

What Little We Know: A Scoping Review of the Research Utilization Literature in Education Policy

David R. Garcia, *Arizona State University*

Abstract

This scoping review covers the academic literature on research utilization from its emergence in the 1970s to 2022, with a focus on empirical research conducted on K-20 education policies in the United States. John W. Kingdon's policy process is applied to distinguish the perspectives of politicians from those of professional staff, because these two groups have different roles and responsibilities in the policy process. The findings reveal that very few empirical studies of the use of research in education policy have been conducted on politicians—those primarily responsible for creating education policy. Rather, most research has been conducted on professional staff whose primary responsibility is policy implementation. Thus, there is limited knowledge of how politicians themselves use research, calling into question the generalization of the academic literature to include politicians, a crucial group of policymaking actors.

Résumé

Cette revue exploratoire examine la littérature académique sur l'utilisation de la recherche, depuis l'émergence de cette littérature dans les années 1970 jusqu'en 2022, en mettant l'accent sur les recherches empiriques consacrées aux politiques éducatives de la maternelle à l'université aux États-Unis. Le modèle du processus politique de John W. Kingdon est utilisé pour distinguer les perspectives des politiciens de celles du personnel professionnel, car ces deux groupes assument des responsabilités et des rôles différents dans l'élaboration des politiques. Les résultats révèlent

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SIMON FRASER
UNIVERSITY



que très peu d'études sur l'utilisation de la recherche en politique éducative ont été menées auprès de politiciens, même s'ils sont les principaux responsables de l'élaboration de cette politique. La plupart des recherches ont plutôt porté sur le personnel professionnel dont la responsabilité première est la mise en œuvre de la politique. Ainsi, les connaissances sur la manière dont les politiciens recourent à la recherche sont limitées, ce qui remet en question l'application de la littérature universitaire aux politiciens, un groupe pourtant crucial dans l'élaboration de politiques.

Keywords / Mots clés : John W. Kingdon, scoping review, research utilization, education policy, politics / John W. Kingdon, revue exploratoire, utilisation de la recherche, politique éducative, politique

Overview

To set the stage, the article starts by identifying the key actors in policymaking, with particular emphasis on politicians and the various professional staff who support the policy process. In the literature review, formal and informal roles in policymaking are examined. The distinct roles and responsibilities of these policy actors are detailed by separating politicians from other policy actors, such as professional staff and outsiders (e.g., advocacy and research organizations, think tanks). The review identifies nuanced understandings of research utilization in education policy that are often obfuscated when different policy actors are commingled into a single group as “policy-makers” or “decision makers,” a common tendency in the academic literature. The methods section details how articles were selected for the scoping review, followed by a discussion of the implications of the major finding that very few empirical studies in research utilization in K-20 education policy have been conducted with politicians—those primarily responsible for creating education policy. Rather, most research has been conducted with professional staff whose primary responsibility is either advisory in nature or largely centred on policy implementation.

This article draws on Kingdon's (2003) lasting and extremely useful perspective of the policy process to distinguish the different roles and responsibilities of key policy actors with formal roles in policymaking, namely politicians versus professional staff. Kingdon (2003) argues that politicians, defined as elected officials and their appointees, are those who set policy, meaning that these political actors determine “the list of subjects or problems to which governmental officials, and people outside of government closely associated with those officials, are paying some attention at any given time” (p. 3). Professional staff are the “hidden cluster of specialists in the bureaucracy and in professional communities” (Kingdon, 2003, p. 19), which influence the selection of alternatives which are put forth to carry out policy.

At the federal level, politicians include the President of the United States and members of Congress (U.S. senators and U.S. House of Representatives). At the state level, politicians include elected officials such as governors, members of state legislators (state senators and representatives) and chief state school officers who are either elected or are appointed by politicians, depending on the state. At the district level, politicians include locally elected school governing board members.

Governmental agencies employ professional staff and have a formal role in the policy process. At the federal and state levels, professional staff can be divided into two groups: First, legislative staff (e.g., legislative aides and formal policy advisors) who serve at the discretion of politicians and work intimately with politicians in an advisory role on policy creation. Second, agency staff, such as federal and state agency directors and other government employees, who provide information to politicians through channels such as formal reports and ad hoc inquiries. At the school district level, professional staff include the district superintendent who “is the school board’s one and only employee” (Starr, 2018). District administrators also are professional staff who serve at the discretion of elected school governing boards.

