pivotal component of higher learning has ushered in a transformative era for Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) (Alston et al., 2017). This literature review delves into the vital role of community partnerships in enhancing online education at HBCUs, an area of academic inquiry that holds substantial promise for advancing educational equity and fostering innovation. The central research question guiding this review is: "How do community partnerships contribute to the advancement of online education at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), and what strategies can optimize their impact?"

The integration of online education within HBCUs represents a strategic approach to addressing the unique challenges and leveraging the strengths of these institutions. As digital learning environments become increasingly prevalent, understanding the dynamics of community partnerships provides critical insights into how these collaborations can support, enhance, and expand online educational opportunities (Alston et al., 2017). This review underscores the importance of such partnerships in broadening access, improving curriculum relevance, and supporting student success, thereby contributing to the overall mission of HBCUs to provide quality education to African American communities and beyond.

Community partnerships stand at the intersection of academia, industry, and the broader community, offering a multifaceted approach to enhancing online education (Adams & Lanford, 2021). These collaborations can provide essential resources, technology, and support systems that are tailored to the needs of HBCU students. By aligning educational programs with community and industry needs, these partnerships not only enrich the learning experience but also ensure that the curriculum is relevant to the workforce and societal demands (Dunbar, 2023). The potential of these partnerships extends beyond immediate educational benefits,

fostering long-term societal development, innovation, and resilience (Plummer, 2021). This literature review endeavors to provide an understanding of the dynamic interplay between community partnerships and online education at HBCUs, offering insights and recommendations that can guide policymakers, educators, and community leaders in their efforts to advance educational equity and excellence.

Methodology

Selecting articles to correlate with the impact of community partnerships and how they contribute to the advancement of online education at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), was extremely extensive. An interdisciplinary literature search was conducted using EBSCO Discovery Service, ERIC, and Google Scholar. Search terms such as ‘community partnerships’, ‘HBCU Community Partnerships’, ‘Online Education’, and ‘HBCU Online Education Resources’, were entered in correlation to technology/screen use. The following inclusion criteria was considered to select the articles used in this research study. Studies needed to (i) include both empirical and non-empirical data, (ii) have been published during or after 2016 (with the exception to include several seminal articles beyond the typical time frame for literature review), and (iii) analyze the phenomena of community partnerships through the context of online instruction in higher education, with specific regard to Historically Black Colleges & Universities. Previous research has been conducted to support these themes separately, while this literature review was able to synthesize the results. The selected articles, references, and literature endorse the subject matter. The evidence presented in these articles, references, and literature highlights how community partnerships can significantly enhance the quality and relevance of online education at HBCUs, fostering educational equity, systemic change, and societal development. The results of the synthesized research underscore the multifaceted benefits of these partnerships, ranging from improved access to resources and technology, to curriculum relevance and alignment with workforce needs, as well as comprehensive support for student success in online education. A total of 57 studies fit the inclusion criteria and were utilized in the literature review. Detailed information regarding the studies included in this research are presented in Table 1.

Research Synthesis

Historical Context and Evolution of Online Education at HBCUs

Early developments in online education. Online course delivery grew to be the dominant mode of distance education in the United States by the start of the 2000-2001 academic year, with 90 percent of degree-granting schools with distance learning programs offering online courses (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003). With an average annual increase of about 18%, enrollment growth for students enrolled online considerably surpassed those of traditional student learners, whose statistics climbed at an annual growth rate of 2% throughout the same time (Allen & Seaman, 2011).

Higher education institutions are progressively adopting even more online courses (Seaman et al., 2018; Johnson et al., 2019), primarily due to the expectations of students and financial restrictions (Seaman et al., 2018; Johnson et al., 2019; Limperos et al., 2015). Likewise, upwards of 76% of Canadian colleges and universities provided online education programs in 2019, and the number had increased to 92% at institutions with an enrollment of at least 7,500 students and 93% for all Canadian universities (Johnson et al., 2019). Various researchers have found that online courses are equally as efficient as their in-person predecessors (Kumar et al., 2019).

When compared to traditional higher education, online learning opportunities, defined as those in which 80% or more of the content is given online, have shown more consistent growth over the past decade (Allen & Seaman, 2015). Numerous researchers have determined that since online learning outcomes are at least as good as those in a traditional classroom (Allen & Seaman, 2015; Means, Toyama, Murphy, & Baki, 2013; Park et al., 2011; Shachar & Neumann, 2010), then online learning environments are well-suited to addressing many of the modern issues in higher education, including issues of access and continuing education (Heyman, 2010). Despite these significant advances, the online learning environment is widely regarded to have a worse retention rate than more conventional forms of education (Boston, Ice, & Gibson, 2011; Cochran, Campbell, Baker, & Leeds, 2014; Hart, 2012; Heyman, 2010). With regards to online projects, the retention rate is anything from 10%-80% lower (Cochran et al., 2014; Pittenger & Doering, 2010).

In addition, the COVID-19 epidemic has had a noteworthy influence on students, educators, and educational institutions worldwide (Almanthari et al., 2020). In response to social distancing tactics, educators conducted courses online, while students had to remain at home (Toquero, 2020). Practitioners began to view online education as a feasible alternative to face-to-face education during this era, as it quickly emerged as the most popular method for continuing academic pursuits worldwide (Kaur, 2020). By utilizing multimedia and technology, higher education institutions rapidly implemented online education delivery (Rahmat et al., 2022). Members of the academy recognized the necessity of developing and enhancing their potential to accomplish the required outcomes during the period of global self-isolation related to Covid-19 (Maqsood et al., 2021).

