

Connecting Research, Practice and Policy: Are Policy Makers and Practitioners in Kenya Utilising Universities' Social Science Research?

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Abstract

Universities play a leading role in research and are considered the main knowledge-producing institutions in any society. Whereas conducting research is important, the utilization of the findings is even more important. Increasingly, research funders are keen to ensure that research makes a difference and that the research they fund is applicable in the relevant areas. The present study thus sought to establish the level of utilisation of university-produced social science research by government in the policymaking and formulation processes in Kenya. Data was collected from universities, national government ministries and county governments. The study established that there was very low utilisation of university produced social science research in the policy formulation and making processes at both national and county government levels. It also emerged that most of the research studies conducted by universities were commissioned by private agencies. The study concludes that channels for communicating research findings between universities and government were lacking. The study recommends that universities should create formal research linkages and partnerships with government ministries to enable dialogue throughout the entire research process. Universities should also establish/strengthen research dissemination units, as well as move beyond the traditional channels of disseminating research findings.

Keywords: University, National Government, County Government, Social Science Research, Utilisation, Policy

Introduction

Teaching, research and community service are the three functions that universities are tasked with globally. Although each of them is equally important, research plays a central role as it serves the other two. With regard to teaching, research plays a key role in the development of both content and pedagogical knowledge. On the other hand, research serves community development by investigating societal problems and advancing innovative solutions.

The research role of universities dates back to the 19th century. According to Rothblatt and Wittrock (1993) cited in Wagner (1999), universities across Europe and in the USA developed from teaching institutions to institutions for research in the natural sciences by the 19th century. The social sciences joined the research tradition in the universities by the turn of the 20th century. Since then, universities have continued to be the key sites of knowledge production right into the 21st century. Although there are other players such as government laboratories, industry, think tanks and NGOs that have entered the research scene, universities continue to play a leading role in research and are considered to be the main knowledge-producing institutions in any society (Cloete, Bunting & Van Schalkwyk, 2018). According to Schoole, Obamba and Jowi (2014), research evidence indicates that knowledge has been the most important factor and the driving force of economic performance in OECD countries over the past decades. Consequently, the economies of the 21st century are considered to be knowledge-based and their success are largely hinged on the level of innovation which in turn is determined by the quantity and quality of knowledge produced. This has led to the emergence of Research and Development, which refers to innovative activities undertaken by corporations or governments to grow the stock of knowledge and to use this stock to create new applications, such as new or improved products (good and services) and procedures (Conte and Vivarelli, 2014

The wider society has also come to recognise the value of research in addressing the various societal challenges. Consequently, there has been increasing emphasis on evidence-based policy making in addressing societal problems. It is argued that effective use of research-based knowledge has the potential to improve the quality of public policy and enhance public services and delivery systems (Mikulskiene, 2013).

Due to the pivotal role of research in development, there have been regional as well as local efforts to entrench it in the overall development process. The African Union's development blueprint, dubbed 'Science, Technology, and Innovation Strategy for Africa 2024 (STISA-2024)' identifies building and upgrading of research infrastructure as one of the four key pillars of the strategy (African Union, 2018). In Kenya, the government has embraced research as key to sound policy development and programme implementation in all sectors of life. The current development blueprint, Kenya Vision 2030, acknowledges that research will play a key role in the formulation of relevant and practical policies (Republic of Kenya, 2007). To operationalize the research agenda in Kenya Vision 2030, the Kenyan government enacted the Science Technology and Innovation (ST&I) Act of 2013 to provide the policy framework for research and innovation. This was followed by the establishment of the National Research Fund in 2014 whose mandate is to finance and facilitate research activities (<https://researchfund.go.ke>). At the institutional level, each university in Kenya has put in place measures to promote research activities in line with the broad government policy frameworks as well as in conformity with the Standards and Guidelines by the

Commission for University Education (CUE, 2014). Indeed, engagement in research for both the institution as well as the individual staff member is now one of the deliverables in the annual performance contract.

