

The Role of Research in Educational Policy Development

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ABSTRACT

Educational research plays a crucial role in shaping policy decisions that determine the structure, goals, and implementation of educational systems worldwide. This paper examines how diverse research methodologies—quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods inform educational policy and practice. It critically examines the historical and contemporary influences on educational policy, the epistemological foundations of educational research, and the multifaceted challenges of integrating evidence into policymaking. The study underscores the necessity for credible, replicable, and inclusive research practices to inform equitable, evidence-based policies. Moreover, it highlights the dynamic interplay between researchers, policymakers, and stakeholders, emphasizing the need for mutual understanding, accountability, and dialogue to ensure policies remain responsive to evolving educational needs. The paper concludes by identifying persistent challenges and proposing strategies for strengthening the interface between educational research and policy to promote effective, inclusive, and context-sensitive educational reform.

Keywords: Educational Research, Policy Development, Evidence-Based Practice, Research Methodologies, Mixed Methods, Stakeholder Engagement, Education Reform.

INTRODUCTION

Educational research plays an important role in the development of educational policies. Research focusing on “what works” in education can be influential in policy formulation. The nature of educational research is diverse in many aspects. This diversity is a concern in policy development because evidence produced by inappropriate research may lead to erroneous conclusions. As educational policies are based on the interpretation of research evidence and are subject to scrutiny by researchers, it is important for both sides to turn such scrutiny into a productive dialogue. In order for the policy development process to be able to examine educational research through knowledge claims, it is necessary for policy development to take into account aspects of educational research that affect knowledge claims in order to better incorporate it into input to educational policy. A description of the nature of educational research is offered, including aspects of educational research covering the treatment of participants, the research questions asked, generalizability of findings, discipline and setting of the research, design and its elements, standards of evidence, and ascription of anti-social effects. The counter-evidence of educational research is examined, including researched subjects, studied relationships, research quality, and interpretation of findings. The aspects of educational research that affect the credibility, accountability, and replicability of knowledge claims in terms of the proof submitted to support knowledge claims. These aspects include the conduct of research, results and findings, and presentation and discussion of results and findings. Educational research plays an important part in the development of educational policies [1, 2].

Historical Context of Educational Policy

As with most modern systems of education, there is a significant history motivating contemporary policies and practices. This chapter will explore some key historical developments frequently cited as necessities for the emerging educational policies of the 21st century. These include the economic, political, and social changes - especially technology-driven changes - that produced the current contexts of educational policy discourse. As individual lives and learning processes become framed by different ways of living and understanding the world, schools and school libraries are positioned to help realize the

potentially good consequences of these changes. At the same time, schools and educational systems are confronted with powerful and often chaotic forces that threaten their traditional mission and role in modern societies. Schools have been sites where culturally approved knowledge of the past was collected, curated, organized, interpreted, stored, and made accessible to the next generations until they became so totally digitized that their existence as place-bound physical institutions was no longer crucial to the incoming students' education. For decades during the middle and late 20th century, schools and libraries enjoyed a golden age when the social, economic, and political climate bestowed relative positions of power and hegemony. However, recent decades have witnessed the rise of powerful opponents of turbulent and de-institutional changes that are threatening the very notions of education and schools. Because of these technological, political, social, and economic shifts, some analysts expect that active collaborative learning environments will soon radically reshape schools and library systems as they evolve schools-of-the-future panaceas. Before unveiling some commonly narrated visions of the school and library of the future in scholarly, professional, and policy arenas, it is important to note that while the educational and library discourses are both concerned with very similar shifts in the contexts of practice and policy development, the early 21st century shifts are more easily mapped out and discussed in the educational context than in the library context. They are also generally considered to be more advanced in the educational context. The future of schools and of the library profession is closely tied together as potential winners or losers in the emerging realities of the information and networking age [3, 4].

Types of Educational Research

Educational research, as well as educational research and relevant policy recommendations, can take on diverse forms. Various types of research gathered a rich web of research knowledge. Educational research can be carried out for theoretical and empirical knowledge generation on education, learning and teaching, and relevant education policy-making. Research can also be commissioned research or jobs that address narrowly defined topics, questions and approaches, typically less academic and more instrumental in nature. Depending on the extent of public availabilities and academic rigor, commissioned educational research can also be classified into various types. In addition to traditional commissioned research works that are fully controlled and owned by the research commissioning organization, or external availability publication, there are semi-controlled or more freely disseminated and owned types of research. These types of commissioned educational research have implications and influences on the outputs as well as research income generation opportunities. Educational research on theoretical knowledge generation should be kept separate and independent from health-system or centralized intervention designs, evaluation studies and comparative impact assessments as a first Ricardo type of economic rent. Balanced commissioned educational research could enhance stakeholders' opinions on the independent and unpredicted nature of public research. Public educational research should not be considered biased and political, and pre-defined conclusions should not be evaluated and critiqued on political grounds or standpoints. The more utilization and political bookings, the more discriminated public or freely accessible educational research is perceived and considered [5, 6].

