



Uganda National Council for Science & Technology

## Using Academic Sources to Extract Data for Evidence Based Policy Reviews in Education

Supported by



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## Introduction.

The idea of using evidence to inform policy is not new. As far back as ancient Greece, Aristotle put forward the notion that different kinds of knowledge should inform rulemaking. This would ideally involve a combination of scientific knowledge, pragmatic knowledge and value-led knowledge (Flyvbjerg, 2001; Ehrenberg, 1999). What is new and interesting however, is the increasing emphasis that has been placed on the concept over the last decade in Europe.

Modern evidence Based Policy making has its origins in the medical field particularly the advancement or promotion of the use of evidence-based medicine. However, it has gained political currency since 1997 under the Blair administration. This signified the entry of a government with a reforming and modernising mandate, which was committed to putting an end to ideologically-driven politics and replacing it instead with rational decision making. They made a bold commitment towards the use of evidence in policy decision making with their White Paper in 1999, Modernising Government. This noted that government must produce policies that really deal with problems; that are forward looking and shaped by the evidence rather than a response to short-term pressures; that tackle causes not symptoms.

EBP is an approach that helps people make well informed decisions about policies, programmes and projects by putting the best available evidence from research at the heart of policy development and implementation (Davies, 2004). EBP is a discourse or set of methods which informs the processes by which policies are formulated, rather than aiming to affect the eventual goals of the policy. It advocates a more rational, rigorous and systematic approach, and moves beyond traditional notions of research to adopt a broader understanding. In most discussions, the approach has also come to incorporate evidence-based practices.

In Africa and Uganda in particular, policies are intuitive and irrational meaning that they are not based on any research. A politician who wants to win an election will set a policy that is based on a short term selfish motive (Democratic Governance report, 2009). Due to high corruption levels, policies are set by managers, administrators and principals of government departments with a sole purpose of enriching themselves. These policies will continue to be part of the policy agenda of such departments irrespective of whether they achieve their intended objectives or not. In Tanzania for example, the implementation of health service reforms backed up by household disease survey data showed a 40% reductions in infant mortality rate between 2000 & 2003 in two pilot districts. On the other hand, the implementation of Universal Primary Education in Uganda continues to lag behind the rest of East African countries because the policies creating and driving this project are not based on any empirical research rather they are responses to political and other money making schemes (Nkwanga, 2011)

The purpose of this fellowship therefore is to engineer a debate that will direct policy makers and other key stakeholders into the use of evidence based approach to analyse the existing policies and evaluate whether their success or unsuccessful implementation is due to the fact that they were backed or not backed up by empirical research. Because of this, UNCST tasked the DRUSSA fellow to organise a workshop that would draw the stakeholders in appreciating the impact of Evidence Based Approach in policy formulation, policy management as well as policy evaluation. The book on the management of UPE in Uganda authored by the DRUSSA Fellow was to be used as a yardstick to measure and compare the current policies in the management of UPE and the empirical evidence presented in the book.

## Statement of the Problem:

The Ministry of Education and Sports has formulated a number of policies to manage the Education Sector since the 1995 Educational reforms (MOES reports, 2010). While a number of policies have been successful in creating a positive impact in the management of the education sector, it is not clear whether these policies are based on any empirical evidence. To address this problem, DRUSSA commissioned a fellowship to assist the Ministry of Education officials in learning to use data to create evidence based policy. The fellowship was kick-started with a review of an academic publication that examined and provided evidence on the functioning of UPE. With the idea that by interrogating the academic document, the officials will begin to appreciate the nature of academic research and its potential to inform policy.

## Methodology

Five topics from the book (Management of UPE in Uganda, 2009, 2011) were distributed to members from the Ministry of Education with willingness to present topics of their interest from the book. Emphasis of the presentation was put on discussing the data arising out each research topic. This was followed by discussion on the policy implications of that data and compare it with the current policies in the Basic education sub sector. At the end of the workshop, a questionnaire was administered to identify the participants' level of interest, appreciation and understanding of data and policy implications based on evidence.

