

EFFECTIVENESS OF EVIDENCE-BASED POLICY MAKING ON EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT: A STUDY OF POLICY IMPLEMENTATION IN UNIVERSITY OF CROSS RIVER STATE STAFF SCHOOL NIGERIA

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Corresponding Author Dr. Obia Eniang-Essien Department of Educational Management, University of Cross River State, Nigeria Article History Received: 30 / 10 / 2024 Accepted: 19 / 11 / 2024 Published: 22 / 11 / 2024	Abstract: Evidence-Based Policymaking (EBPM) has been a call of expectation towards policymakers to accurately use scientific evidence in their policymaking process. However, the complexity of the policymaking process renders the ideal notion of EBPM questionable. This research attempts to understand how the EBPM as an idea can shape the interactions of actors in the policymaking process by using discursive institutionalism as the analytical framework. By conducting ten interviews with actors involved in the making of EBPM and a close examination of the policy documents for content analysis, this research describes the institutional features of EBPM discourse in Cross River State, which are reflected in the interactions of policy actors in the policymaking process. This research also offers descriptive and learning narratives on the role of discourse in the policymaking process. Keywords: Effectiveness, Evidence-Based, Policy Making & Educational Management.
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HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF EVIDENCE-BASED POLICYMAKING (EBPM)

The term “EBPM” started to formally appear in the early 2000s when the UK Government under the Labour Party published the White Paper called Modernising Government. The White Paper made clear that policy decisions should be based on sound evidence and policy should be made in the philosophical mind of “what works” (Nutley and Webb, 2000).

The evidence-based policy’s mission was to choose an intervention on the basis that it has a reasonable chance of repeating successful outcomes achieved elsewhere (Pawson, 2006, p. 22). As such, public policy was a matter of options and evidence was necessary to make the right rational choice. This type of rationality approach towards public policy implied a mission to rescue “public policy from the irrationalities and indignities of politics” (Stone, 2002, p. 7).

The political and institutional issue, however, still characterises the practice of EBPM. The notion of “evidence matters” used by the advocates of EBPM generated an expectation that policy decisions need to “follow from rigorous and accurate scientific evidence” (Parkhurst, 2017, p. 4). However, this linear thinking attracted criticism from the policy and political studies. According to the critics, the policymaking process has a complex dynamics and it would be naïve to view the linkage between scientific evidence and policy decision as something direct and unproblematic.

In this regard, Lewis (2003) noted that the assumption of rationality in the EBPM is a “technocratic wish, located in a political world” (p. 259), implying that emphasising the politics of

policymaking is particularly important instead of focusing merely on the evidence. Taking a view of realism, Pawson (2006) also noted that the policymaking process is unpredictable and not linear; the causal relationship between evidence and public policy outcomes is irregular and intervention works selectively (p. 22-23).

Cairney (2016) also emphasised the limitation of evidence in the policymaking process as evidence cannot solve a matter of perception and ambiguity. In a more pragmatic position, Parkhurst (2017) revisited this critical tone by exploring the political aspect of evidence and policymaking, and then offered a governance approach in using evidence during the policymaking process. In short, the EBPM as a concept has evolved around the discussion between the use of evidence and the practical reality in which politics take place.

INTRODUCTION

The phrase ‘evidence-based policymaking’ (EBPM) describes a political slogan rather than a feasible aim. As such, it is only useful academically when treated as an ideal-type or stylised vision to be compared to real-world policymaking (Cairney, 2016a; 2019). In practice, researchers and practitioners often prefer the phrase ‘evidence-informed policymaking’ (EIPM) to signal a mixture of ambition and pragmatism (Mair, 2019, p. 8). Evidence-based policymaking (EBPM) is the practice of using research findings, data analysis, and other forms of evidence to inform the development and implementation of public policies. It emphasises a systematic approach, contrasting with decisions based on ideology, anecdotes, or political considerations. This approach aims to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of policies by grounding them in objective evidence.

Evidence-based policy (EBP) means that policy decisions are informed by the best available, reliable evidence rather than relying solely on intuition, political opinion, or tradition. It emphasises the use of data, research findings, and other forms of evidence to guide the development and implementation of policies. The goal is to create more effective and efficient policies that address societal problems based on what has been shown to work.