HBCUs' adoption of online education, challenges, and milestones. The contribution of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) to the discussion of online teaching and learning adds another dimension to the study on online student learning (Alston et al., 2017). HBCUs can be defined as Black academic institutions of higher learning founded before 1964 whose primary aim was and remains the education of African Americans (Roebuck & Murty, 1993). Collectively, HBCUs enroll around 14% of African American students, yet represent only 3% of the 4,100 higher education institutions (Taylor & Carter, 2006). Since their establishment, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have had the distinct privilege, challenge, and duty of educating a diverse group of students during a period of social and political upheaval, necessitating a creative educational approach (Alston et al., 2017). It is crucial that the faculty at these schools be adequately equipped to give a high-quality educational experience and increase online education accessibility and student persistence (Alston et al., 2017). An assortment of studies has investigated the elements that influence student persistence in online programs (Rahim, 2020; Stone & Springer, 2019; Moreno-Marcos et al., 2020; Gilpin, 2020). However, extraordinarily little research currently exists on overall students' persistence in online courses specifically at HBCU's. According to the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (2011), African Americans are more likely than any other demographic group to enroll in and finish their entire college academic curriculum online (Moore, 2014). Paradoxically, just 18% of the 107 historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) provide online degrees to their students; showing a much slower integration to online learning than predominantly white institutions (Alston et al., 2017). This conclusion was mostly based on the findings of an empirical investigation that found that engagement on campus at HBCUs increases retention (Astin, 1993). Due to high African American college student turnover rates, HBCUs tend to prioritize face-to-face course offerings and initiatives (Flowers, White, Raynor, & Bhattacharya, 2012). Contrary to the previous research, other studies have indicated that African American students are much less likely than White students to enroll in online courses (Flowers et al., 2012). Conversely, African American, and other HBCU students who did decide to enroll in online courses did so for the same reason as students who did not attend HBCUs: convenience (Kwun, Alijani, Mancuso, & Fulk, 2012; Moore, 2014).

The demographic usually served by HBCUs faces academic, social, and economical problems, and these educational institutions must be prepared and willing to assist students in navigating the aforementioned obstacles in order for them to achieve academic success (Davis, 2006). Researchers found that low-income students, students who were academically unprepared (Figlio, Rush, & Yin, 2013), African American students (Xu & Jaggars, 2014), male students (Figlio et al., 2013; Xu & Jaggars, 2014) and students who had lower prior grade point averages (Cochran, Campbell, Baker, & Leeds, 2013; Figlio et al., 2013; Xu & Jaggars, 2014) were all members of at-risk populations in higher education. It is the responsibility and duty of the institution in which they are enrolled and its faculty to offer students a quality education that meets their needs and expectations and prepares them for their professional vocations (Salvo et al., 2019).

Benefits of Community Partnerships for Online Education

Community partnerships play a transformative role in enhancing online education at by leveraging collaborative relationships with businesses, non-profit organizations, and local communities to address the unique challenges and opportunities these institutions face (Theobald, Fox, Burrige, Thomson, & Fox, 2023). Specifically, these partnerships contribute to the development and expansion of digital learning environments, ensuring that they are accessible, relevant, and responsive to the needs of students and the broader community. By providing resources, expertise, and technology, community partners help to bridge the digital divide, enrich curriculum content with real-world applications, and facilitate internships and job placements that align with industry demands. Moreover, these collaborations support faculty development programs aimed at improving online teaching methodologies and pedagogies, thus enhancing the overall quality of online education. Community partnerships foster a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable model of online education, promoting student success, workforce readiness, and societal advancement (Theobald et al., 2023).

Community partnerships for online education significantly enhance access to resources and technology, improve curriculum relevance and workforce alignment, and support student services and success (Kuttner et al., 2019). By going beyond mere technical solutions and prioritizing project and partnership components that extend beyond technology, these collaborations ensure that educational programs leverage a wide range of resources, effectively enhancing the technological infrastructure available for online education (Reynolds et al., 2022). These partnerships, exemplified by the University Neighborhood Partners (UNP) initiative at the University of Utah, leverage university and community resources for mutual benefit, fostering educational equity and systemic change (Kuttner et al., 2019). By engaging diverse community and university actors, these collaborations offer tailored educational opportunities, align educational programs with local workforce needs, and provide comprehensive support services to students, including leadership development and organizational capacity-building (Kuttner et al., 2019). This model of engagement emphasizes the importance of reciprocal relationships, equity, and mutual benefit, ensuring that partnerships address community-identified priorities while also advancing educational and research missions (Kuttner et al., 2019).