## Results.

This section presents the results into two sections. The first section addresses the characteristics of the participants. The second addresses the evaluation of the participants. Figure 1 below summarises the sex distribution of the participants.

### Characteristics of Participants

Fig.1 Sex of respondents

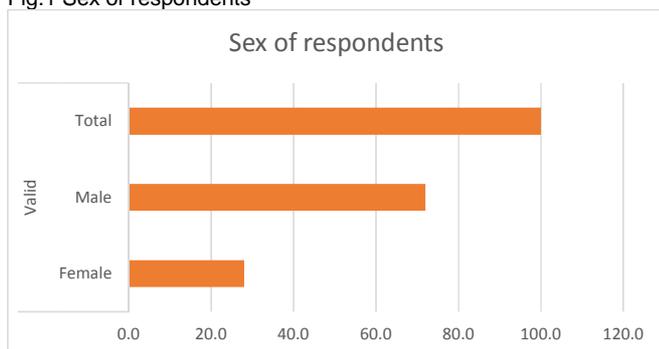
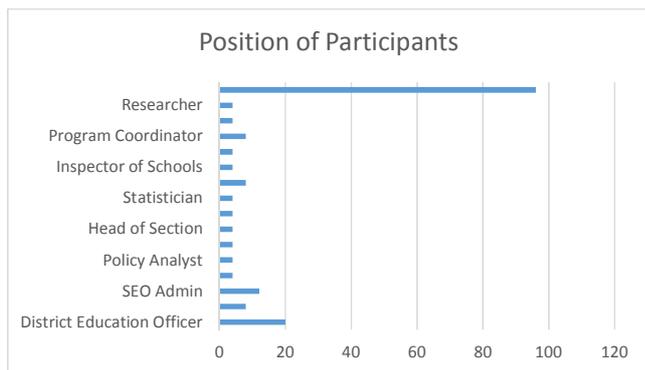


Figure 1 indicates, there were 35 participants who attended the workshop at Royal Suits Bugoloobi. However of these only 25 participated filled in the questionnaire. Of these participants, 28% were female and 72% male. Figure 2 below summarises the professional characteristics and job titles of the attendants.

Fig. 2: Position of participants



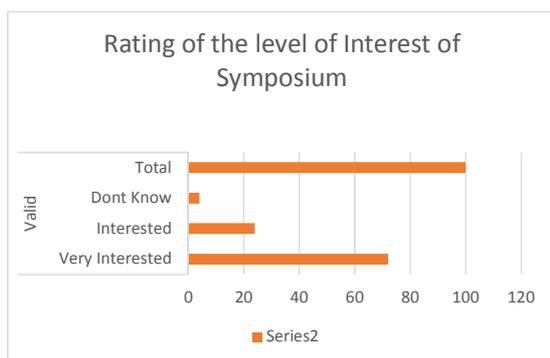
In terms of positions of participants, (fig. 1) majority of the participants (20.8%) were District Education Officers, 12.5% were Senior Education Administration Officers and 8.3% were Principal Personnel Education Officers and 8.3% Assistant Commissioner Education.

Section 2: Evaluation of the participants.

The participants evaluated ~~the workshop the participants~~ from a number of characteristics ~~of the workshop~~. These were level of interest, level of understanding, aims and objectives of the workshop. These are presented in the same order.

~~Participants~~ Participants' level of interest.

Fig.3: Level of interest in the symposium.



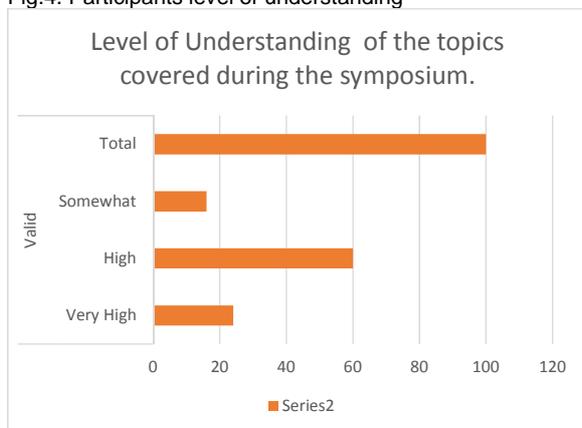
The majority (72%) were very interested in the symposium, while 4% were non-committal.

