



From Research Evidence to Educational Practice: A Qualitative Analysis of the Research–Practice Gap in Contemporary Education

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Abstract: Educational research is expected to generate evidence capable of improving teaching, learning, assessment, institutional management, and educational policy. Nevertheless, a persistent gap frequently exists between the production of research evidence and its translation into educational practice. This qualitative study examines the nature, causes, and consequences of the research–practice gap in contemporary education and explores strategies for strengthening the connection between educational research and professional practice. A qualitative documentary research design was employed using scholarly literature, policy documents, and research on evidence-informed education, teacher inquiry, educational knowledge mobilization, and research utilization. The analysis was organized around four objectives: examining the significance of research evidence for educational practice; analysing the factors responsible for the research–practice gap; identifying its consequences for teachers, institutions, and educational policy; and proposing strategies for strengthening research–practice connections. The findings indicate that the gap is shaped by differences between academic research priorities and practitioners' immediate needs, limited accessibility of research findings, methodological complexity, inadequate research capacity among educators, insufficient institutional support, time constraints, and weak mechanisms for knowledge mobilization. The analysis further suggests that research evidence becomes more useful when teachers participate in inquiry, research findings are presented in accessible forms, institutions develop collaborative research cultures, and policymakers establish mechanisms for sustained evidence use. The study concludes that bridging the research–practice gap requires a shift from a linear model of research dissemination towards a collaborative model in which researchers, teachers, institutions, policymakers, and communities jointly produce, interpret, and apply educational knowledge.

Keywords: Educational Research; Research–Practice Gap; Evidence-Based Education; Knowledge Mobilization; Teacher Research; Educational Practice; Research Utilization.

Introduction: Educational research constitutes an important foundation for understanding educational processes and improving educational practice. Research generates knowledge about teaching methods, learning processes, assessment, curriculum, teacher development, educational inequality, technology, inclusion, and institutional management. Ideally, such knowledge should inform classroom practice and educational policy.

However, the existence of a large body of educational research does not necessarily result in corresponding changes in educational practice. Teachers may remain unfamiliar with relevant research, research findings

may be difficult to access, and practitioners may consider academic studies insufficiently connected with classroom realities. At the same time, researchers may focus on theoretical or methodological questions that do not immediately address practitioners' needs.

This phenomenon is commonly described as the research–practice gap. The problem is not unique to education. It reflects a broader challenge concerning the movement of knowledge from research institutions into professional settings. In education, however, the issue is particularly significant because teachers operate within complex and context-dependent environments. Strategies that demonstrate effectiveness in one setting may not automatically produce identical results elsewhere. Consequently, educational evidence must be interpreted rather than mechanically transferred. The contemporary emphasis on evidence-informed education has increased attention to this issue. Policymakers increasingly seek research evidence for programme design and evaluation, while teachers are encouraged to use evidence to improve instructional decisions. Yet effective evidence use requires institutional structures, professional capacity, accessible research communication, and opportunities for practitioner inquiry.

The present study therefore investigates the research–practice gap as a multidimensional problem involving knowledge production, knowledge accessibility, professional capacity, institutional culture, and policy mechanisms.

Rationale of the Study: The rationale for this study arises from the growing importance of evidence-informed educational practice. Contemporary educational systems face complex challenges including learning loss, digital transformation, inclusion, teacher workload, educational inequality, and changing labour-market requirements.

Research can provide valuable evidence for addressing these challenges. However, the practical value of research is reduced when findings remain confined to academic journals, conferences, and universities.

A second concern is the difference in priorities between researchers and practitioners. Researchers may seek theoretical contribution and methodological rigour, whereas teachers often need practical answers to immediate classroom problems.

A third concern relates to research accessibility. Academic articles may use specialized terminology and statistical procedures that are difficult for practitioners without research training to interpret.

Finally, many institutions lack formal mechanisms through which research findings can be discussed, tested, adapted, and evaluated collaboratively.

Therefore, bridging the research–practice gap is not simply a matter of disseminating more research. It requires restructuring the relationship between research production and educational practice.

Brief Review of Literature

Hargreaves (1996) argued that educational research must become more closely connected with teachers and professional practice. His work highlighted the importance of creating stronger relationships between research knowledge and practitioner knowledge.

Levin (2013) examined knowledge mobilization in education and argued that the movement of research knowledge into practice is complex rather than linear. Effective mobilization requires interaction among researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and other stakeholders.

Nutley et al. (2007) similarly emphasized that research utilization involves multiple pathways through which evidence influences professional thinking, organizational behaviour, and policy.

Biesta (2007) questioned simplistic interpretations of evidence-based education and argued that educational decisions involve values and contextual judgements that cannot always be reduced to technical evidence.

Davies (1999) emphasized the importance of evidence-based practice while recognizing the need for critical evaluation of research evidence.

Cordingley (2008) highlighted the value of collaborative professional learning and teacher engagement with research.