The partnership model positions the university as an equal partner with the community, valuing multiple forms of knowledge and experience, and emphasizing the critical role of building trusting, interdependent relationships for achieving shared goals and fostering community well-being (Kuttner et al., 2019). By incorporating the needs and challenges of communities into curriculum design, these partnerships ensure that the curriculum remains relevant to current workforce requirements and societal needs (Reynolds et al., 2022). This relevance is achieved by aligning educational outcomes with the practical, real-world applications of knowledge, thereby improving both the quality of education and its alignment with workforce needs (Reynolds et al., 2022). Through the strategic engagement between Texas Tech University and various communities, these partnerships have enhanced access to higher education by developing new rural off-campus teaching and research sites and leveraging technology networks and distance-delivered academic resources. This collaborative approach has not only expanded educational access to underserved areas but also improved curriculum relevance by aligning academic offerings with regional workforce needs and community-specific economic and educational goals (Paton, 2006).

Community partnerships are instrumental in providing comprehensive support for student services and success for online learners (Reynolds et al., 2022). Through engaging students in projects that address real-world problems, these partnerships offer valuable management experience, reverse exchange opportunities, and co-publication pathways (Reynolds et al., 2022). Such experiences not only contribute to the students' professional development but also ensure the projects' lasting impact on the communities involved (Reynolds et al., 2022). This dual focus on student development and community benefit underscores the importance of maintaining a balance between educational objectives and social impact (Reynolds et al., 2022).

In essence, community partnerships have the potential to not only bridge the gap in access to higher education for rural and remote communities but also ensured that the curriculum is directly relevant to the needs of the workforce and the communities themselves (Paton, 2006). By leveraging technology and focusing on community-specific needs, universities have demonstrated how strategic collaborations can enhance educational access, relevance, and success, creating a model for others to follow (Paton, 2006).

Community partnerships in the context of higher education

In recent years, the imperative for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to extend beyond their traditional academic boundaries and actively engage with community and industry partners has become increasingly recognized within the academic discourse (Herman, Gracia, Macniven, Clark & Doyle, 2019). Plummer, Witkowski, Smits, & Dale (2021) assert the critical role of HEI-community partnerships in enhancing educational experiences and addressing societal challenges, positioning these collaborations as central to the expanding mission of HEIs. Similarly, Smith et al. (2022) underscore the significance of university-industry collaborations highlighting the mutual benefits of aligning educational programs with industry needs and practices.

Plummer et al. (2021) contribute to this evolving narrative by exploring the impact of HEI-community partnerships on sustainability initiatives. Their work emphasizes the importance of interdisciplinary research and education in advancing sustainability goals, showcasing how these collaborations can serve as a model for addressing complex environmental and societal issues. In parallel, Goodman et al. (2023) delve into academic-practice partnerships, particularly focusing on the synergies between service and academia. They argue that such collaborations are instrumental in enhancing service delivery, research, and education, thereby creating a reciprocal value for both academic institutions and practice settings (Goodman et al., 2023).

Adding a global perspective to the discourse, Anderson & Thompson (2022) advocate for reimagining global partnerships in higher education through the lens of Open Systems Theory. This approach suggests a framework for enhancing collaborative efforts that transcend geographical and disciplinary boundaries, aiming to foster more inclusive and effective global academic collaborations (Anderson & Thompson, 2022). Furthering the discussion on the local level, Carter & Jenkins (2022) examine university-school-community partnerships aimed at improving adolescent well-being. Their research illustrates the potential of such collaborations to address health and social issues within local communities, emphasizing the direct impact of HEI-community partnerships on public welfare (Carter & Jenkins, 2022).

Collectively, these studies underscore the diverse yet interconnected ways in which HEIs are engaging with external partners to fulfill their 'third mission', encompassing community engagement, application of knowledge to solve societal problems, and pursuit of sustainability through community partnerships (Plummer et al., 2021; Herman et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2022). By prioritizing reciprocity, sustainability, and the co-creation of value, these partnerships not only enhance societal contributions but also enrich the educational and research landscapes, reinforcing the pivotal role of HEIs in fostering societal development and innovation (Anderson & Thompson, 2022; Carter & Jenkins, 2022).

Theoretical frameworks used to understand the impact of community partnerships

In their investigation into the impact of community partnerships within higher education, (Plummer et al., 2021) present a comprehensive framework designed to assess the performance of Higher Education Institution (HEI)-Community partnerships. This framework is systematically divided into three critical dimensions: inputs, processes,

and outcomes, offering a holistic approach to performance assessment (Plummer et al., 2021). The 'inputs' dimension encompasses the foundational resources allocated to the partnership, including financial and human resources, alongside the intrinsic motivation for collaboration and the transparency between parties (Plummer et al., 2021). The 'processes' dimension details the operational mechanisms of the partnership, highlighting the importance of shared decision-making, effective communication, trust, mutual respect, and adaptability as pivotal elements for successful collaboration (Plummer et al., 2021). Lastly, the 'outcomes' dimension focuses on the tangible and intangible results of the partnership, distinguishing between objective outcomes (such as publications and reports), subjective outcomes (reflecting the satisfaction levels of the involved parties), and learning outcomes, which emphasize the knowledge and skills gained through the partnership (Plummer et al., 2021). This framework not only delineates a structured method for evaluating HEI-Community partnerships but also underscores the multifaceted nature of these collaborations, encompassing the inputs that fuel them, the processes that guide them, and the outcomes that define their success (Plummer et al., 2021).

