



## From Theory to Practice: Aligning Science Research with Classroom Realities

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### Abstract

The function of research is to provide insights into contemporary societal issues and, by doing so, provide answers to the questions that arise. Within educational systems, it informs not only the decision-making process but also influences the teaching and learning process; by proposing improved and more effective teaching methods. The undeniable divide between policy and practice is consequently a significant issue that calls for immediate, organized, and genuine cooperation between researchers and educators, two essential components of the process. This study employs conceptual analysis to explore the chasm between policy and practice and the reasons for the divide. It provides commensurate suggestions for tackling them and also suggests a step-by-step blueprint that stakeholders can use to effectively close the divide. This blueprint will ensure a seamless but enduring transition process. Recommendations were made for educational stakeholders to become actively involved in consolidating the teacher as researcher policy and to expedite actions towards achieving an evidence-backed teaching and learning environment. They were also advised to utilize the blueprint and suggestions recommended by this study to effectively close the divide.

**Keyword:** Educational Research, Evidence-backed teaching, Theory-Practice gap,

### Introduction

The relationship between research and classroom practice is undeniable and has long been a subject of scholarly discourse and practical concern. Educational research is designed to generate insights that inform teaching, improve learning outcomes, and propel policy decisions. To achieve this, quality use of research in classrooms is necessary and should allow systematic teacher and environmental modifications (Rickinson, Cirkony, Walsh, Gleeson, Cutler & Salisbur, 2022). A supposedly spectacular educational research with little or no input into improving teaching and learning is of no value (Wang, Robert, & Maria, 2010). Consequently, instead of addressing only policy-informed and generalized issues, researches are supposed to target and address specific individual and societal needs, where their evidence can really make visible differences (Breckon & Dodson, 2016). This indicates that for effectiveness, evidence-based research must be met by a systematic and responsive implementation plan.

Based on available research, there has been ongoing global and local attempts to steer educational system away from its sole dependence on conventional teacher centered mode of teaching towards more students centered learning approaches (Onuigbo, & Ajulufu, 2025) which are characterized by enhanced student engagement, deeper understanding, increased retention, and improved critical thinking capabilities (Eraikhuemen, David-Egbenusi & Onuigbo, 2024). Currently, Governmental efforts and policies are many on paper but lack practical implementation plans; researchers churn out evidence in support of educational technology and student-centered learning strategies on a daily basis, yet, actual classroom practices still majorly favor the conventional mode of teaching. The push by the top echelon of the educational sector appears lip-bound and only yield minimal fruits. Consequently, a significant gap continually persists between what research recommends and what actually happens in classrooms.



This chasm between theory and practice, according to (Wang et al, 2010) started after the invitation of external experts by stakeholders to solve post war problems in the curriculum as far back as 1950s. This status becomes increasingly worse for developing educational systems where socioeconomic situations help exacerbate the theory-classroom gap. This disparity has become a defining challenge in the quest for quality education globally.

At its core, this theory-practice divide reflects a tension between the idealism of academic inquiry and the realities of classroom implementation. While researchers often operate within controlled environments and theoretical paradigms, teachers must navigate and surmount complex, dynamic, and contextually diverse learning spaces. Other classroom realities like large class sizes, diverse learner needs, limited resources and rigid assessment systems are considerations that also deter or constrain the extent to which teachers can translate theoretical insights into classroom reality (Hepburn, & Beamish, 2019). Teachers seek to adapt researches to their imminent environments and solve peculiar realities; researchers on the other hand create restrictions in a bid to reduce influence of extraneous variables. They fear uncontrolled mutations that can distort efficacy of methodologies, but also fail to understand the effect of adaptations in streamlining them into more suitable versions for student's success (Howard-Jones, Woollacott & Gilmore, 2025). As a result, the educational community faces a paradox; the abundance of research knowledge churned out by researchers on a daily basis that does not equate to improved classroom practice or enhanced student learning. Since both are inherently right according to their contexts and are working towards the common good, it is evident that collaboration is a very important aspect of the process. To address this imbroglio, Gorard, Huat See, and Siddiqui (2020) suggests that researcher should work rather at improving knowledge instead of trying to create the most impact from single studies.