Schildkamp et al. (2017) demonstrated that organizational factors significantly influence data-based decision-making in schools. Their findings reinforce the broader argument that evidence use requires institutional support.

OECD (2020) has emphasized the importance of professional learning and evidence-informed educational systems, while **UNESCO (2021)** has highlighted the need for education systems to develop collaborative approaches to knowledge and learning.

The literature therefore suggests that the research–practice gap is not caused by a simple absence of research. Rather, it results from weak connections among research generation, accessibility, interpretation, professional learning, institutional culture, and implementation.

Research Questions

1. What is the significance of educational research evidence for contemporary educational practice?
2. What factors contribute to the research–practice gap in education?
3. What are the major consequences of the research–practice gap for educational practice and policy?
4. What strategies can strengthen the relationship between educational research and practice?

Research Objectives

1. To examine the significance of research evidence for contemporary educational practice.
2. To analyse the major factors responsible for the research–practice gap.
3. To identify the consequences of the research–practice gap for teachers, institutions, and educational policy.
4. To suggest strategies for strengthening the relationship between educational research and educational practice.

Methods

The study employed a qualitative documentary research design. Peer-reviewed articles, academic books, policy documents, and reports concerning evidence-based education, educational research utilization, knowledge mobilization, teacher inquiry, professional learning, and research–practice relationships were purposively selected.

The collected literature was analysed thematically. Four analytical themes corresponding to the research objectives were developed: value of research evidence, causes of the research–practice gap, consequences of weak research utilization, and mechanisms for strengthening research–practice connections. Findings from different sources were compared to identify common patterns and divergent perspectives. The approach emphasizes conceptual synthesis and interpretive understanding rather than statistical generalization.

Analysis and Discussion

Objective 1: To Examine the Significance of Research Evidence for Contemporary Educational Practice

Educational research contributes to practice in several interconnected ways.

- **Improving Teaching and Learning**

Research can provide evidence concerning instructional strategies, assessment practices, learner motivation, classroom management, inclusive education, and technology-supported learning.

Teachers who engage with research can critically examine their existing practices and consider alternative approaches.

However, research evidence should not be interpreted as a universal prescription. Classroom contexts vary considerably according to learners, language, resources, institutional culture, and socio-economic conditions.

- **Supporting Professional Reflection**

Research can help teachers question assumptions about teaching and learning. Evidence provides an opportunity for reflective practitioners to compare their experiences with findings from broader educational studies.

This supports the argument of *Hargreaves (1996)* that educational research becomes more meaningful when connected to professional knowledge.

- **Supporting Educational Policy**

Research provides policymakers with information concerning the likely effectiveness, limitations, and consequences of educational interventions.

Evidence can inform curriculum reforms, teacher education, assessment policies, resource allocation, and inclusion strategies.

- **Promoting Innovation**

Research can identify emerging educational practices and technologies. It can help institutions assess whether innovations actually improve educational outcomes.

Discussion and Validation: The findings support *Nutley et al. (2007)*, who demonstrate that research can influence professional practice through multiple pathways. They also support *Davies (1999)*, who emphasizes the importance of evidence in informed professional decision-making.

Nevertheless, the analysis indicates that research evidence is most useful when combined with professional judgement and contextual knowledge.

Objective 2: To Analyse the Major Factors Responsible for the Research–Practice Gap

The research–practice gap emerges from multiple interacting factors.

- **Difference in Researcher and Practitioner Priorities**

Researchers often prioritize theoretical contribution, methodological rigor, and publication, whereas practitioners frequently require practical and immediate solutions.

This difference can create a communication gap.

- **Limited Accessibility of Research**

Many research studies are published in academic journals using specialized terminology and statistical language. Teachers may have limited access to subscription-based journals or insufficient time to read lengthy academic publications.

- **Lack of Research Literacy**

Teachers may not always receive adequate preparation in research methods and evidence evaluation. Consequently, even accessible research may be difficult to critically interpret.

- **Time Constraints**

Teachers frequently face substantial teaching, administrative, assessment, and reporting responsibilities. Continuous engagement with research may therefore be difficult.

- **Weak Institutional Research Culture**

Where schools and colleges do not encourage inquiry, professional discussion, or action research, research may remain disconnected from everyday practice.

- **Limited Knowledge-Mobilization Mechanisms**

Many educational systems lack effective structures for translating research findings into practitioner-friendly guidelines, professional development, policy briefs, or institutional interventions.

- **Contextual Differences**

Research findings generated in one educational environment may not directly apply to another. Differences in culture, curriculum, language, class size, resources, and student characteristics can influence outcomes.

- **Publication-Oriented Research Culture**

Where academic recognition depends heavily on publication quantity, researchers may prioritize scholarly output rather than long-term engagement with educational practitioners.

Discussion and Validation: These findings strongly support *Levin (2013)*, who conceptualized knowledge mobilization as a complex process rather than a simple transfer of information. They also align with *Biesta (2007)*, who cautions against treating research evidence as an automatic substitute for educational judgement.