Whereas conducting research is important, the utilization of the findings is even more important. It has been observed that more and more research funders are keen to ensure that research makes a difference and that the research they fund is taken up and used in the relevant areas (Uzochukwu et al., 2016). It is when research results are utilized that the study can have an impact in the society. The focus of this study therefore, was on the utilization of social science research conducted in universities in Kenya. The major objective of the study was to establish the extent to which social science research produced by Kenyan universities is utilised by government in policy formulation and programme implementation.

Problem Statement

Universities play a leading role in research and are considered the main knowledge-producing institutions in any society, which is part of their core mission in pursuit of scholarship. In Kenya, the Universities Act legislates that production and dissemination of scholarly research and the promotion of innovation are two key objectives of universities (Department for International Development, 2019). Indeed, research is critical for the advancement of society and the economy, driving innovation, and addressing the challenging problems faced by humanity. With the recognition by the wider society of the value of research in addressing the various societal challenges, there has been increasing emphasis on evidence-based policymaking. It is argued that effective use of research-based knowledge has the potential to improve the quality of public policy and enhance public services and delivery systems. The question that arises therefore is: how much of the university-generated research is consumed by government agencies to inform policy? Are policy makers in Kenya utilizing universities' social science research?

Objectives of the study

The objectives of this study were to:

- i) Establish the level of utilization of university-produced social science research by the government in the policymaking
- ii) Establish the body of knowledge relied on to inform policy decisions by County policy makers and practitioners

Literature Review

Concern about the utility value of research has had a long history in academic circles. Indeed, scholars have for many years argued that for research to be useful, it has to be put to practical use (Weiss, 1979). The term research utilization arose out of increasing interest in the use of research across various disciplines from about the 1970s and during the subsequent two decades (Cooper, Levin, & Campbell, 2009;; Levin 2011; Sutcliffe & Court, 2005). Henry and Mark (2003) called the 1970s and 1980s the “golden age” for work on research knowledge utilization. Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith (1988) posit that the term research utilisation emerged as scholars increasingly became interested in the influence that academic research might

have on the public policy process. Interest in research use persisted, sustaining the discourse on research utilization into the 1990's and early 2000's.

Research evidence has been viewed as an essential ingredient in policy making processes that helps ensure sound and robust policy decisions (Nutley et al, 2007; Head, 2008; Banks, 2009; Bogenschneider & Corbett, 2010), Cooper, Levin, & Campbell, 2009; Davies, Nutley, & Smith, 2000; Levin 2011; Sutcliffe & Court, 2005). Consequently, this has given rise to what has been referred to as the Evidence-Based Policy (EBP) movement. In the social sciences, EBP movement promotes the conscientious, explicit and judicious use of the most up-to-date and best available evidence to help make decisions for more effective social interventions (Zarghi and Khorasani, 2018). Plewis (2000) further observes that EBP emphasizes the need for policy initiatives to be supported by research evidence and in addition, evaluating policy that is introduced on a trial basis in a rigorous way. Advocates of EBP argue that evidence-based policy making is desirable and rational because policy and practice that is not informed by the best available evidence is likely to be ineffective or even harmful (Trinder, 2003).

Head (2013) notes that in Europe and North America, the language of evidence-based policy and practice (EBPP) has been infused into a range of economic, social and health policy areas including education, skills and training, social work, criminal justice, child and family services, and preventative health care. Nevertheless, there seems to be a shift in research utilization terminology from evidence-based policy to evidence-informed policy. With this shift, research "use" is being expressed in new terminology such as "knowledge mobilisation", "knowledge integration" or "knowledge transfer and exchange". Indeed, a wide range of terms, such as knowledge exchange, knowledge transfer, knowledge translation, research brokering, and research utilization are used interchangeably to describe the process of creating linkage between research and practice in the different disciplines.