Nevertheless, a pedagogical shift that bridges the theory-practice gap is simply not a matter of teacher readiness; political dynamics and power structures within the educational system also play crucial roles in either facilitating or hindering the process. Policymakers and educational leaders are large and vocal about their dreams towards a sustainable and efficient learning environment. Schools and their administrators too claim to be abreast with developmental trends but in practice are hesitant to take

bold steps toward comprehensive change (Anyanwu, Iwuamadi, 2015). Concerns about possible pushbacks, fear of change from conventional models, lack of resources and trained manpower and the lack of political will to drive such reforms at scale are plausible reasons for this discrepancy between theory and practice (Onuigbo et al.2025). It goes without saying that unless a strong leadership and a united commitment to prioritizing evidence backed learning is in place, even the most well-meaning policies will fail, resulting in missed opportunities for all involved (Cain, Brindley, Brown, Jones, & Riga, 2019).

One of the dominant framework of this study is Stenhouse's (1975) "teacher-as-researcher" model, which argues that teachers should not merely apply external theories but actively engage in reflective inquiry to adapt research to their specific classroom conditions. He insists that effective change happens when teachers become researchers who Plan and collect evidence that answer questions in their immediate environments. This leads to positive change in both the teachers and students. Similarly, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory emphasizes that learning for both students and teachers is socially constructed and contextually bound. This implies that an effective educational research must consider and be responsive to the social and cultural dimensions of classroom life to be genuinely applicable.

Addressing this gap between theory and practice holds significant implications for policymakers, curriculum planners and researchers who will have evidence to why closer collaboration with educators should be encouraged for increased educational quality, teacher professionalism, and policy effectiveness. A deeper alignment which will consequently empower teachers as reflective practitioners, enhance student outcomes, and promote continuous innovation within the education system.

This research aims to look into how educational stakeholders can move beyond rhetorical support to create sustainable and research backed environments in schools. It will identify the factors that contribute to the discrepancy between research and practical classroom implementation and propose actionable but adaptable frameworks and timelines that promote stronger research-practice integration, especially in developing contexts. This ultimately builds a bridge between classroom practice and research and ensures that educational policies are informed.



### **The Importance of Bridging the Gap**

Bridging the gap between research and classroom practice is not only a priority simply because it is an academic concern but it is pertinent as it is a logical necessity. As the nature of knowledge and societal contexts continue to change daily, research concurrently continues to investigate and provide valuable insights and solutions that can influence policy changes and propel growth (Crain-Dorough, & Elder, 2021). Therefore, education systems that fail to align with the burgeoning body of knowledge and carries in translating research into actionable strategies become inefficient and may face stagnation (Keskin, 2022). Evidence-based teaching practices have been shown to significantly improve learning outcomes, foster innovation, and enhance teacher professionalism. However, without effective mechanisms for integrating research findings into classroom practice; and until research wary teachers are encouraged to participate and research findings are made easily accessible, these benefits may remain theoretical at best (Howard-Jones, et.al. 2025).

In many educational climates, particularly in developing regions, teachers rely heavily on traditional methods passed down through experience rather than on current empirical evidence (Ogunode & Ahaotu, 2020). This reliance on convention over research undermines innovation and perpetuates instructional practices that are no longer pedagogically sound and in line with current trend. Bridging the gap enables teachers develop their thinking voice by helping them hone their inquiry skills and by influencing how and what they think (Cain, et al. 2019). According to Ucan, (2016), any implementation process within the educational realm is a learning process and an opportunity for them to professionally develop themselves.

Meanwhile, policymakers often introduce reforms based on research trends without adequately considering the ongoing realities in schools. This results to a perpetuation of policy-practice misalignment, where research-informed initiatives fail to yield expected outcomes due to a lack of contextual adaptation and teacher ownership. Bridging the gap requires more than just disseminating research findings, it demands a systemic shift in how stakeholders think, how research is conducted, interpreted, and implemented. Researchers must engage more deeply with the lived experiences of teachers, while educators themselves must be empowered to see themselves as researchers; active agents of inquiry rather than passive consumers of research. This partnership between

influential partners in the field is beneficial for teaching, learning, and education. In other words, the alignment of educational research and classroom realities is a collaborative process that values both theoretical insight and professional experience as neither of them in isolation can address issues faced in recent times (Cain,2015).