Quantitative Research

Research aims to develop knowledge and insights useful to a research topic, community, or stakeholder group, and to present them in a systematic and structured way. Educational research has sought to help education actors struggle with the challenges and problems they face and aim to analyze and develop their actions. Education actors address problems, challenges, or dilemmas that affect the quality of their own or their target group's learning. They aim to obtain knowledge of the problem issue on hand. Such knowledge may act as a blind spot or as a pedestal for action. Educational action may or may not be correct or appropriate, effective or success-oriented, and so on. Educational research aims to develop knowledge and insights helpful to education actors in this respect. It aims to assist those actors in building a clearer and more reflective mindscapes from which they can examine their warrants and beliefs, and their unintended and unexpected actions. In doing so, research strives at making a difference and a change in real-life education situations, and by implication education systems. Educational research not only aims to explore the problems but also to empower educational actors, since it might be good to know but not empowering to not be able to do. Research applies methods and gathers data. However, no disciplines, forums, communities, or even individual researchers accept research methods; there is no agreed textbook on this. In any case, quantitative and qualitative methods have been discussed as the two main research paradigms. While education research has recently been criticized for numerous reasons, the critique could be characterized as a view under which education research is qualitative. Education research is viewed as sound, valid, and helpful when it is qualitative: interesting case studies, insightful questionnaires, and rich and phenomenological education research, anchored in particularities. Accordingly, most critique are said to miss the target. Quantitative methods and experimental designs are

deterministic devices capable of “scientific” descriptions of education research and research-inspired developments. Numbers are viewed being sound data. This has been a mainstream perspective for both researchers and the public alike for nearly a century now, as have been valued as valid, accurate, and appropriate for some disciplines like chemistry, anthropology, and psychology. It is in this context that the kind of numbers generated by quantitative research is constructed as the same time “the answer” and “the answer to the question”: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5...96. For education research, it should be reasonable how education ought to be or to act to strive for improved quality concerns at hand in producing data. However, it is suggested to treat all types of data with caution [7, 8].

Qualitative Research

It has been mentioned earlier that a large amount of qualitative research is being carried out in education worldwide. Qualitative research is based on a distinct ontological and epistemological position and it is important to be aware of this distinction so that the values and assumptions underpinning it are not transgressed. A number of qualitative research paradigms are usefully discussed in the context of educational research by, and some reports on their application are provided. Researchers differ fundamentally in their epistemology. Social research aims to improve understanding of human affairs but the ontological position of the researchers influences the research itself. This is implicit in the researcher's choice of paradigm and, consequently, method, as these involve assumptions that render reality in the form of snapshot descriptions of a reality unconstrained by human perception (negatively-objective paradigm), truth statements about a reality that have been provided by external ‘witnesses’ (positivistic-objective), truth statements that have been derived from internal human perceptions of a reality (interpretive-subjective) or speculations about a reality that can know very little of or even nothing (constructivist-anti-epistemic). These paradigms differ greatly in terms of the design and conduct of the research. Once the paradigm has been chosen, it influences all aspects of the research: the form that the questions take, the selection of individuals to be studied, how the researcher relates to these individuals, how the data are treated and what finally emerges. Each of the paradigms plays a distinctive and valid role in educational research and each one has its respective strengths, weaknesses and limitations. These are discussed in conjunction with examples of educational research that is representative. It is important to be aware of the limitations and assumptions of qualitative research [9, 10].

Mixed Methods Research

Mixed methods entered the educational research community beginning in the 1980s. Its usage has increased dramatically during the past 20 years for various reasons. There is a growing recognition that social phenomenon can best be captured by multiple methods, especially qualitative methodologies in combination with quantitative methodologies. In this endeavor, education department officials across the world are struggling to develop and maintain a rigorous regulatory environment that fosters high professional teaching standards. A combination-of-methods research paradigm is needed to guide this complex enterprise. The modern and popular mixed methods research approach provides such a paradigm. The literature on the nature of mixed methods research has grown very dramatically during the last 20 years. New mix methods textbooks and methodological papers have been written both from qualitative and quantitative perspectives. Significantly, the emphasis has shifted from the ontology and epistemology of mixed methods to positive applications and guidelines that inform researchers about how to design a mixed methods study. Research on the use of mixed methods in research publications has also grown exponentially, focusing mostly on social and health sciences. Despite Gardener's hope for mathematical education journals with 400 pages and zero qualitative studies, this paper shows that mathematics educational research journals, with either international or local foci, have been the most progressive in methodological terms [11, 12].