Scholars have sought to explore research utilization in the policymaking process as a multidimensional construct. These efforts have led to the development of research utilization models. Some three basic models of research utilization are documented namely, instrumental use, conceptual use, and political use (Amara, Ouimet, & Landry, 2004; Nutley et al., 2007; Tseng, 2012). Instrumental use denotes the direct and concrete application of research findings to specific policy decisions. Thus, research could be translated into a material and useable form such as a policy, protocol or guideline. This type of research use results in changes in policymaking and practice, as explained by Nutley, Walter, and Davies (2007). Tseng (2012) characterizes this as the rational and linear image of research use in which the decision-makers have a question and directly make use of research to address that question.

Conceptual use of research was coined by Weiss (1977) to capture the enlightenment function of research. This is achieved when research influences how policymakers and practitioners reflect on issues, challenges or potential solutions. The conceptual use approach considers the indirect contribution of research to the flow of ideas and deeper insights in an area. Conceptual use of research represents the longer-term influence that research can have on the understanding of a certain policy issue by policymakers (Ness, 2010). As noted by Nutley, Walter, & Davies (2007), practitioners and policy makers could use research conceptually in ways such as identifying problems, approaching issues from different stakeholder perspectives, identifying the kind of stakeholders that should be consulted when addressing problems and understanding the benefits and shortcomings of implementing particular policies and programs in different contexts. Some scholars such as Caplan (1979) argue that the broader utilization of research (conceptual use) in the policy

process is usually under-estimated by researchers as more focus is usually given to the instrumental use of information.

Political use of research refers to the tactical or symbolic use of research evidence by policymakers to justify a position that has already been taken (Ness, 2012). This typically involves policy makers using research evidence to garner support for positions that are held or existing policy preferences, rather than using research to identify the ideal policy solution. Policymakers may therefore use research politically by disseminating research findings to fellow legislators to gain support for an issue or use it to legitimate a policy decision that has been made. Weiss (1979) also delineates 'imposed use' and 'process use' of research in addition to the instrumental, conceptual, and political uses. Imposed use occurs when government initiatives deliberately tie funding to the adoption of evidence-based programs. Process use on the other hand, refers to what is learnt by practitioners from participating in the production of research, as opposed to how they apply or learn from research findings.

However, despite the aforementioned benefits of research to the policy formulation processes in the public sector, research continues to be an underutilized component of policy-making due to a variety of barriers (Ness & Gándara, 2014). This has led to initiatives by scholars to explore models for enhancing research utilization by policy-makers and practitioners (Nutley et al., 2007). One of the most propagated models is academic–industry collaborations which, evidence suggests, can increase the policy uptake of academic research (Nutley et al., 2007). Scholars have proposed that to achieve effective academic–industry collaborations, it is important to underpin the collaboration with knowledge co-production, where there are mutual inputs by the partners (researchers and users of research findings) into the design and outcomes of research projects (Rickinson et al., 2011). The justification for this is that the perspectives and activities of academic and industry partners do not always align due to the heavy influence of numerous individual and organisational factors (Bammer, 2008; Bogenschneider and Corbett, 2010; Cherney and McGee, 2011; Cherney et al., 2012; Clark and Sinclair, 2008; Haynes et al., 2011). This means that to increase collaboration and the transfer of research to policy, some effort is required by both policy-makers and the research community.

Albert, Fretheim, and Maïga (2007) also argue that increasing the competency of policy makers in research methods as well as their appreciation of research is also vital to increasing utilization of research. Researchers on their part have a role to play to increase utilization of their research results. Research has high chances of being utilized if it focuses on policy-relevant issues and is timely, unambiguous and easily understood, non-controversial, and has low implementation cost (Lewig et al, 2006).

Methodology

This study employed a mixed methods approach in order to adequately explore the utilisation by policymakers in the public sector (i.e., county and national governments).of social science research produced by Kenyan universities The mixed methods approach was the most appropriate for the study because it enabled the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data from the universities and government agencies. To operationalize the mixed research approach, the study employed retrospective and exploratory survey designs that were useful in capturing the status of utilization of social science research over a period of 10 years.