### **Factors Contributing to the Persistent Gap between Educational Research and Classroom Practice**

#### **1. Policy-Practice Misalignment**

Educational policies are often driven by macro-level research or political agendas that fail to consider the realities of classrooms. Policymakers adopt reform strategies based on foreign large-scale studies or international benchmarks without factoring in local constraints. These reforms although research-based and fit in theory often becomes impractical in practice due to resource shortages or contextual mismatches. Even when implemented, these are often implemented without appropriate guidance or support for the educators who implement them locally. In Nigeria, inconsistent attempts at planning where implementation procedures are not stated during the planning phase but are established on spontaneous basis during the process ruin processes before they even begin. (Education Sector Analysis, 2021).

#### **2. Lack of Teacher Research Literacy and Capacity**

The ability to understand, evaluate, and apply research within particular contexts are critical educational skills needed for quality use of research (Rickinson, Cirkony, Walsh, Gleeson, Cutler Salisbur, 2022). A teacher's research skillset dictates how comfortable a teacher is towards interpreting data, evaluating research validity, or adapting findings to their unique contexts. Many teacher training programs and in-service development initiatives provide limited exposure to research methods or critical appraisal skills, and without training in action research, teachers may perceive research as an external, expert-driven activity rather than as part of their professional role.

#### **3. Accessibility and Language of Research**

Another key barrier is the accessibility of research to classroom teachers. Many research papers are published in academic journals behind paywalls, written in technical or statistical language that is difficult for practitioners to interpret or apply (Hemsley-Brown & Sharp, 2003). Hence, they often lack the time, access, or training to interpret academic research. Research findings are rarely broken down into actionable



strategies and even when professional development sessions include research insights, they are often presented abstractly, without clear demonstration of classroom application. Thus, the language and dissemination style of research frequently alienate the very audience who would benefit most from it.

#### **4. Limited Collaboration Between Researchers and Educators**

Researchers tend to prioritize publication and theoretical advancement and often work in isolation within academic settings; focusing on theoretical or controlled studies, whereas teachers prioritize student outcomes and classroom management and operate in unpredictable and dynamic environments. Consequently, the knowledge produced by researchers does not always align with the immediate needs, challenges, or realities of teachers. This factor contributes largely to the disconnect between researchers and classroom teachers. In settings where career progression is not tied to researches and even when this is the case, involvement in researches does not transcend to inculcation of their results in the classroom; neither of them see any need for collaborations.

#### **5. Weak Professional Development Structures**

Professional development (PD) is one of the main vehicles for translating research into practice. Educational practitioners do not become evidence informed nor translate from that to evidence backed unless they undergo a form of training which helps them make the needed connection between what they already know and the information provided by research (Brown, 2017). In many developing systems, PDs are sporadic, theoretical, and often disconnected from daily classroom realities (Khan, 2012). They lack continuity, don't provide follow-up coaching and opportunities for collaborative reflection after the training process. The result is minimal transfer of research knowledge into classroom application.

#### **6. Cultural and Attitudinal Factors**

Willingness to adopt research-based innovations is greatly influenced by individual beliefs and values. Educational stakeholders come in with varied perceptions that thwart the process; while some may view research negatively because they see it as imposed, others view it as irrelevant, impractical, or even threatening to their professional autonomy and will prefer to rely more on personal experiences than on empirical evidence (Howard-Jones, et. al. 2025). Some experienced teachers may be evidence informed but will balk at usage if it is not institutionalized and used

by colleagues (Brown, MacGregor, Flood, & Malin, 2022). Policy makers and administrators are also often hesitant due to the financial implication that is usually connected to changes of this magnitude.

#### **7. The Nature of Educational Research Itself**

Many educational researches have been criticized for different reasons, it is either they not designed with classroom application in mind; or they are too specific and small-scale to be generalized (Brown, et al. 2022); or they focus on theoretical development, policy critique with little or no generalizable or actionable insights for teachers. Methodological complexity render findings difficult to replicate in real-world settings. It therefore requires a whole lot of intentionality for researches to provide applicable answers to the questions that teachers need answered.