Research Methodologies in Education

Inclusive education for all learners is critical and plays a central role in international educational policy. Despite regulations promoting equal school access for all children, significant concerns persist regarding entry to regular educational settings. Research has aimed to persuade decision-makers of the existence of barriers to educational and social inclusion, despite numerous international conventions addressing these issues. Barriers include factors related to educational systems, policies, curricula, and family circumstances. The belief in the uniqueness of each child necessitates careful reflection on societal and individual changes in a dynamic context. It's imperative to ensure equal access to education, health, and social opportunities for all children while safeguarding the educational rights of the larger majority. Research should enhance educational and social opportunities for growing elderly individuals by utilizing historical learning resources. Lifelong education and training are crucial for disadvantaged groups, emphasizing the importance of understanding the historical context of education, which predates modern university settings. Current pedagogical philosophies advocate for more flexible and adaptive educational

institutions. However, creating effective principles for flexibility remains challenging, preventing accidental and destructive interventions. Defining community and welfare organizations within the educational context remains complex. Generally, a community is understood as a group whose members share common qualities and responsibilities, yet challenges persist in providing equitable educational and social opportunities for marginalized and disabled individuals [13, 14].

The Impact of Research on Policy Decisions

Numerous studies have explored the pathways and models of using research in educational decision-making in different contexts. Analyzed existing models of using research and plans to conduct a study on how educational research is used in decision-making in Kenyan schools and colleges. Based on an extensive review of the literature on educational research in educational decision-making, it is found that the events surrounding decision-making and the people involved in it in different contexts differ from each other in many aspects. However, despite the variations, one common element is to improve the quality and effectiveness of education. It is expected that models developed using the insights gained from the existing literature can be used to study pathways of using educational research in educational decision-making in Kenya. However, educational research should not be put on par with educational policy. Unlike policy which is a statement of intent, research is an investigation of a phenomenon. Educational research deals with the past, present, and future of education in the form of conducting studies at different levels on a continuum of micro, meso, and macro. Educational policy is legislation passed by a ministry or ministry of education or an education agency that has broad implications for the educational system (in terms of aims, objectives, structure, governance, curriculum, textbooks, assessments, etc.) . In the case of Kenya, educational policy is made and enacted by the Ministry of Education, education boards, and education agencies-in this case Teacher Service Commission and Kenya National Examinations Council. Educational research does not instruct policy but informs policy. Informed policy does not mean a hindrance to the continued conduct of educational research. The conduct of educational research should not be held captive to respond to educational policy only . The process of making informed policy should allow comprehensive studies to transition from the knowledge base of educational research into policies based on peak periods, which, if not handled with utmost care, can into aberrant policy directions that hamper the quality and effectiveness of an already teetering education system [15, 16].

Stakeholders in Educational Research

Scientific research is vital for the development and improvement of educational policy and practice. There is a growing call for better research in education, equaled by a growing call for better use of research in education to influence educational policy and practice. Evidence-informed policy-making in educational systems depends on collaboration and a community of practices consisting of researchers, policy-makers and practitioners. Stakeholders include all relevant educational partners involved in the applied educational process. Integration of practice, policy and research, coercion of stakeholders, open discussion between them, and reciprocity and trust are essential for knowledge-sharing. The relationship between educational research, policy and practice is marked by conflicting interests and unmet expectations. The gap is often too wide for educational stakeholders on either side of it to bridge without prior convergence and mediation. This a priori convergence can be achieved in several ways, some of which are not subject to influence and action by either educational researchers or policy-makers. Cold creativity is present to the fullest extent in fundamental research, primarily geared to the advancement of knowledge. Structural convergence is limited to the strongest nations and states and is expected to be achieved with difficulty or over a long time scale. However, a new epistemic milieu allowing for more widespread and universal convergence is entering the educational arena. The relevant policy options deemed most suitable by those involved will probably not coincide. The optimality of a given management policy cannot be enhanced by appraising a range of policies specified in advance via review studies of the cognate literature. Other subjects promised to deliver research-informed practice will be relevant only if guiding and controlling systems proper to them may evolve from an imprecise notion of college-capable human capital to explicit and enforceable prescriptive regulations targeting educational stakeholder conduct. The provision of adequate educational services is indispensable for a range of social questions, and educational policy will outstrip and preclude scientific righteousness in an arm race to that end [17, 18].