The study was nationwide in scope and covered universities and the two levels of government (national and county). The target population was the 39 chartered Universities (22 public and 17 private), 19 national government ministries and 47 county governments. In the universities, the study targeted the schools/faculties in social sciences/education and research units and University managers in charge of research, innovation and dissemination. At the national government level, the study targeted heads of units in all the 20 ministries as well as those working in other national government agencies (Semi-Autonomous Governmental Agencies - SAGAs). At the county government level, the study targeted members of the County Executive (CECs) as well as Members of the County Assembly (MCAs) all who play a key role in policy formulation at the county government level.

Purposive sampling was used to select the 3 oldest public and 2 oldest private universities to comprise the sample for the study. The selected universities are:

Table 1: Sample Universities

UNIVERSITY	CATEGORY	AGE (YEARS)
University of Nairobi (UoN)	Public	43
Moi University (MU)	Public	29
Kenyatta University (KU)	Public	28
University of Eastern Africa, Baraton	Private	12
Catholic University of Eastern Africa	Private	11

Data were collected from two schools/faculties in each university: Education and Humanities/Arts. In each school, 50% of the departments were sampled. The academic heads of those departments as well as individual researchers were the respondents. In addition, data was collected from senior officers in the universities in charge of research, innovation and dissemination and related activities.

With regard to research uptake, data were collected at the national government level from 3 of the 19 ministries. The three ministries which were purposively selected because they are more inclined to providing direct social services to the citizens are: Education, Health, & Agriculture. The heads of directorates/units/sections and their officers were the respondents. Data was also collected from all the heads of research units in the ministries. Data was also collected from relevant agencies of the national government such as SAGAs. These officers/bureaucrats play a key role in crafting policies at the national level, and they provided information helpful in answering the question on extent of research utilization in crafting policies.

At the County government level, 5 counties out of the 47 were purposively selected to participate in the study. They were Nairobi, Nandi, Uasin Gishu, Machakos and Kajiado. These counties have close proximity to the universities being studied and they are good case studies on the investigation of the relationship between research production and research up-take. At the County government level, data was collected from the County Secretary and 5 County Executive officers in charge of: Education, Gender & Social Services; Health & Sanitation; Agriculture & Livestock Development; Lands Housing and Physical

Planning; Environment, Water and Natural Resources. Data was collected from 30% of the Members of the County Assembly. These two categories of respondents are the ones tasked with development of policies at the County government level and they shed light on the research question on the extent of utilization of research findings in policy formulation. Data was also collected from the representatives of the national government at the County level who include County Commissioners and County directors. Data was collected through three sets of instruments: Document analysis guide, structured questionnaires, and Key informants interview guides. The data obtained from this study was analysed using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. SPSS Version 21 computer package was used for quantitative data analysis while qualitative data was analysed through listing various themes in-order to identify the main ones and their frequencies/counts.

Prior to commencement of the research, a research permit was obtained from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation. Additional permission and clearance was obtained from each County (County Commissioner) and from the County Director of Education and the Ministry Headquarters as well as at the individual universities visited. The study was also guided by the Kenyatta University Ethical Review policy. The principles of confidentiality and informed consent were upheld throughout the research process. Anonymity was observed at all levels possible, and the information and data gathered were treated as research information and utilized only for that purpose.

Results

The key objective of the study was to establish the extent to which Social Science research produced by universities in Kenya is utilized by the relevant national and county government ministries and agencies to inform the policy making process. To address this objective data were gathered from both the producers (universities) and expected users of research (national and county governments).

Universities' Perspective on Research Utilization

Firstly, the study sought the views of the research producers themselves (university social scientists) on the utilisation of their research. The general consensus from university-based researchers was that government policy makers and implementers minimally utilized social science research produced by the universities. Table 2 below captures the views generated through the survey.