#### **8. Contextual Diversity**

Education is highly contextual, strategies that work in one setting may fail in another due to differences in culture, socioeconomic conditions, resources, or student demographics. Research findings from high-resource contexts are often inappropriately generalized to developing regions where practitioners find it difficult to adapt. Teachers in resource impaired environments most times find it impossible to apply evidence-based practices that require complex materials, technology, or smaller class sizes.

#### **9. Systemic and Institutional Barriers**

In many school systems, academic achievement is measured by grades, not by the successful adoption of research-informed, student-centered approaches. These student-centered approaches are often large on exploratory, collaborative and experiential learning. Teachers who deviate from standard methods often face administrative and structural resistance. These resistance range from rigid curricula and assessment systems that prioritize standardized testing over innovative practices, Heavy workloads and administrative duties that leave little time for reflective or research-based practice and Institutional cultures that doesn't reward innovation or inquiry. Additionally, the slow pace of the research-to-implementation transition frequently leads to information that is out of date and cannot be used for decision-making.

### **Strategies for Bridging the Research-Practice Gap in Developing Systems.**

While evidence-based teaching, reflective practice, and theory-application synergy which are the core principles of educational research and practice are universal. The conditions under which education



systems operate differ greatly between developed and developing systems. Economic, structural, and sociocultural contexts shape the nature of the gap and therefore the feasibility of the remedies that can be applied.

Developed educational systems have several advantages over their developing counterparts; they have

- Access to stable and domestically backed funding, digital resources, and institutional support for professional development.
- A robust ecosystem of universities, education think tanks, and government research agencies that continuously generate, indigenize and disseminate research findings.
- Data-driven policies, with established systems for evaluation and tracking feedbacks.
- Structured, continuous, and mandatory professional development, with access to mentoring and coaching systems.
- Locally generated research relevant to their education system and easy access to databases for teachers and institutions.
- Efficient digital platform support for continuous learning and peer to peer knowledge sharing.

Consequently, developing countries also require intentionally tailored strategies for addressing their peculiar limitations.

1. Governments and NGOs can provide grants or incentives for teacher-led classroom innovations. Locally driven action research using available materials should be emphasized while adaptable but high-impact research translations that fit limited-resource environments should be encouraged.
2. To address policy and administrative barriers, there should be effective collaboration between ministries, NGOs, and research institutions. Policy makers should institutionalize evidence-based policy frameworks, strengthen educational data systems to track efficiency in classroom implementation and create feedback loops where teachers and school leaders can report on policy effectiveness.
3. Easily accessible teacher resource centers should be built in local government areas for accessible ongoing support. Instead of sporadic workshops, models that are peer to peer, school based and offer opportunities for meaningful

engagements and collaboration should be encouraged (Hepburn, et al. 2019). In places where internet access is especially redundant, mobile technology or radios can be used to deliver PD contents.

4. Teachers should be motivated to imbibe a culture of curiosity and reflection. Positive Reinforcements in either monetary or non-monetary incentives such as certificates, leadership opportunities and career progression should be available for research-active teachers who translate research engagement into class practice (Breckon et al, 2016) as it bolsters engagement.
5. Funding should be made available for adaptation studies; whose prerogative will be to test global methods in local contexts in order to solve the issue of cultural mismatch due to imported research. Local researchers can also be encouraged to document, test, and publish indigenous teaching methods.
6. To boost dissemination, Ministries should create simplified teaching guides based on verified local research, distribute printed research breakdowns or audio summaries for rural educators and establish open access research databases where teachers can freely access indigenous researches (Gorard, et al., 2020).
7. Inspectorates in zonal and state educational levels should be established to assess not just compliance, but innovation and inquiry. They should oversee continuous teacher-friendly monitoring tools and teams in order to document classroom-level research implementation and efficiency.
8. Technological barriers that are usually characteristic of developing systems can be tackled by investing in education technology infrastructure as part of national development planning. Partnerships between education ministries and telecom companies for provision of subsidized access for teachers and schools as a tax reduction incentive will also help reduce the financial strain on teachers.
9. Where international organizations involved in research processes dictate research areas that favor their own agendas; Policymakers must ensure that external interventions align with national education priorities. They must insist on local participation in defining research



questions, interpreting results and long-term sustainability plans.