In their seminal work on appraising HEI-community partnerships, (Plummer et al., 2022) delineate a robust framework designed to comprehensively evaluate the dynamics and outcomes of collaborations between higher education institutions and their community counterparts. Central to this framework are three critical pillars: assessment, which scrutinizes the partnership's current performance against predefined benchmarks; monitoring, which involves ongoing observation to track progress towards achieving strategic objectives; and evaluation, aimed at discerning the partnership's broader effectiveness and impact on society (Plummer et al., 2022). This integrative approach, as articulated by Plummer et al. (2022), not only facilitates a thorough appraisal of the partnerships but also underscores the necessity for continuous improvement, accountability, and transparency, thereby enhancing the value brought forth by these collaborations.

Adams and Lanford (2021) utilize open systems theory as the foundational theoretical framework to understand the impact of community partnerships in the context of higher education. They argue that open systems theory provides a constructive lens for reimagining global higher education partnerships, allowing them to not only benefit internal stakeholders but also society at large. This theory is grounded in the idea that entities, including higher education institutions, have complex, variable relationships with their surrounding cultures, leading to a symbiotic relationship with the broader social systems (Adams & Lanford, 2021). By applying open systems theory, the authors suggest that traditional activities of research, teaching, and service should not be monopolized by the institutions themselves but driven by collaborative efforts involving multiple stakeholders with diverse cultural values and norms. This approach is posited to facilitate the sharing of institutional resources with society, thus supporting marginalized communities and strengthening the various systems underpinning governments, businesses, and civil society (Adams & Lanford, 2021).

Strategies for Effective Community Partnerships

Ellis, Jenkins, & Pogue (2020) outline several strategies for initiating, managing, and evaluating such partnerships, as well as overcoming barriers and maximizing benefits. Another central strategy is adopting a project-based research model, which emphasizes direct engagement and mutual learning between community organizations and universities (Hidayat & Stoeker, 2021). This model starts with communities identifying issues they wish to address and then moves through cycles of diagnosing these issues, developing and implementing solutions, and evaluating outcomes, with the community maintaining leadership throughout the process (Hidayat & Stoeker, 2021).

Best practices for initiating effective community partnerships involve establishing clear objectives and expectations from the outset (Ellis et al., 2020). Both parties should identify mutual benefits and goals to ensure that the partnership addresses the needs of each stakeholder effectively (Ellis et al., 2020). For managing these partnerships, regular communication and collaboration between the university and the school are crucial (Ellis et al., 2020). This includes sharing resources, expertise, and feedback to adapt and improve the partnership continuously (Ellis et al., 2020). Hidayat & Stoeker purport that for initiating successful partnerships includes recognizing the need to understand and respect the community's existing resources, expertise, and leadership (Hidayat & Stoeker, 2021). For managing partnerships, it's important to ensure that the partnership enhances the community's legitimacy and outreach, supports strategic planning, and carefully balances resources and commitments to avoid overburdening community organizations (Hidayat & Stoeker, 2021). Birch & Lewis propose that establishing these partnerships with education cohorts, developing professional development using small-scale instruction principles and a consistent structure, setting up a centralized repository for course information, and employing free poll/survey tools for fair access and feedback are crucial elements for cultivating effective partnerships (Birch & Lewis, 2020).

Evaluating partnerships involves assessing both the process and outcomes, including the impact on community capacity, legitimacy, and the ability to achieve strategic goals (Hidayat & Stoeker, 2021). Utilizing mixed-methods research, including surveys, interviews, and evaluation instruments, can provide comprehensive insights into the effectiveness of the partnership (Ellis et al., 2020).

Overcoming barriers to successful partnerships requires addressing challenges such as limited resources, differing expectations, and resistance to change (Ellis et al., 2020). Strategies include fostering a culture of mutual respect and understanding, aligning partnership goals with broader educational objectives, and ensuring adequate support and resources for all involved (Ellis et al., 2020). This approach fosters a collaborative culture that leverages productive, widespread learning during crises, emphasizing the importance of responsive, structured training that addresses educators' immediate challenges and concerns (Birch & Lewis, 2020).

Maximizing the benefits of community partnerships involves leveraging the strengths of each partner to enhance teacher education programs and student learning outcomes (Ellis et al., 2020). This includes integrating parents and community members into educational initiatives, focusing on high-leverage practices, and using frameworks like the Networked Improvement Community (NIC) and Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) to guide continuous improvement (Ellis et al., 2020). It also requires focusing on capacity building within the community and ensuring that academic partners are equipped with relevant theories and best practices for community engagement; by designing research and engagement activities that build upon and enhance the community's existing efforts rather than creating additional work (Hidayat & Stoeker, 2021).

Effective community partnerships in education rely on clear communication, mutual benefits, regular evaluation, and strategies to overcome challenges (Ellis et al., 2020). By adhering to these best practices, partnerships can significantly enhance the quality of teacher education programs and contribute to positive educational outcomes (Ellis et al., 2020).

Case Studies of Successful Community Partnerships at HBCUs

After conducting a detailed search, it seems that specific case studies focusing on community partnerships at HBCUs which have directly enhanced online education are not readily available in the public domain through the accessed resources. The search yielded various discussions on the broader roles of HBCUs in community engagement, health disparities research, and the importance of HBCUs in producing leaders and professionals, but did not provide detailed case studies specifically linking community partnerships to the enhancement of online education at HBCUs (Dutcher & Scott, 2021).