The research–practice gap is therefore best understood as a structural and relational problem, rather than as a deficiency of teachers alone.

Objective 3: To Identify the Consequences of the Research–Practice Gap

The research–practice gap has consequences at several levels.

- **Classroom Practice**

When teachers have limited access to relevant evidence, instructional practices may continue primarily through habit, tradition, or informal experience.

Experience is valuable, but without systematic reflection it may be difficult to determine whether a practice is genuinely effective.

- **Teacher Professional Development**

Professional development programmes may become disconnected from current research. Training can become routine rather than evidence-informed.

- **Institutional Improvement**

Institutions may implement reforms without systematically evaluating their effectiveness.

Educational Policy

Policymakers may rely heavily on administrative experience, political considerations, or international models without sufficient engagement with context-specific research.

- **Duplication of Effort**

Where research findings are not effectively communicated, institutions may repeatedly experiment with interventions without learning from previous studies.

- **Slow Educational Innovation**

Weak research–practice relationships can slow the adoption of effective innovations.

9.7 Missed Opportunities for Local Knowledge: A strong research–practice gap can also prevent practitioners from contributing their experiential knowledge to educational research.

Discussion and Validation: These findings reinforce the argument of *Cordingley (2008)* that teacher engagement in research and collaborative professional learning can strengthen educational improvement.

Importantly, the relationship should not be one-directional. Researchers should not simply “deliver” knowledge to teachers. Teachers themselves possess valuable contextual knowledge that can improve the relevance of educational research.

Thus, effective educational knowledge should be understood as co-produced rather than merely transferred.

Objective 4: To Suggest Strategies for Strengthening the Relationship Between Educational Research and Practice

The analysis suggests several strategies:

- **Promote Practitioner Research**

Teachers should be encouraged to conduct action research, classroom inquiry, and small-scale evidence-based studies.

- **Strengthen Research Literacy**

Teacher education should include practical training in research design, evidence evaluation, data interpretation, and academic reading.

- **Develop Research–Practice Partnerships**

Universities, schools, colleges, government agencies, and communities can collaborate through long-term research partnerships.

- **Improve Research Communication**

Research findings should be communicated through practitioner-friendly formats such as policy briefs, teaching guides, webinars, professional workshops, and concise evidence summaries.

- **Establish Institutional Research Cultures**

Institutions should allocate time and resources for professional inquiry, collaborative discussion, and evidence-based experimentation.

- **Recognize Practitioner Contributions**

Teachers who conduct systematic inquiry should receive professional recognition and opportunities to disseminate their findings.

- **Encourage Co-Production of Knowledge**

Researchers and practitioners should participate jointly in identifying research questions, designing studies, interpreting findings, and developing interventions.

- **Strengthen Evidence-Based Policy**

Policymakers should establish mechanisms through which research evidence systematically informs policy design and evaluation.

Discussion and Validation: These strategies correspond with *Levin's (2013)* knowledge-mobilization perspective and *Nutley et al.'s (2007)* emphasis on multiple pathways of research utilization.

The strongest approach is therefore not a research-to-practice pipeline, but a research–practice partnership model.

Policy Implications: The study suggests the following policy implications:

1. Integrate research literacy into teacher education.
2. Promote action research and practitioner inquiry.
3. Establish university–school research partnerships.
4. Create institutional research and innovation cells.
5. Provide teachers with dedicated time for research engagement.
6. Develop accessible evidence summaries for practitioners.
7. Include teachers in educational research design and evaluation.
8. Strengthen research-based professional development.
9. Create mechanisms for translating research into policy briefs and implementation guidelines.
10. Evaluate educational reforms continuously using both quantitative and qualitative evidence.
11. Recognize practitioner research in professional advancement.
12. Promote context-sensitive rather than mechanically transferred evidence.

Concluding Remarks: The research–practice gap remains one of the important challenges confronting contemporary education. Educational research generates extensive knowledge, but its potential remains underutilized when research findings fail to reach classrooms, institutions, and policy processes in meaningful ways. The analysis demonstrates that the gap is produced by multiple factors, including differences between researchers and practitioners, limited research accessibility, inadequate research literacy, time constraints, weak institutional research cultures, insufficient knowledge-mobilization mechanisms, and contextual differences. At the same time, the study demonstrates that bridging the gap is not simply a matter of encouraging teachers to read more research. The relationship between research and practice must become interactive, collaborative, and reciprocal. Teachers should not be treated merely as consumers of research. They should become active contributors to knowledge generation. Researchers, in turn, should engage more closely with authentic educational problems and communicate findings in accessible and practically relevant forms. The future of educational improvement therefore depends on creating stronger connections among researchers, teachers, institutions, policymakers, learners, and communities. A sustainable research–practice relationship requires institutional support, research literacy, practitioner inquiry, collaborative partnerships, accessible research communication, and evidence-informed policy. When these conditions are established, educational research can move beyond academic publication and become a meaningful instrument of classroom improvement, institutional development, and educational transformation.

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