### **Actionable Recommendations for Different Educational Stakeholder Level**

If evidence-based practices are to be swift, impactful and widely adopted, educational practitioners with influence engaged in linking research to practical applications, must have the knowledge, skills and confidence to lead and implement effective changes in real-world settings. In other words, they need to have a clear understanding of what it takes to lead change successfully, as well as their specific responsibilities in facilitating sustainable change (Brown, 2017).

### **Funding Bodies - Sustainable Support and scalable interventions**

- Prioritize funding for programs that show evidence of bridging theory and practice with local adaptation.
- Encourage capacity building (teacher training, research labs) rather than only infrastructure.
- Include evaluation components that assess fidelity of implementation and contextual fit.

### **Education Authorities- Policy design for flexibility & resource allocation**

- Allow curriculum frameworks that permit teacher adaptation based on evidence.
- Invest in infrastructure (simulation labs, ICT) when evidence shows they make a difference.
- Negotiate and provide funding for sustained professional development, not one-off workshops.
- Carry out pilot trials and collect feedback from field before scaling reforms.

### **Teacher Education Institutions-Core attitudinal Integration in pre-service training**

- Use case-based, problem-based learning modules that force teacher candidates to reconcile theory with classroom situations.
- Embed supervised teaching practicum where mentors help candidates reflect on how theory plays out in practice.
- Ensure research literacy courses are not optional but core courses.
- Provide exposure to action research methods.

### **Researchers- Contextual sensitivity**

- Collaborate with teachers in choosing research questions.
- Use design-based research, participatory action research, or implementation science approaches.

- Produce findings with practitioner-friendly formats: executive summaries, guidelines and toolkits.
- Focus on long-term monitoring of implementation, not only short-term trials.

### **School/School Leaders-Champion evidence-informed culture.**

- Model using research in decision-making.
- Recognize and reward teachers who try innovations based on research.
- Allocate scheduled time for teachers' reflection, experimentation and collaborative learning
- Support mentoring/coaching programs.
- Initiate regular meetings where teachers review recent research, discuss classroom observations, and share outcomes.

### **Step-by-step framework for translating Educational research into classroom practice (5-year regional proposal).**

This practical, phased blueprint ensures a seamless move from endorsement of research to consistent classroom implementation. Each of the phases contain concrete actions and suggestions for leadership. It can be generalized to suit larger samples or adapted to local realities and budget range.

#### **Phase 1 - Preparation**

Proposed time frame (0–3 months)

Regional policy/education officers are ready to move beyond broad and sweeping policy declarations and create comprehensive, implementation strategies. The priority is to make a strong case for the translation process, secure mandate and needed resources, and map stakeholders so the effort has legitimacy, maximum support and a clear objective. These plans should include setting clear, measurable objectives with stipulated and achievable timelines. At this stage, there is massive convention of educational authorities whose prerogative will be to launch and steer the direction of the process. Avenues for generating resources are identified and funding partners are courted for support. This support may be financial: regional budget, reallocated funds, donor support or non-financial support in form of organizational release time. Commensurate needs assessment to audit available infrastructures, research capacity, PD systems, and school readiness are also carried out.

#### **Phase 2 - Capacity Building**

Proposed time frame (3–9 months)

A joint professional development team pooled from Universities, zones and school leaders co-design regionally impactful interventions and build core capacity among researchers, teacher, and school



leaders. Available resources will be channeled into stipends for facilitators, teacher leaders and procurement of basic materials. The team's prerogative will be to firstly create local Research-Practice Partnerships (RPPs) which will match university teams with schools and define roles, data sharing, ethics, and timelines. Secondly, design pilot interventions using evidence-based research for production of pilot implementation templates and lastly, co-create joint researcher-teacher workshops to define priority research problems and offer intensive short courses on: research literacy, action research, facilitation and mentorships.

Teacher training colleges; an important part of the process are encouraged to inculcate research strengthening courses in their curriculum for training prospective teachers. Policymakers prioritize funding for teacher training programs that focus on research skills while continuous, job-embedded professional development that goes beyond one-time workshops are provided for teachers.