Challenges in Integrating Research into Policy

An increasing number of educators advocate for evidence-based decision-making (typically called 'Evidence-based Practices', EBP) as a strategy to ameliorate the functioning of educational institutions and systems. At the same time, calls for educational initiatives that take full advantage of scientific knowledge forcefully recur in developed and developing countries alike. A similar upsurge in research funding amount and opportunities has been paralleled on the side of researchers. As a consequence of this

vanishing gap between educational practice and research communities public debates increasingly recur, oscillating between pessimism and optimism, but in general, with a shared belief that much more should be and could be invested in this matter. The dissemination and use of knowledge produced by educational research in policy decision-making processes are important means to improve education systems. Unfortunately, several constraining factors render very complicated the conduct of this two-way relation between educational research, on the one hand, and education policy processes, on the other. Regulatory frameworks guiding the research activities carried out by public sector educational boards, ministries of education, and even public education departments typically only imperfectly encourage the integration of educational research in the verification of implementation and impact of evidence-based policies, practices, and approaches. Urgent calls for the reform of national education systems raised by the global community and international agencies call, among other things, for a strengthened educational research base. Such reform programmes typically advocate for the presentation of the educational research base to evaluate currently employed education policies and practices. However, models of a research base addressing the efficacy and effectiveness of nationally situated education system policies and practices, also taking into consideration the culture and context of implementation, are scarce [19, 20].

Case Studies of Successful Policy Implementation

The Finnish education system, though initially unfamiliar to outsiders, has been extensively analyzed by scholars seeking to emulate its successes. Misinterpretations of Finland's educational policies often stem from its well-trained teachers, commitment to equity, and systematic planning. These misunderstandings have led to a renewed focus on the "micro-level" interactions within educational policy, employing a "nested" policymaking model adaptable to various contexts. This overview summarizes Finnish educational development and its implications for research on educational model formalization. In the early 1970s, Finland adopted undivided basic education, gradually implementing it through the 1980s and early 1990s. Merging students into common schools has placed significant demands on educational policy and funding. While Finland has achieved completion of undivided education, the new curriculum is still being developed. According to an OECD/DAC peer review, in the 1990s, Finland's educational policy shifted towards addressing new challenges, necessitating a clear understanding of changes and their implications for equitable resource distribution across government levels. The flexibility of Finland's decentralized educational system is crucial in absorbing changes from new policies. The recent education program aims to clarify the national school board's role, with no signs of re-centralization pressure. A broader socio-political context analysis of educational reform and its policy implications would be beneficial. Finnish educational policy has adapted to social and political changes, maintaining its core principles but reformulated in contemporary terms. Finland views basic education as part of a flexible and inclusive strategy, promoting learning-to-learn skills and making educational goals more practical while emphasizing national evaluative policies, school-parent cooperation, and diverse education implementation [21, 22].

Future Directions for Educational Research

The research community faces dilemmas regarding the speed of delivering results and their application in educational policies. Future educational research should adopt a mixed-methods approach, integrating qualitative designs alongside the dominant quantitative methods. Emphasizing both "hard" and "soft" systems is crucial for enhancing research productivity in education. A postmodern perspective urges researchers to reassess traditional notions of truth, rationality, and ethics inherited from the Enlightenment. This shift redefines teachers from mere policy implementers to active participants in governance. For educational research to influence policymakers, it needs to incorporate diverse understandings of truth, power dynamics, and ethical considerations, including social justice. Additionally, the ontology of a "VUCA" (volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous) world challenges the credibility of knowledge production in Western education, highlighting the need to reevaluate the framework of educational research. The effectiveness of decisions relies on the modeling capabilities and data utilized in quantitative methods. Considering the future of educational research, two crucial questions emerge: first, whether innovations can enhance understanding of student learning and support in classrooms; second, regarding the overall effectiveness of education systems in fulfilling their roles. Addressing both requires "hybrid" approaches that merge quantitative models with qualitative methods or postmodern phenomenological practices [23, 24].

CONCLUSION

Educational research is indispensable in the formulation and evaluation of effective education policies. Its contribution spans from diagnosing problems and evaluating reforms to forecasting the impacts of potential interventions. However, for research to truly inform policy, it must be rigorous, contextually grounded, and communicated effectively to policymakers. The diversity of research methodologies from

quantitative data analysis to qualitative insights and mixed methods enriches the knowledge base but also complicates integration due to differences in epistemological assumptions and expectations. Stakeholders in education researchers, policymakers, educators, and communities must therefore engage in continuous, trust-based dialogue to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Moving forward, enhancing the accessibility, applicability, and credibility of research through structural support, transparent dissemination, and inclusive stakeholder participation will be essential. Only through such collaborative and informed efforts can educational research fulfill its promise of guiding equitable and effective educational policy.

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