Table 2 University-Based Social Scientists' Perceptions on Extent of Use Of The Research They Produce By Type Of University

		TYPE OF UNIVERSITY		
		Public	Private	Total
Has any of your research been utilized by a ministry or government agency?	Yes	43 (42.2%)	5 (16.7%)	48
	No	59 (57.8%)	25 (83.3%)	84
Total		102	30	132

Table 2 shows that according to a majority of public (59: 57.8%) and private (25: 83.3%) university-based social scientists in the five target universities, utilization of university produced social science research by government was low. On the whole, researchers from public universities reported higher utilization of their research compared to those from private universities at 42.2% and 16.7% respectively. These views from university researchers on low research utilization are corroborated by the Heads of Departments (HoDs) who are university academic managers. The heads of departments were asked whether or not any research done by staff members in their departments had been used for policy formulation and programme implementation. Their responses are captured in Table 3.

Table 3 HoD's perception on utilisation of University produced social science research by Government

		TYPE OF UNIVERSITY		
		Public	Private	Total
Has any of your staff's research been utilized by a ministry or government agency?	Yes	3 (21.4%)	1 (20.0%)	4
	No	11 (78.6%)	4 (80.0%)	15
	Total	14	5	19

Data in Table 3 shows that the HoDs in both public and private universities gave a low rating of research utilisation by government ministries and agencies at 21.4% and 20% respectively. It is clear that for public universities, the rating of research utilisation by the HoDs (21.4%) is far much lower than that given by the individual researchers (42.2%) in Table 2. A comparative analysis of the individual researchers' and HoD's perceptions on research utilisation is given in Table 4.

Table 4 HoD's and Individual Researchers' rating of extent of research utilisation by government ministries and agencies

CATEGORY	Yes	No	Total
HoDs	4 (21.1%)	15 (78.9%)	19
Individual Researchers	48 (36.4%)	84 (63.6%)	132

Data in Table 4 shows that HoDs in both public and private universities rated research utilisation by government ministries and agencies at 21.1% against 36.4% given by individual researchers. The difference in rating implies a disconnect between individual researchers and HoDs on research utilisation meaning that there could be some studies that are utilised, but the individual researchers fail to inform their HoDs.

The above quantitative data from individual researchers and HoDs which point to very low levels of utilization of university produced social science by government policy makers was corroborated by the interview data gathered from the deans of schools/faculties. The deans, who are academic leaders, indicated very low utilisation of university produced social science research to inform policy. One of the deans interviewed was categorical that virtually, no research is used to inform policy. The dean stated "Not aware

of any use of research, not during my time as dean.” Another dean stated that: “Research utilization does not exist. As a dean, I am very concerned that most of the research we do ends up in shelves.” This was echoed by another dean from a different university who noted that “Social science research by faculty from my school is hardly utilized by government agencies. Only a few NGOs get to utilize research findings.” Similar sentiments were raised by another dean who noted that, “There is little utilization of social science research produced by members of the school on the part of the government agencies and policy makers.”

These low rating of research utilization by the deans implies that either the rating of utilisation of 36.4% reported by the researchers in Table 4 could be overrated or that there exists a communication breakdown between individual researchers and the dean’s office on research related issues. The latter could be the case as suggested by one dean from a public university who noted that his school did not have a formal mechanism of monitoring research by its staff. The absence of a formal research monitoring system could be construed to mean that researchers were left to self-declare what they were doing to the deans.

The few social scientists who indicated that their research had been used were asked to name the particular studies. Table 5 lists some of the studies that the researchers reported were utilised by government ministries and agencies.

Table 5 Social Science studies reported to have been utilized by government ministries and agencies

TITLE OF STUDY	UTILIZING MINISTRY/AGENCY
Study on transport infrastructure and public transport	Ministry of transport
The role of administrative boundaries in the Pokot-Turkana relations	National police service/KNCHR
Language teaching in Schools	Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD)
Informing policy issues	Ministry of education
Implementation of the secondary school music curriculum in Kenya	Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development
Graduate employability in Kenya	MoEST
Food security and small holder farmers. Ministry of Agriculture, Audit	KNCHR/ AG/ Interior
Factors contributing to suicide and murder among police	Kenya Police
Building capacity through quality preparation of teachers	Ministry of Education
Assessment of prevention measures for drugs	Ministry of Interior
Research on human rights	Ministry of Sports and Heritage
Appreciation of the UNOBI project which culminated in the formation of the Uasin Gishu children's Services forum -under the social services	Children department
Assessment of Radicalization-	IGAD/ Ministry of interior

Table 5 shows some studies that were conducted by researchers from the universities and consumed by various government ministries and departments. However, the present study was not able to establish if they had been conducted as consultancies or independent studies.