### **Phase 3 — Small-scale Pilot Test**

Proposed time frame (9–18 months)

At this stage, RPPs in conjunction with researchers, school teacher leaders and with the support of teachers conduct a trial interventions in few selected schools. They collect, document evidence and refine models. These pilot tests will run for a minimum of one academic term with strict adherence to stipulated lesson plans and teaching strategies. Armed with rubrics, the RPP researchers will intermittently analyze data garnered from teacher reflections and classroom observations and provide iterative feedback. After each cycle of 6 weeks, based on immediate feedback; practices, materials, or supports are adjusted for increased efficiency.

### **Phase 4- Evaluation**

Proposed time frame (18–24 months)

RPP evaluation team with district analytics staff will embark on rigorous objective research with the aim of providing evidence showing effective interventions, and the conditions of success. They will combine quantitative and qualitative insights to ascertain implementation fidelity, contextual constraints, and financial implication per school and present findings to steering group, teacher unions, parent reps, and funders. They will also produce scalable toolkits, training packages, monitoring dashboards, and policy briefs

### **Phase 5 - Scaling & Policy Integration**

Proposed time frame (24–48 months)

Ministries with the support of Zonal policy offices and RPPs systematically expand effective practices in schools while building strong systems that continue to institutionalize research-informed practice. A tiered model design where efforts start from early adopter schools, to other schools deemed ready before full district roll-out is utilized as it has the highest chances of success. Concerted efforts are made to integrate proven practices into curriculum guidance, PD requirements, teacher appraisal criteria, and annual budgets. Supports are made readily available and responsive while a regional open repository of toolkits and evidence is created and systematically monitored for ongoing fidelity.

### **Phase 6- Institutionalization**

Proposed time frame (48+ months)

At this stage, all efforts are geared towards consolidation. All involved stakeholders ensure sustenance by enforcing research-informed practices in classrooms; ensuring continuous funding and cycles of improvements and sustained momentum of local research. Long term success means that the previous phases remain iterative; finance strategies must be incorporated into regular regional budgets, and public-private partnerships must be actively explored in order to guarantee continued financing; The RPPs continually train cohorts, test new indigenous questions, improve practice and reward schools with outstanding development tracks and teacher-researchers.

In summary, these phases are cyclic and dependent on each other. Their success are dependent on deliberate effort to initiate and sustain stakeholder engagement. This is achieved by maintaining an ongoing sincere communications pathway between stakeholders; either by monthly newsletters sent out to involved stakeholders, short video case studies or via a responsive community forums. This ensures that everyone is carried along. There should be an aura of equity across all participating groups and schools albeit their socioeconomic status, language and location. While efforts are made to meet all needs, deployment however, should be prioritized where gaps are largest. Thorough and ethically guided documentation of the process from the planning to last phase is non-negotiable.

### **Conclusion**

Aligning educational research with classroom realities is not merely about implementing research findings.it also involves redefining the relationship between theory and practice. The chasm that exist between these two



domains have existed for lengths of time, each operating with its own language, priorities, and difficulties. The challenge before contemporary education systems is to create bridges of dialogue and collaboration that bring these worlds together in service of meaningful, equitable, and effective learning experiences.

This study contributes to that by examining how research informs practice, how teachers can become co-constructors of knowledge, and how education systems can systematically evolve toward a model where theory and practice are not separate spheres but mutually reinforcing dimensions of professional growth. Ultimately, the alignment of educational research and classroom practice is not an end in itself but a pathway to realizing the larger goal of transformative education which is empowering both teachers and learners to thrive in a knowledge-driven world.

### Recommendations

This study therefore recommends that

1. The government and other educational parastatals should cut back on superficial efforts and accelerate the adoption of policies that bridge the theory-practice gap.
2. Sufficient financial and human resources be deployed by governmental and private-public partners towards the accomplishment of this significant but essential change.
3. For an effective process, stakeholders should make use of the blueprints and recommendations offered by this study and possibly modify them to suit their unique contexts.

### Suggestions for Further Studies

Detailed studies can be carried out to determine the impact of each involved educational stakeholder on speed and efficacy of implementation.

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