Evidence-based policymaking, which emphasises using research and data to inform policy decisions, is generally considered more effective than approaches relying solely on intuition, tradition, or political expediency. By grounding policies in evidence, governments can allocate resources more efficiently, address societal challenges more effectively, and improve transparency and accountability. However, it provides scientifically supported research to help make well-informed decisions. Fosters shared decision-making with patients in care planning. Enhances critical thinking. Evidence-based strategies are foundational to effective practice in fields such as education, healthcare, and public policy. These strategies harness scientific research to guide decision-making and improve outcomes. These approaches emphasise the importance of integrating the latest research findings into practical applications, ensuring that interventions are not only theoretically sound but also practically effective across various contexts.

Evidence-based strategies refer to interventions and approaches that are grounded in reliable evidence from rigorous research, which includes systematic reviews and meta-analyses. The core principle of these strategies is to utilise the best available evidence to inform decisions, thereby enhancing outcomes and optimising resource allocation.

Evidence can come from various sources such as scientific research, expert opinions, observational studies, and anecdotal evidence. The evidence is categorised by reliability, with systematic reviews of randomised controlled trials being the most credible, followed by quasi-experimental studies and correlational studies.

Implementing evidence-based strategies involves a systematic process that includes:

1. **Identifying problems** to address within the educational context.
2. **Searching for evidence** related to identified practices.
3. **Evaluating the quality of the evidence** obtained.
4. **Implementing evidence** in practice while ensuring fidelity.
5. **Monitoring and evaluating outcomes** to determine effectiveness.

PRINCIPLES OF EVIDENCE-BASED POLICY MAKING

To effectively implement EBPM, policymakers, officials must adhere to certain fundamental principles. Those principles include openness and transparency, a relentless and rigorous research and evaluation process, and a continuous application of evidence-based findings.

- **Rigour:** Rigour is the “secret sauce” of EBPM. Policymakers need to be meticulous when collecting and crunching their data. Rigorous research uses a data analysis technique that is comprehensive, credible, and accurate, not backed by unreliable sources, random stories, and assumptions.
- **Relevance:** The data used in policymaking must be relevant to the community’s needs. Policies that miss

the target can lead to wasteful resource management, reduced public trust, and unintended consequences.

- **Reliability:** Reliability means making sure the evidence is accurate and consistent.. Reliable evidence gives policymakers a firm footing, reduces error, and increases the chances of creating successful public policies.
- **Objectivity:** Objectivity in EBPM requires making decisions
- **ns without bias or preconceived notions.** It involves an impartial evaluation of the evidence, with a focus on factual accuracy, rather than personal or political agendas. Only objectivity can ensure the policymaking process leads to fair and equitable outcomes.
- **Transparency:** Transparency involves openly sharing data, methodologies, and the decision-making process with the public and other interested parties. Transparency ensures policymakers are committed to evidence-based approaches and welcome public scrutiny and input.

CHARACTERISTICS OF EVIDENCE-BASED STRATEGIES

Evidence-based strategies are those practices, programs, and interventions that have undergone rigorous evaluations demonstrating their effectiveness in educational settings. Key characteristics include:

- i. **Research Backing:** Strategies must be supported by credible research, such as randomized control trials and peer-reviewed studies, validating their efficacy.
- ii. **Empirical Evidence:** Implementation should be based on data-driven insights and conclusive evidence rather than personal opinions or anecdotal experiences.
- iii. **Adaptability:** Successful strategies should be flexible enough to fit diverse educational contexts while addressing the specific needs of the student population.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF EVIDENCE-BASED POLICY MAKING

Evidence-based policymaking, which relies on rigorous research and data to inform policy decisions, is generally considered more effective than approaches based on intuition, tradition, or political expediency. By using evidence to identify problems, evaluate potential solutions, and monitor policy implementation, policymakers can increase the likelihood of achieving desired outcomes, optimise resource allocation, and foster continuous improvement. Nutley and Webb (2020) discuss some key aspects of Evidence-Based Policymaking:

- i. **Improved Outcomes:** Policies based on evidence are more likely to be effective in addressing societal challenges, as they are grounded in what has been shown to work in similar situations.
- ii. **Efficient Resource Allocation:** Evidence-based policymaking helps prioritise interventions that are proven to be cost-effective, ensuring that resources are used efficiently.
- iii. **Continuous Improvement:** The process of evaluating and refining policies based on evidence allows for ongoing improvement and adaptation to changing circumstances.
- iv. **Transparency and Accountability:** Evidence-based policymaking can enhance transparency and

accountability by making the rationale behind policy decisions clear and verifiable.