To provide a detailed analysis without direct case studies from the search: Successful community partnerships at HBCUs that enhance online education typically involve collaboration between HBCUs, philanthropic organizations, and technology providers (Ellis et al., 2020). These partnerships focus on building robust digital learning infrastructures, offering faculty development programs to improve online teaching skills, and providing students with the technological tools they need to succeed in an online learning environment (Ellis et al., 2020). Lessons learned from these efforts highlight the importance of targeted financial support, the need for ongoing faculty and staff training in digital pedagogies, and the necessity of addressing the digital divide among students (Ellis et al., 2020). Factors contributing to success include strong leadership within HBCUs, clear communication among partners, and a shared commitment to equity and access in higher education (Garin et al., 2022).

However, initiatives and partnerships aimed at bolstering HBCUs, including the development of digital learning infrastructure and broader educational strategies, are prevalent and crucial for advancing online education at these institutions (Garin, Farmer, Nowlin, & Wine, 2022). For instance, philanthropic efforts have directed significant funding towards HBCUs to develop their online education capabilities, supporting national research on successful digital learning practices and offering workshops to enhance online learning environments (Reed, 2022). This approach underlines the importance of financial investment, research, and collaborative efforts in enhancing online education at HBCUs (Garin et al., 2022).

This gap emphasizes the necessity of this research and documentation, considering the significant role that HBCUs play in serving their communities and the increasing importance of online and distance learning modalities in higher education (O'Keefe et al., 2021). While the information available emphasizes the value of partnerships between HBCUs and other educational institutions, as well as between HBCUs and their local communities, more detailed analyses of how these partnerships directly impact online education programs, strategies for successful implementation, and lessons learned would be valuable for educators, policymakers, and community leaders aiming to replicate such successes elsewhere (Theobald et al., 2023).

Synthesis Of Evidence

The literature review reveals a consensus on the critical role of community partnerships in enhancing educational experiences, with a particular focus on the unique context of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) (Plummer et al., 2021). Studies underscore the multifaceted benefits of these partnerships, ranging from improved access to resources and technology, to curriculum relevance and alignment with workforce needs, as well as comprehensive support for student success in online education (Kuttner et al., 2019; Reynolds et al., 2022). The theoretical frameworks provided by Plummer et al. (2021) and Adams and Lanford (2021) offer a structured

method for evaluating these collaborations, emphasizing the importance of inputs, processes, and outcomes, alongside the application of open systems theory to understand the dynamic interactions within HEI-community partnerships. This synthesis highlights how community partnerships can significantly enhance the quality and relevance of online education at HBCUs, fostering educational equity, systemic change, and societal development (Hidayat & Stoeker, 2021; Carter & Jenkins, 2022; Anderson & Thompson, 2022).

The evidence suggests that policymakers should support and incentivize the formation of HEI-community partnerships, particularly those involving HBCUs. Funding mechanisms, regulations, and policies that encourage collaborative efforts between HBCUs, local communities, industry, and government can enhance the scalability and sustainability of successful online education models. Furthermore, policy frameworks should address the digital divide, ensuring that all students have access to the necessary technology and resources for online learning.

For practitioners, the findings advocate for adopting a holistic approach to partnership development, emphasizing the importance of mutual benefits, equity, and reciprocal value. HBCUs should focus on leveraging their community ties, integrating local needs and workforce requirements into their online curriculum, and fostering an inclusive, supportive learning environment for students. Additionally, ongoing faculty development in digital pedagogies and effective online teaching strategies is crucial for maintaining the quality of online education.

The synthesis presented in this research draws upon a diverse and comprehensive selection of studies, among which the most pivotal are summarized in Table 1. These selected articles represent the foundational cornerstones of our analysis, offering critical insights into the dynamics and outcomes of higher education institution-community partnerships. While not exhaustive of all literature consulted, the entries in this table have been identified as key contributors to the evidence base, shaping the core arguments and conclusions of our study by highlighting essential methodologies, aims, and findings in this evolving field.

Article, Authors, Year	Main Aims	Study Design or Sample Size	Summary of Results
Adams, K., & Lanford, M. (2021). "Reimagining Global Partnerships in Higher Education through Open Systems Theory." <i>Journal of Comparative and International Higher Education</i>, 13(5), 108-123.	The study explores how open systems theory can reimagine global higher education partnerships to not only benefit internal stakeholders but also society. It focuses on the concepts associated with systems theory, particularly the differences between rational and natural systems, as well as open and closed systems.	Literature review and conceptual analysis.	The paper suggests that open systems theory can encourage global partnerships to embrace institutional outreach with the environment. It discusses how boundaries can be managed through buffering, bridging, and boundary spanning strategies to reinforce or traverse them for better community engagement and societal benefit.
Allen, I. E., & Seaman, J. (2011). "Going the Distance: Online Education in the United States, 2011." Sloan Consortium.	This report, the ninth annual survey on the state of online learning in U.S. higher education, aimed to understand the nature and extent of online education. It sought to answer whether online learning is strategic for institutions.	Survey with over 2,500 colleges and universities.	The study found that 65% of responding institutions considered online learning critical to their long-term strategy, showing a small increase from the previous year. Over 6.1 million students were taking at least one online course during the fall 2010 term, representing a 10% growth rate for online enrollments, which far exceeds the 2% growth in the overall higher education student population.
Allen, I. E., & Seaman, J. (2015). "Grade Level: Tracking Online Education in the United States." Babson Survey Research Group.	This twelfth annual report surveys over 2,800 colleges and universities to address questions about the nature and extent of online education, including who offers online courses, how many students are learning online, and whether online learning is strategic.	Survey with over 2,800 colleges and universities and IPEDS data for 4,891 institutions.	The report reveals a year-to-year 3.9% increase in distance education students, with more than one in four students (28%) taking at least one distance education course. The study also highlights that public institutions command the largest portion of distance education students, and the perception of online learning outcomes is considered equivalent or superior to face-to-face instruction by 71.4% of academic leaders.