Verbal testimonies describe why the participants were very interested. ~~The following are the reasons we were able to capture: Participants they~~ were looking forward to learning how to use data for policy making, applying what they learnt from the symposium into practice, interpreting data for policy making, subjecting all policies to evidence based criteria to determine their relevance. ~~Others were interested because of -and~~ the way the symposium was organised (methods) ~~that allow~~ing active participation. See participants 3,6,11 and 09 below.

Participant 3: Right from the beginning of the planning phase, I was interested in seeing how we benefit from this symposium whose benefit is to learn more about using our existing data to improve the policies we make in the Ministry of Education & Sports.  
Participant 6: Am happy and privileged to have attended this symposium. The contents are very relevant to my work and what I do. Am interested in seeing the way policies are made depending on the way data is used and interpreted.  
Participant 11: Am a policy executive, am interested in learning and using statistics in informing policy. At the same time, review all the previous policies that were not based in data and reverse them. This might have a huge implication but will be worth taking the risk.  
Participant 09: I liked the participants involvement in the discussion

~~Participants~~ Participants' level of understanding.

Fig.4. Participants level of understanding



The figure above suggests that the topics were well understood by the majority of the participants (84%) ~~-agreed that the topics were well understood (See Fig. 4). They may be indicated by participants looking forward to subsequently~~ ~~This is because -participants testified that they were going to~~ interrogate the data collected over the years to see whether they can use it to direct both current and future policies as well as helping them to write evidence based reports. See participants 20 & 05.

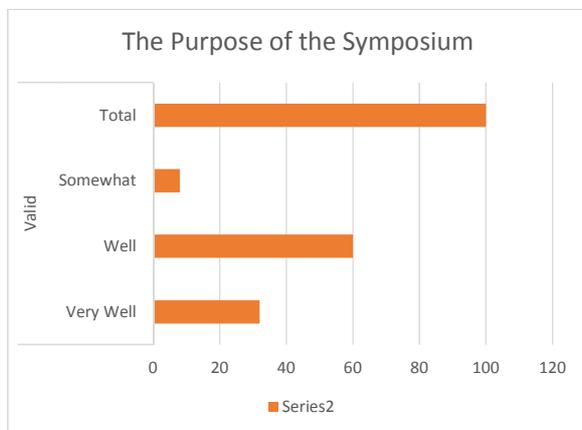
Participant 20: Learnt how to extract academic data to generate policy direction and to use the same research findings/monitoring reports findings to write

Participate 05: We have always had data collected on annual basis. We have never thought of using this data for policy making. It is interesting to see how data that was collected by Professor 15 years ago how it is relevant today in support of his recommendation on social capital and other variables.

*Understanding of the Purpose of the symposium.*

The purpose of the symposium was to enable the participants understand and appreciate the use of academic sources to extract dData for evidence based policy reviews in education.

Fig.5: Purpose of the symposium.

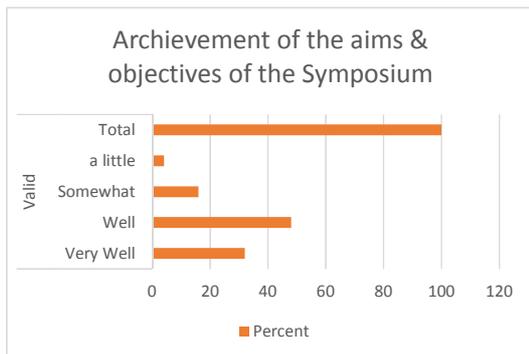


The figure above shows that 92% of the participants understood the purpose of the symposium. Because the methods used for the symposium were clear which allowed high level a participation from the members. I they all appreciated and showed willingness to correct, re-~~interpret~~interpret and subject all policies and regulations in the Basic Education Department to evidence based approach. See participants 23 & 20 below.