Lastly, the academic literature on research utilization in education often includes outsider groups and organizations that do not have a formal role in the policy process but seek to influence policy through means such as providing research (e.g., policy briefs and white papers). This large group of outsiders includes think tanks, intermediary organizations and academics (Table 1).

Table 1. Policy actors by type

Level	Politicians	Professional staff	Outsiders
Federal	President	Legislative: Legislative Assistants, Aides, Policy Advisors	Think Tanks
	Congress	Agency - Federal Agency Directors and Staff	Intermediary Organizations
State	Governor	Legislative: Legislative Assistants, Aides, Policy Advisors	Community-Based Organizations
	Legislature	Agency: State Agency Directors and Staff	Advocacy Groups
	Chief State School Officers		Vendors
District	Governing Boards	Superintendent	University Research Centers
		Administrators	Academics

This scoping review covers the research utilization literature from its emergence in the 1970s to 2022 (Ness, 2010) with a focus on empirical research conducted on K-20 education policy in the United States. Questions addressed include: Who are the participants included in empirical studies on research utilization in education policy?¹ What are the perspectives of research utilization by different policy actors (politicians, professional staff, and outsiders)?

Literature review

What is policymaking and who makes policy?

Policymaking involves setting the direction or course of action for government, including education. Cohen, Moffitt, and Goldin (2007) divide policymaking into two main components: aims and resources. Aims are the “changes in practice that policies seek” (p. 528). The perspective taken in this article aligns with the Education Commission of the States, where elected officials, such as governors, members of Congress, state legislators and school governing board members, are responsible for

establishing the aims or direction of education policy (Railey, 2017). Politicians also make financial appropriation decisions to accomplish policy aims, referring to setting the aims or direction of policy as “policymaking.”

Resources refer to the instruments, local capabilities and the environment in which policy aims are implemented. Here, professional staff (e.g., legislative staff, agency heads, district superintendents) make a myriad of critical decisions to facilitate policy implementation. Professional staff work at ground zero where policy aims are realized based on the capacity and limitations at the local level. Cohen et al. (2007) argue further that “many public managers are both central controllers and street-level bureaucrats” where “the roles of ‘policy maker’ and ‘practitioner’ converge in the same person and office” (p. 525).

Cohen et al. (2007) present an inclusive view of “policymaking” that combines two distinct groups under the same label: those who set policy aims and those who implement policy at the site level. The conflation of all policy-related decisions as “policymaking” may lead to combining both politicians and professional staff into a single category as “policymakers,” a commingling that blurs the important distinctions between distinct policy actors.

Per Kingdon (2003), however, professional staff generally do not set the direction or course of action in policy. Rather, their primary responsibility is to influence how the course of action is implemented. Their decisions shape rules, regulations, and organizational cultures, all of which are vital to the success or failure of policy. These decisions, however, are made within the confines of the policy aims set by politicians. For example, in formal rulemaking, professional staff are constrained by the statutory jurisdiction granted to them by Congress (Garvey, 2017). Since the earliest research studies, professional staff have recognized the limitations of their role. In 1979, those staff at the highest echelons of government lamented that “the job often looks like rubber stamping decisions already made” (Weiss, 1979, p. 400). More recently, a Chief State School Officer observed in 2009, “new leadership, new governor, new commissioner, new whatever, I mean they are going to drive the policy agenda for the state” (Nelson, Leffler, & Hansen, 2009, p. 15).

The intent of this article is not to diminish the role of professional staff, but to distinguish the policymaking role of politicians from the policy implementation responsibilities of professional staff because maintaining this distinction makes clear the unique roles and contributions of each group, particularly politicians. Ultimately, politicians cast the votes that pass the laws that enact policy. Politicians are the primary targets of direct lobbying efforts to influence their votes. Politicians are accountable for policy outcomes either in the public sphere (e.g., press, social media) or at the ballot box, where politicians earn the privilege of creating policy (i.e., setting policy aims) by winning elections.

Applying Kingdon's distinction between politicians and professional staff

To separate politicians from professional staff this article makes three specific assumptions that distinguish the two groups: 1) most professional staff likely are exposed to either academic or professional knowledge in education policy, research, or both, to carry out their specialized roles. Politicians, on the other hand, are not

expected to have an academic or professional background in education policy or research; 2) politicians and professional staff have different responsibilities and carry out distinct roles in the policymaking process; and 3) the policy positions held by politicians constrain the ability of professional staff to impact policy.