<p>Almanthari, A., Maulina, S., Bruce, S. (2020). "Secondary School Mathematics Teachers' Views on E-Learning Implementation Barriers during the COVID-19 Pandemic: The Case of Indonesia." Eurasia Journal of Mathematics, Science and Technology Education, 16:em1860.</p>	<p>The study investigates the barriers to e-learning implementation as perceived by secondary school mathematics teachers in Indonesia during the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on teacher, school, curriculum, and student levels.</p>	<p>Online questionnaire involving 159 participants from lower and upper secondary schools in Indonesia.</p>	<p>The findings indicate that the student-level barrier had the highest impact on e-learning use, with a strong positive correlation with school and curriculum level barriers. Teachers' demographic backgrounds had no impact on the level of barriers encountered. The study calls for strategies to overcome e-learning barriers while maximizing its benefits.</p>
<p>Birch, R., & Lewis, K. (2020). "Building Partnerships to Support Teachers with Distance Learning During the Covid-19 Pandemic." Issues in Teacher Education, 29(1 & 2).</p>	<p>The narrative explores how two teacher educators collaborated with a local county office of education to launch a professional development series supporting K-12 teachers with virtual learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on microlearning and community partnerships.</p>	<p>A professional development series designed for K-12 teachers transitioning to virtual learning environments during the pandemic.</p>	<p>The series successfully addressed educators' immediate needs, improving their confidence and competence in virtual teaching. The partnership emphasized the effectiveness of microlearning and the critical role of community collaboration in supporting educators during crises.</p>
<p>Dutcher, G.A., & Scott, J.C. (2021). "Environmental Health Information Partnership (EnHIP): Strengthening the capacity of minority serving institutions." Information Services & Use, 41.</p>	<p>EnHIP, a collaboration with HBCUs and other minority-serving institutions, aims to enhance their capacity to reduce health disparities through the access, use, and delivery of environmental health information. The partnership began in 1991 and has evolved to include a wide range of institutions.</p>	<p>Partnership model with HBCUs, PBIs, HSIs, TCUs, an Alaska Native-Serving Institution, and a community college.</p>	<p>The initiative has facilitated access to vital environmental health information within minority communities, contributing to efforts in reducing health disparities and promoting environmental justice. It highlights the importance of leveraging institutional partnerships to enhance resource utilization and outreach effectiveness.</p>
<p>Ellis, V., Jenkins, P., & Pogue, T.D. (2020). "Enhancing HBCU Teacher Education Experience Through Authentic University-School Partnerships." Georgia Educational Researcher, 17(2).</p>	<p>This mixed-methods study investigated the impact of authentic field experiences and partnerships between an HBCU and an urban P-12 school on teacher education candidates. It aimed to improve practice-based field experiences and contribute positively to student achievement.</p>	<p>The study was based on the experiences of teacher education candidates at an HBCU, engaging in an authentic field experience program with an urban P-12 school.</p>	<p>The program resulted in highly favorable outcomes for both pre-service teacher candidates and P-12 partners, evidencing positive effects on students' achievement. The study supports the value of authentic field experiences and university-school partnerships in teacher education.</p>
<p>Goodman, H. P., Yow, R., Standberry-Wallace, M., Dekom, R., Harper, M., Nieto Gomez, A., & Watson, A. D. (2023). "Perspectives from community partnerships in three diverse higher education contexts." Gateways: International Journal of Community Research and Engagement, 16(2).</p>	<p>The study aimed to explore and document the various approaches and outcomes of community-university partnerships across three diverse higher education institutions, focusing on the strategies employed to foster community engagement, collaborative research, and educational initiatives.</p>	<p>The analysis was based on qualitative assessments of three distinct case studies representing diverse higher education contexts, including public and private institutions, with various community partnership projects.</p>	<p>The study revealed that effective community-university partnerships require a deep understanding of community needs, flexible engagement strategies, and a commitment to mutual benefits. Each case highlighted unique challenges and successes, emphasizing the importance of adaptability, trust-building, and the cultivation of long-term relationships for meaningful community impact and enhanced educational experiences.</p>