Participant 23: Presentations were well done through clear illustrations and explanations of key concepts. I feel the purpose was well achieved.  
Critical importance of social capital in improving quality outcomes of UPE program. We learnt how to use data to inform policy. This was achieved.  
Participant 20: It is a timely intervention. A lot has been going on failing the implementation of UPE and discussions at various levels held without referring to existing data. Using available data to solve issues affecting UPE implementation is very good.

*Aims and objectives.*

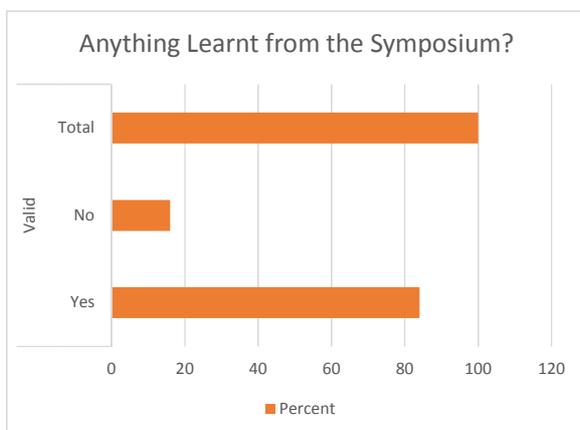
Fig.6. Aims and objectives of the symposium.



Majority of the participants indicated that the symposium met its aims and objectives.

*Learning from the Symposium.*

Fig.7: Learning from the symposium.



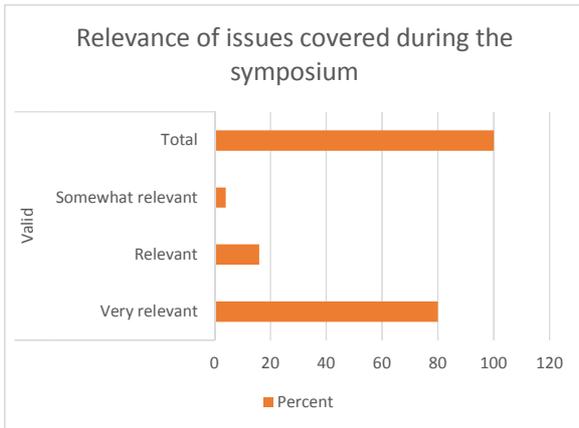
Majority of the participants (84%) ~~answered in affirmative~~ ~~agreed~~ that they learnt from the symposium. ~~Some recalled or reflected on~~ ~~Because of~~ the challenges faced in the management of UPE, ~~that they had never had an opportunity to examine though they~~ ~~participants~~ have been looking forward to ~~identify and implement~~ ~~having~~ strategies to improve the situation. ~~Consequently such participants~~ ~~This symposium was~~ rated as one of those best strategies that have been long overdue to challenge and bring on new ideas that may have a positive impact on the program. These new ideas are; the social cognitive factors and the evidence based approach to ~~policy making~~ ~~policymaking~~. See participants

17, 08 and 13.

Participant 17: The symposium is timely as it handles the management of UPE in Uganda since its inception in 1997  
Yes, I learnt about the social cognitive factors that had hither to not been emphasised yet they are very crucial.  
I learnt about the issues that are quite pertinent in the management of UPE. Use of Data is quite critical in coming up with relevant and successful policies that will positively enhance the education sector.  
I learnt about incorporating the emerging issues for the future policy making.  
Participant 08: Learnt how to extract academic data to generate policy direction  
Learnt how to Use research findings/monitoring reports findings to write.  
Participant 13: I have learnt to pay attention to the social cognitive factors in our schools for improvement.

*Relevance of the issues discussed at the Symposium in relation to Participants work.*

Fig.8. Relevance of the issues covered during the symposium.