From the interviews conducted it also emerged that there are some private agencies which made use of research findings from universities to improve their programmes or execute interventions. Some of the local organizations that were said to have utilised research findings were Kenya National Union of Teachers (research on teacher appraisal), and the Kenya Conference of the Catholic Bishops (research on religious matters and curriculum reforms). One of the universities did a research that involved 10,000 respondents whose results were utilised by a church in the drafting of its Strategic Plan. It was reported that international organizations also made use of research findings. Some of these organizations mentioned include Action Aid, UNICEF, World Vision, AMREF and UNESCO. It also emerged that most of these studies conducted by the universities were commissioned by the private agencies. Once the research is done, these organizations utilise the results to meet their original objectives.

National Governments' Perspective on Research Utilization

A majority of the respondents who were interviewed from the national government ministries and SAGAs indicated that social science research reports were not used to inform policy. This corroborated the responses given by the university researchers who gave very low rating of research utilisation by government ministries and agencies as captured in the preceding section. In the interviews, the Directors of research in the three ministries (Agriculture, Health and Education) which were the focus of this study indicated that there was near zero utilisation of university-based social science research in their ministries. In fact, the directors of research in the three ministries were not even aware of social science research produced by the universities and wondered how they could utilize that which they were not aware of.

Contrary to expectations, some of the target ministries and agencies did not seem to appreciate the relevance of social science research to their work. For example, asked whether they made use of university produced social science research, directors of research in the Ministry of Agriculture and fisheries emphasized that they had specific bodies that conducted research for their utilization. One of the officers noted:

In this ministry, we have KALRO and IRLI that conduct whatever specialized research we may need to inform our specific agricultural needs. Therefore, it is highly unlikely that we utilize any social science research from universities in our policy making.

The same position was reiterated by the Ministry of Health respondent who stated that they relied on the Kenya Medical Research Institute (KEMRI) to conduct their studies. However, it is worth noting that these research institutes in these two ministries deal mostly with scientific research. The implication here is that the resultant policies and other decisions are not informed by knowledge from the social sciences yet policies have huge social implications.

County Government's Perspective on Research Utilization

At the time of the research, County governments were young (about 3 years old) and were still putting governance structures in place. However, these were modelled on the national government structures with Members of County Assembly (MCA) as the political leaders and county ministry officers playing the role

of executive officers. From the quantitative data, it was clear that utilisation of university produced social science research at this level was low (4.9%: Figure 1). Indeed, a majority of the County government policy makers and practitioners (44: 69.8%) were not aware of any social science research produced by universities. Just like the directors at the national government level observed, the County government policy makers and practitioners could not utilise that which they were not aware of.

Body Of Knowledge Relied on To Inform Policy Decisions at The County Level

The study sought to establish what body of knowledge was relied on to inform policy decisions at the County level by the County policy makers and practitioners. Their responses are captured in Figure 1 below.