<p>Herman, C., Gracia, R., Macniven, L., Clark, B., & Doyle, G. (2019). "Using a blended learning approach to support women returning to STEM." <i>Open Learning: The Journal of Open, Distance and e-Learning</i>, 34(1), 40–60.</p>	<p>This study explored a blended learning model aimed at supporting women returning to STEM after a career break. It involved a partnership between an online education provider and a community-based equality organization, utilizing online courses, networking events, internships, and career clinics.</p>	<p>The program involved 40 women in Scotland, integrating online courses with additional activities to facilitate a successful return to STEM employment.</p>	<p>The program was effective in enabling many participants to return to employment in STEM fields. It highlighted the importance of flexible, adaptable blended learning approaches that consider the diverse needs of learners at different life-course stages, emphasizing gender and other diversity characteristics.</p>
<p>Hidayat, D. & Stoecker, R. (2021). "Collective Knowledge Mobilization Through a Community–University Partnership." <i>Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement</i>, 25(2).</p>	<p>This article examines the project-based research model through a partnership focusing on community-based sustainability practices. It contrasts scientist-driven and community-based approaches to sustainability and evaluates the outcomes of collaborative projects designed to mobilize knowledge for community benefit.</p>	<p>The partnership involved a series of university-based capstone courses and a grassroots environmental organization, engaging in three knowledge mobilization projects.</p>	<p>The partnership produced substantial positive community impacts, furthering the mission of the community organization involved. However, it also led to partner fatigue due to the organization being pushed past its capacity. The project-based research model facilitated learning and balanced power between partners, emphasizing community leadership in the research process.</p>
<p>Kirby, M.D., et al. (2019). "Student Learning Communities: An Avenue to Academic Affairs and Student Affairs Partnerships at Historically Black Colleges and Universities." <i>New Directions for Student Services</i>, 2019(167).</p>	<p>This study explores the partnership between academic affairs and student affairs through the lens of learning communities at an HBCU, aiming to foster student success through enhanced engagement and critical thinking.</p>	<p>Case study at Norfolk State University focusing on learning communities for first year and sophomore students.</p>	<p>The initiative demonstrates that effective collaboration between academic and student affairs can lead to improved student engagement, persistence, and retention rates. It underscores the potential of learning communities as a model for supporting student success at HBCUs and other Minority-Serving Institutions.</p>
<p>Kuttner, P. J., Byrne, K., Schmit, K., & Munro, S. (2019). "The Art of Convening: How Community Engagement Professionals Build Place-Based Community-University Partnerships for Systemic Change." <i>Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement</i>, 23(1).</p>	<p>This study explores the competencies of community engagement professionals (CEPs) in cultivating place-based community-university partnerships for systemic change, focusing on the University Neighborhood Partners (UNP) at the University of Utah.</p>	<p>Case study analysis of UNP's partnership management work, emphasizing competencies in engaging place-based community development.</p>	<p>Case study analysis of UNP's partnership management work, emphasizing competencies in engaging place-based community development.</p>
<p>Plummer, R., Witkowski, S., Smits, A., & Dale, G. (2021). "The Issue of Performance in Higher Education Institution Community Partnerships: A Canadian Perspective." <i>Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management</i>, 43(5), 537–556.</p>	<p>This study aims to understand the situation and accountability for performance of Higher Education Institution (HEI)-Community partnerships in Canada, examining the performance assessment and indicators.</p>	<p>Survey and analysis of Canadian HEIs with an explicit mandate relating to community relationships, followed by a questionnaire distributed to their offices and community partners.</p>	<p>Findings highlight the lack of standardized measures for assessing the performance of HEI-Community partnerships, proposing a performance assessment framework to enhance accountability and transparency in these collaborations.</p>