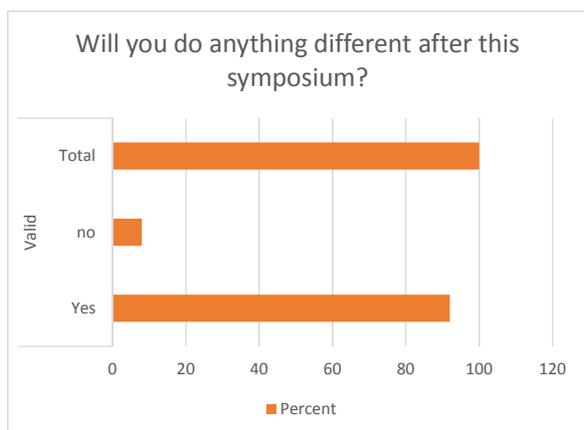


Majority of the participants (96%) said that the issues discussed during the symposium were relevant. More importantly, they admitted the emerging interest or drive to apply the ~~This is because they showed willingness and interest in applying the knowledge into~~ their day-to-day day-to-day work and vowed to subject existing policies to evidence based standards.

Participant 04: This is a very important seminar for my day's activities as a policy maker. I will use the method is to identify those policies that are weak, subject them to data analysis and strengthen them with evidence.  
Participant 06: Social cognitive factors have blown me with their strength in the education sector. Am going to pay particular attention to them.

Will you do anything different in your work or how you access/share research evidence as a result of the discussion?

Fig.9: Willingness to do anything different after the symposium.

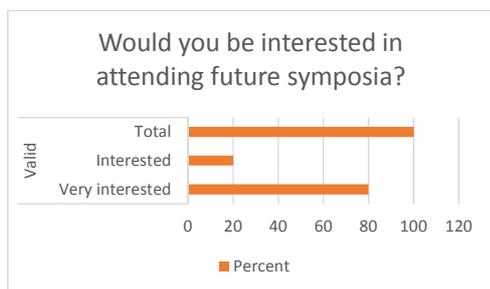


Majority of the participants (92%) agreed that they ~~would~~ do their work differently after learning from the symposium. Evidence of this is shown by participants' testimonies on their level of interest in interrogating academic sources and existing data to check, formulate, pass, approve and evaluate policies not only in the Basic Education Department but in their daily activities. See Participants 08,09,12,15.

Participant 08: I will use evidence all the time in my work to suggest policies.  
I will always question policies that are not based on any evidence  
Participant 09: As a statistician, I know the importance of data. Without good data, there will be bad policies. I will always collect good data which will ~~allow to~~ inform good policies.  
Participant 12: Social capital is the way to go. PTAs and other stakeholders must come in together to manage and own schools.  
Participant 15: In our district, policies will only be based on evidence. If no evidence to back-up a certain policy, I will not support it.

Participation in the future symposia.

Fig.10. Participation in the future symposia.



Majority of the participants (80%) agreed to participate in the ~~forth-coming~~forth-coming ~~symposia~~symposium a. ~~Symposia~~and ~~they~~suggested improvements below:

Participant 11: Members of the press should be invited to attend the forth coming symposiuma to allow the public know what is being done to rectify the challenges in the education sector.

Participant 24: Members of other directorates of the Ministry like ~~policy making~~polycymaking, NCDC, Secondary Education, BTVET etc. should all be invited to attend the coming seminars.

Participant 25: More time should be allocated for the plenary session to allow enough time for wider discussions and draw recommendations.

Participant 18: Policy makers should be put to task to tell us on how they have been making the policies. They should show us the methods to go through to make policies. Are the policies they make based on evidence or they are politically motivated? Do they answer our problems we have in the education sector? We need policy makers in the next session of the seminar.

## Discussion and Conclusion.

The workshop was intended to equip participants with knowledge of formulating policies based on empirical ~~findings which~~ findings that provides evidence as a benchmark for policy formulation. The level of participants' involvement was high, level of interest was high and the level of understanding of the topics discussed was high.

Participants vowed to create policies based on empirical research and to take issues discussed in the workshop and apply them in their day today activities. Because of the sharp contrasts between data and policy recommendations in the Book versus the current policies in the education sector, participants were intrigued on how our current policies were ~~reached - created~~. For example, from the book, data supports the role of PTAs in primary schools to provide an administrative, oversight and ownership roles of the school yet the current government ~~practices is to marginalise policies have completely disregarded and disempowered the role of - the existence of~~ PTAs in schools. This is coming at the helm of failure of UPE and participants felt that it is high time such ~~policies~~ practices were changed.

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