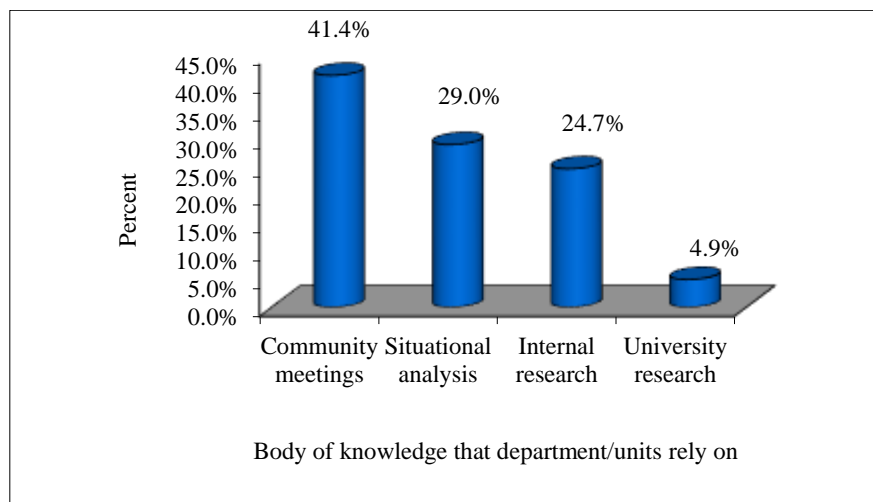


Figure 1: Body of knowledge that department/units in the County relied on in making decisions and formulating policies

Figure 1 shows that only 4 (4.9%) of County policy makers and practitioners said that research departments in the county relied on Universities' research to inform policy. The majority (33: 41.4%) of County policy makers and practitioners said that the department/units in the county relied on community meetings to make decisions and to formulate policies, 23 (29.0%) said that they relied on situational analysis followed by 20(24.7%) of them who said that they relied on internal research.

A follow up on the 4.9% of County policy makers and practitioners who indicated they made use of university produced social science research revealed that it was used for a variety of purposes as indicated in Figure 2.

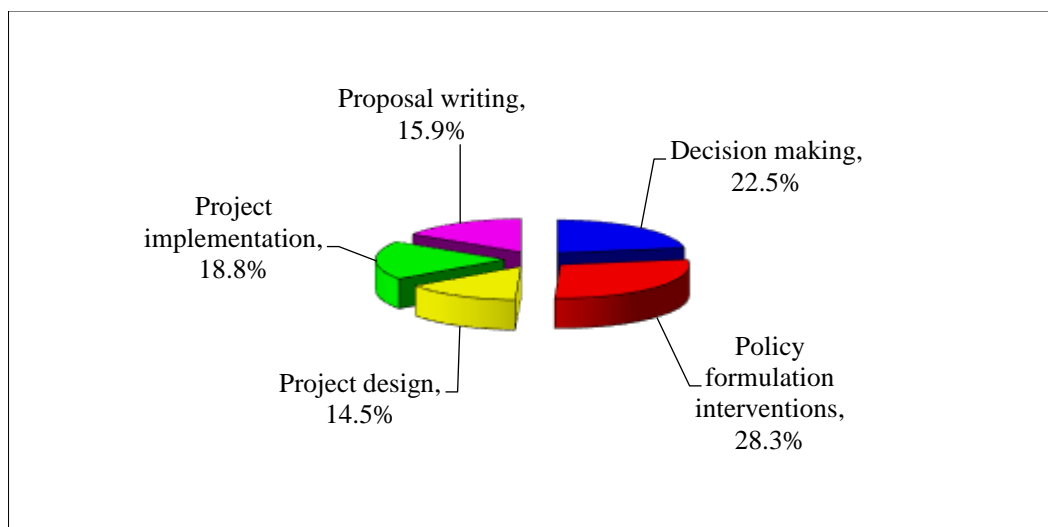


Figure 2: Ways social science research produced by universities was utilized by relevant county departments.

Data from Figure 2 shows that majority of county policy makers and practitioners (23: 28.3%) reported that social science research was used in policy formulation interventions, 18 (22.5%) in decision making, 15 (18.8%) in project implementation, 13 (15.9%) in writing proposals whereas 11(14.5%) said that it was used to come up with project design.