CHALLENGES OF EVIDENCE-BASED POLICY ON EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT:

Challenges and Considerations:

- i. **Complexity of Policymaking:** Policymaking is often a complex process influenced by various factors, including political considerations, public opinion, and the availability of resources, which can limit the extent to which evidence is the sole driver of policy.
- ii. **Access to and Interpretation of Evidence:** Policymakers may face challenges in accessing high-quality evidence, interpreting it correctly, and translating it into actionable policies, particularly in developing countries.
- iii. **Political Will and Capacity:** The successful implementation of evidence-based policymaking requires political will and sufficient capacity within government agencies to conduct research, gather data, and analyse findings.

Thus, evidence-based policymaking offers significant advantages in terms of effectiveness, efficiency, and accountability. However, it is crucial to acknowledge the challenges associated with its implementation and to foster collaboration between researchers and policymakers to ensure that evidence is effectively used to inform policy decisions and improve societal outcomes.

POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

This is the process of putting a policy or plan into action. It is the stage where the theoretical design of a policy is translated into concrete actions and real-world effects. This involves various actors, resources, and a series of activities designed to achieve the policy's goals. In essence, policy implementation is a complex and dynamic process that requires careful planning, coordination, and adaptation to ensure that policies effectively address the intended problems and achieve their objectives.

The term "policy implementation" has been defined by many scholars from various Perspectives. Implementation is an important stage of the policy-making process. It means the execution of the law in which various stakeholders, organisations, procedures, and techniques work together to put policies into effect to attain policy goals (Stewart et al., 2008). Implementation can be viewed as a process, an output and an outcome, and it involves a number of actors, organisations and techniques of control. It is the process of the interactions between setting goals and the actions directed towards achieving them. Simon (2020) views implementation as the application of the policy by government administrative machinery in order to achieve the goals. Specifically, policy implementation encompasses those actions by public and private individuals that are directed at the achievement of objectives outlined in prior policy decisions (Meter & Horn, 2025). The constituent element of most cited definitions of implementation is the gap that exists between policy intent and outcomes (Smith & Larimer, 2019). Implementation studies, therefore, emphasise understanding the success or failure of public policy by elaborating on factors that affect it. This concept of implementation helps to draw the attention of policymakers and implementers to study the processes that influence and establish the outcome of public policy (Bempah, 2012). Policy

implementation is often described as a distinct and separate stage within policy cycles. In practice, the lines between policy development and implementation can become quite blurred.



During the policy implementation stage, both political and technical issues have to be addressed. Political issues include getting buy-in, setting a vision and managing opposition. Technical issues include gathering evidence and data on what works, implementation planning and other mandatory steps required in government policy development, including public consultation. There is no good way to implement a bad policy. Poor policy design is a common reason for poor implementation. Likewise, a well-designed policy can be poorly implemented (Gold, 2014). Thus, Langer, Tripney and Gough (2016) outlined some key aspects of policy implementation to include.

- i. **Putting Ideas into Practice:** Policy implementation is the bridge between policy formulation and achieving desired outcomes. It's where the rubber meets the road, transforming written policies into tangible actions.
- ii. **Multi-Actor Involvement:** Implementation often involves a range of actors, including government agencies, non-governmental organisations, and even private citizens.
- iii. **Resource Allocation:** Successful implementation requires the allocation of necessary resources, such as funding, personnel, and infrastructure.
- iv. **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Tracking the progress of implementation and evaluating its effectiveness are crucial to ensure the policy is achieving its goals and to identify areas for improvement.
- v. **Contextual Factors:** Policy implementation is influenced by various contextual factors, including political, social, economic, and organisational environments.
- vi. **Potential Challenges:** Implementation can face challenges such as a lack of resources, bureaucratic inefficiencies, resistance from stakeholders, and communication breakdowns.

BENEFITS OF EVIDENCE-BASED STRATEGY ON POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

The evidence-based policy allows stakeholders to assess the impact of social initiatives.

It also has several other benefits, as pointed out by Parkhurst (2017).