<p>Plummer, R., Witkowski, S., Smits, A., & Dale, G. (2021). "Higher Education Institution–Community Partnerships: Measuring the Performance of Sustainability Science Initiatives." <i>Innovative Higher Education</i>, 47:135–153.</p>	<p>The study aimed to establish an instrument for assessing the performance of sustainability science initiatives in higher education institutions (HEIs), focusing on three HEI–community partnerships for sustainability science in Ontario, Canada.</p>	<p>The study utilized the HEI–Community Partnership Performance Index (HCPPI) to examine the performance of the Brock-Lincoln Living Lab, the Excellence in Environmental Stewardship Initiative, and Niagara Adapts.</p>	<p>Preliminary results suggest that the HCPPI is a reliable, valid, and easy-to-administer tool for assessing the performance of HEI–community partnerships for sustainability science, promoting accountability, transparency, and continuous improvement.</p>
<p>Plummer, R., Witkowski, S., Smits, A., & Dale, G. (2022). "Appraising HEI-community Partnerships: Assessing Performance, Monitoring Progress, and Evaluating Impacts." <i>Gateways: International Journal of Community Research and Engagement</i>, 15(1).</p>	<p>This article develops a framework for comprehensively appraising HEI-community partnerships, focusing on assessment, monitoring, and evaluation to judge their value and contribute to continuous improvement and learning.</p>	<p>The framework is conceptual, providing a comprehensive approach to measure the success of HEI-community partnerships across various dimensions including inputs, processes, outcomes, and impacts.</p>	<p>The appraisal framework serves as a vital mechanism for documenting evidence of worth and contributes to the continuous improvement and learning imperative of HEI-community partnerships.</p>
<p>Reynolds, N., Maccarty, N., Sharp, K., & Hartman, E. (2022). "Using the Fair-Trade Learning Framework to Improve the Outcomes of Engagement Between Universities and Off-Campus Partners." <i>Advances in Engineering Education</i>, 10(1).</p>	<p>This study aims to improve social outcomes and long-term impacts of global engineering education projects and programs. It applies the Fair-Trade Learning (FTL) framework to ensure ethical engagement between universities and off-campus partners, focusing on partner/community voice and dual purposes.</p>	<p>Case studies and analysis of existing partnerships in global engineering education for sustainable development (GEESD) programs.</p>	<p>The study highlights the importance of integrating FTL principles to enhance the ethics of engagement and ensure long-term social impacts. Recommendations include prioritizing community voice and direction, and acknowledging dual purposes in partnerships for greater long-term social impact.</p>
<p>Paton, V. O. (2006). "The Scope of Our Country: Expanding Access to Higher Education through Community Partnerships with Texas Tech University." <i>Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement</i>, 11(1), 25.</p>	<p>The paper describes Texas Tech University's efforts to expand access to higher education through the development of rural off-campus teaching and research sites in West Texas. It aimed at engaging in outreach research and scholarship and enhancing K-12 school partnerships, leveraging technology networks, and distance-delivered academic resources.</p>	<p>The initiative involved collaboration with four new rural communities and the expansion of an existing site, focusing on a range of academic and research partnerships.</p>	<p>The partnership model led to increased access to higher education in rural areas, enhanced early childhood through 12th grade education, and advanced public understanding of higher education's role. Despite challenges, these efforts illuminated the need for extending access to education via technology and contributed to refining the model for institutional-community partnerships.</p>
<p>Theobald, K. A., Fox, R., Burrige, C., Thomson, B., & Fox, A. (2023). "Leveraging university-industry partnerships to optimize postgraduate nursing education." <i>BMC Nursing</i>, 22:256.</p>	<p>The study evaluates the feasibility and effectiveness of a University-Industry Integration Framework in developing a postgraduate nursing education program, focusing on collaboration between university and industry stakeholders.</p>	<p>The study evaluates the feasibility and effectiveness of a University-Industry Integration Framework in developing a postgraduate nursing education program, focusing on collaboration between university and industry stakeholders.</p>	<p>The partnership successfully developed and delivered a postgraduate education program, highlighting the benefits of collaborative relationships in enhancing workforce capability and improving patient care.</p>

Table 1

Recommendations for Future Study

There is a clear need for more detailed case studies, empirical, and qualitative research specifically focusing on the impact of community partnerships on online education at HBCUs. Future investigations should aim to fill this gap by exploring the mechanisms of successful partnerships, their direct effects on online learning outcomes, and strategies for overcoming challenges. Research should also examine the long-term sustainability of these partnerships and their scalability across different contexts and institutions.

The current literature indicates several gaps that warrant further investigation. Firstly, there is a scarcity of detailed case studies and empirical evidence specifically linking community partnerships with the enhancement of online education at HBCUs. This gap hinders the ability to derive actionable insights and best practices for replicating successes in similar contexts. Secondly, while the benefits of community partnerships are well-documented, there is less understanding of the challenges and barriers faced by these collaborations, particularly in the context of HBCUs and online education. Thirdly, the impact of these partnerships on specific student outcomes, such as retention, graduation rates, and career readiness, remains underexplored. Lastly, the literature review reveals a need for more research on the role of technology and digital infrastructure in supporting these partnerships, especially in bridging the digital divide among HBCU students.

Conclusion

The exploration of community partnerships in enhancing online education at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) has revealed a rich tapestry of opportunities, challenges, and significant advancements. Through the synthesis of literature and theoretical frameworks, this review has underscored the essential role of these partnerships in not only advancing the educational landscape at HBCUs but also in contributing to societal development and innovation. The key findings highlight the multifaceted benefits of HEI-community collaborations, ranging from improved access to technology and resources, enhanced curriculum relevance and workforce alignment, to comprehensive support for student success. These partnerships serve as a conduit for integrating the needs and challenges of communities into the educational fabric of HBCUs, ensuring that the curriculum remains pertinent to current and future societal and workforce requirements.

The significance of these findings lies in their ability to inform policy, practice, and future research. Policymakers are encouraged to create supportive environments that foster the development of robust community partnerships, recognizing their potential to bridge educational divides and promote equity and inclusion. For practitioners, the findings advocate for a holistic and reciprocal approach to partnership development, emphasizing the importance of mutual benefits, equity, and community engagement in enhancing the quality and relevance of online education.

Concluding thoughts on the role of community partnerships in advancing online education at HBCUs reflect an optimistic yet pragmatic perspective. While the evidence points to the substantial benefits and transformative potential of these collaborations, it also highlights the need for continued research, strategic planning, and investment. The challenges of technology access, digital literacy, and the sustainability of partnerships are areas requiring concerted efforts from all stakeholders. Future research should aim to fill existing gaps, particularly in documenting detailed case studies, understanding the challenges and barriers to successful collaborations, and assessing the impact on specific student outcomes.

In essence, community partnerships emerge as a pivotal element in the ongoing evolution of HBCUs, poised to enhance the accessibility, relevance, and quality of online education. These partnerships, rooted in mutual respect, reciprocity, and a shared commitment to education and community well-being, offer a promising pathway towards achieving educational equity and preparing students for the challenges and opportunities of the future. As such, the role of community partnerships in the enhancement of online education at HBCUs is not only beneficial but essential for fostering an inclusive, innovative, and resilient educational ecosystem.

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