Some of the studies that were mentioned as having been utilized by the County Policy makers and practitioners are:

- Study on Social development, Psychosocial, civic education (KCA University)
- Research on challenges facing youths (Institute of Development Studies, University of Nairobi, 2014).
- Study on Poverty and coping strategies (CUEA)
- Value chain development in dairy sector (Moi University)
- Challenges in implementation of devolution (University of Nairobi, 2014)

From the qualitative data gathered, it was evident that there was little if any use of university produced Social Science Research by the counties. Virtually all the officers interviewed indicated that they did not utilise research in policy formulation. For example, in both Nairobi and Machakos counties, the officers interviewed indicated that Social Science research is not considered in policy formulation. In Machakos County, the officer was categorical: *“Research findings do not influence policy.”* Another officer from Nairobi County noted: *“Not much consideration is given to research findings in decision making.”*

Indeed, even as counties are setting up their own structures, they are closely modelled on those in the central government. It appeared that officers with a research function as part of their work were chiefly expected

to conduct research themselves. From Kajiado, there were reports that a customer survey had been conducted but it was not clear if the outcomes of the survey were used to inform policy formulation

Discussion

A triangulation of responses from both sides (universities and government) shows strong agreement between the two that there was very low utilisation of university produced social science research by government policy makers in policy formulation and programme implementation. This means that a majority of the policies in Kenya at both levels of government (national and county) are not informed by social science research produced by the universities.

This low utilisation of university produced social science research by the two levels of government raises questions about its usefulness. Scholars have argued that that for research to be useful, it has to be put to practical use (Cooper, Levin, & Campbell, 2009; Davies, Nutley, & Smith, 2000; Levin 2011; Sutcliffe & Court, 2005). One of the practical uses of research that has been underscored by various scholars is using it to inform and shape policy (Nutley, Walter, and Davies 2007; Howlett , 2009; Sá, Li, and Faubert 2011; and Brown 2012). This view is also supported by Gough's (2004) who stated that "*the importance of research to policy-making has become increasingly overt, with knowledge being seen to be given a higher profile.*" (p. 45). Use of research information for policy making has led to the emergence of the Evidence-Based Policy (EBP) movement and can be categorized into three basic types, namely the instrumental use, conceptual use, and political use (Amara, Ouimet, & Landry, 2004; Neilson, 2001; Nutley et al., 2007; Tseng, 2012). The focus of the study was mainly on the first type of use (instrumental) and the conclusion is that social science research produced by universities in Kenya did not play the instrumental use of informing and shaping policy decisions.

A study by DfiD (2019) made a worrying revelation that in Kenya, research seems not to be valued for its contribution to the economy and society, but instead, is often pursued to leverage external funding. The report adds that most universities lack the capacity or incentive to perform knowledge exchange activities and research uptake by government remains very limited. It is further noted that a disconnect between the national research policy and the research policies of universities exists. Edwards (2005) also argues that researchers in many parts of the world, researchers often view governments as being averse to risk, too short term-oriented and anti-intellectual, while governments perceive policy research as being irrelevant to current policy debates and to day-to-day issues in program delivery. As such, Head (2010) advises that the research and policy communities need to overcome mutual ignorance and indifference for policy to be informed by research evidence. In view of the foregoing, Raadschelders (2011) concludes that such fundamental differences between researchers and policy makers impede a process that would otherwise see academic research inform and influence policy directly and more abundantly. These sentiments could provide some explanation for the low uptake by policy makers of university-produced research.

Conclusions

The study concludes that there was very low utilisation of university produced social science research in the policy making and formulation process at both the national and county government levels. The study also concludes that channels of communicating research findings between the universities and the

government levels were lacking which could have majorly contributed to the low utilisation of social science research in policymaking processes.

Recommendations

The study recommends that universities should create formal research linkages and partnerships with government ministries to enable dialogue between the two in the entire research process from conceptualisation to dissemination. The universities should also establish/strengthen research dissemination units as well as move beyond the traditional channels of disseminating research findings and embrace innovative approaches and media. In addition, the Kenya government should work with universities in meeting its research needs in order to build universities' institutional research capacities and cultures, rather than opting to work with consultants. Lastly, a body should be established to collect and review research produced by universities (and others) to identify the cumulative findings on given policy issues and advise policy makers appropriately. Such a body would also monitor and identify what research is required for policy and practice so as to advise research funders and university researchers on the research concerns they should prioritise.

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