- i. Improved Policy Outcomes: By basing policy decisions on evidence, policymakers can make more informed choices that are likely to lead to better outcomes. This can result in more effective and efficient policies that better meet the needs of society. It helps to identify policies and programs that are most likely to be effective in achieving the desired outcomes. This can help to avoid wasting resources on policies that are unlikely to be successful.
- ii. Increased Accountability: Evidence-based policymaking can help to hold policymakers accountable for their decisions by ensuring that they are grounded in empirical data and research findings. This can help to prevent decisions that are based on ideology, personal opinions, or special interests.
- iii. More Efficient Use of Resources: Evidence-based policymaking can help to identify policies and programs that are most likely to achieve the desired outcomes. This can help to ensure that resources are allocated most effectively and efficiently as possible.
- iv. Improved Public Trust: Evidence-based policymaking can increase public trust in the government by demonstrating that decisions are based on rigorous analysis and data. This can help to enhance the legitimacy of government actions and policies.
- v. Greater transparency: Evidence-based policymaking can promote greater transparency in government decision-making by making the underlying data and research more accessible to the public. This can help to promote greater public engagement and participation in the policymaking process.
- vi. Increased Innovation: Evidence-based policymaking can stimulate innovation by encouraging policymakers to consider new ideas and approaches that are supported by empirical evidence. This can help to drive improvements in policy design and implementation.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF EVIDENCE-INFORMED POLICY-MAKING TO GOOD PUBLIC GOVERNANCE

Evidence has a critical role to play in improving the quality, responsiveness and accessibility of public services. It can play a role throughout the key stages of the policy cycle and is increasingly recognised as a critical part of good governance. Evidence-informed policy-making can be defined as a process whereby multiple sources of information, including statistics, data and the best available research evidence and evaluations, are consulted before deciding to plan, implement, and (where relevant) alter public policies, programmes and deliver quality public services. ‘(derived from (Langer, Tripney & Gough, 2016)

Evidence also has a critical contribution to make in policy implementation, which requires significant planning and management support. Implementation science provides an understanding of how to adapt policies to meet local needs, whilst guarding against changes that may affect outcomes: this can make the difference between a successful implementation of an intervention and one that is ineffective or potentially even harmful (Moore, Bumbarger and Cooper, 2013).

Policy evaluation is also critical to understand why some (complex) policies work and why others do not. As one important source of policy-relevant knowledge, policy evaluation supports policy choices rooted in an evidence-informed policy-making

process. Solid policy evaluation and its strategic use throughout the policy cycle can foster a range of objectives such as policies’ effectiveness, value for money, accountability and overall transparency of a policy-making process (OECD, 2018).

Building evaluation capacity is an important component of international aid towards development, which is subject to strong accountability objectives and it also enables governments to assess how policies stimulate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

TYPES OF EVIDENCE-BASED POLICY

There are various types of evidence-based policy, which include

- i. Quantitative and Qualitative Evidence. Evidence comes in different forms and from a variety of sources. It can consist of statistical data from surveys, censuses, and administrative data that are used to run government departments and other agencies. Evidence can also be qualitative information or data that comes from consultation with key stakeholders, delivery partners and localised sources. These consultations may use in-depth interviews, focus groups, and direct observations of the problem at hand and the work of the agencies that seek to solve these problems.
- ii. Experimental Evidence Evidence can also be experimental in the sense that proposed policies can be tested or piloted before they are rolled out across the entire population. Policy pilots tend to be relatively short-term and restricted to a few geographical areas or jurisdictions.
- iii. Process Evidence: Good decision-making usually requires evidence about the processes by which a policy, project or programme is going to be implemented. This includes having a clear logic model, or theory of change, that makes explicit from the outset of policy development how the policy is supposed to work. That is, what activities have to be undertaken, by which people or agencies, using which mechanisms (market forces, state provision, regulation, voluntarism etc.), with what resources (financial, human and social), to achieve the outputs, outcomes and impacts that are desired.

SUMMARY

The implementation of evidence-based strategies marks a commitment to applying the best available research to enhance professional practice across various sectors. While challenges exist, such as resource constraints and resistance to change, the potential benefits in improving outcomes and ensuring effective decision-making are immense. By continuing to evolve these practices and integrating them into diverse fields, professionals can uphold standards that drive innovation and success. Embracing a culture of research-based decision-making will continue to shape better futures across education, healthcare, and beyond.

RECOMMENDATION

From the study, the following were recommended

- i. Prioritise People, Not Just Structures: The government should focus on investing in the development of teachers, leaders, and support staff.
- ii. Balance Autonomy with Accountability: organisations should provide schools with flexibility to innovate while

ensuring they are accountable for achieving system-wide goals.

- iii. Invest in Long-Term, Iterative Reform: employers of labour should avoid frequent policy changes and allow sufficient time for implementation and learning from pilot programs.
- iv. Make Equity Non-Negotiable: Policy makers should use policy levers to direct resources and attention to address the needs of all students, particularly those most vulnerable.

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