Politicians and professional staff have different background knowledge of education policy and research

In general, professional staff in education policy contexts are expected to have some academic or professional knowledge in education or public policy and are expected to stay abreast of the research in their field as part of their job responsibilities (Wye, Brangan, Cameron, Gabbay, Klein, & Pope, 2015). For example, according to the U.S. Senate Employment Office, the preferred experience for all legislative staff positions includes a bachelor's or advanced degree, and legislative staff are expected to have "related policy experience," knowledge of a specific policy area (e.g., education), and legislative experience commensurate with the level of the position (Table 2). At the district level, an advanced degree in education or a related field is a general job requirement for administrative positions (Drexel University, n.d.; Peete, n.d.).

Commonly, legislative staff have attended universities or graduate schools and hold degrees in an education-related field or public policy. Therefore, they have likely completed courses in research methods and/or policy analysis. Professional staff may have carried out policy research themselves, either as part of a dissertation or thesis, or with a professor. Through the course of their education and training, professional staff have likely become familiar with research articles and reports, even the work of specific academics. In fact, many education policy programs seek to prepare students for these very types of professional roles.

There are no degree or policy experience requirements to serve as a politician at either the federal, state, or district level. The academic training and professional experiences of many politicians are likely not in education research or policy. For example, Hird (2009) studied a nationally representative sample of politicians and found that 48 percent of politicians identified their profession as "legislation," 21 percent cited medicine and law, and only 8 percent identified their profession as education. Among school governing board members nationally, 27 percent worked in education (Hess & Meeks, 2010).²

Furthermore, politicians have multiple committee assignments and create policy in multiple areas. There is too little time and too many commitments for politicians to develop a thorough expertise in all policy areas in which they make decisions. For this reason, Kingdon (2003) described expertise among members of Congress as, "a system in which generalists learn enough about a given subject matter to help other generalists, their colleagues" (p. 37). Alternatively, as a veteran legislator described expertise among his colleagues at the state level, "We have about an inch of knowledge. I always say we're an inch deep and about a mile wide. We know a little bit about a lot of things" (Bogensneider & Corbett, 2010, p. 55). Even those legislators who were considered "education specialists" by their colleagues "openly stated that their staffs were the ones who really knew education policy" (Marshall, Mitchell, & Wirt, 1985, p.106).

Table 2. Academic and professional employment requirements for legislative staff

	Career level	Key duties	Education	Policy/Professional experience	Legislative experience
Correspondent	Entry/Mid	Conduct research to formulate correspondence with constituents; track legislation	Bachelor's or advanced degree	0–2+ years of professional experience	None
Aide	Mid	Prepare Member for hearings and meetings by writing background reports and memoranda, briefing them on current issues or legislation, and staffing them at committee hearings and executive sessions; meet with constituents, agency staff, other stakeholders; draft constituent correspondence and legislation	Bachelor's or advanced degree	Minimum of 2–4+ years of related policy experience, policy area experience as noted	Knowledge of the legislative process
Assistant	Professional	Handle portfolio of 1–9 policy issues; draft bills and amendments; prepare Member for hearings and meetings by writing background reports and memoranda, briefing them on current issues or legislation, and staffing them at committee hearings and executive session; represent Member in congressional and public settings	Bachelor's or advanced degree	Minimum of 3–5+ years of related policy experience, knowledge of assigned policy area(s)	Knowledge of the legislative process
Policy Advisor/ Legislative Director	Professional	Monitor legislative developments; oversee development of vote recommendations; coordinate briefings on legislation or policy developments; create and advance legislative proposals; draft, analyze, and track amendments and legislation; develop recommendations for votes and co-sponsorship of bills; represent Member in congressional and public settings	Bachelor's, Juris Doctorate or advanced degree	At least of 5–10+ years of related policy experience, detailed knowledge of assigned policy area(s)	Advanced knowledge of the legislative process and prior Hill or administration experience

Sources: Senate Employment Office (n.d.), Congressional Research Service (2021)

Politicians and professional staff have different roles and responsibilities in the policy process

Through the course of their responsibilities, professional staff are more likely than politicians to interact with content experts and are expected to understand and engage with education research. Professional staff may be found behind the scenes with other staff and content experts, remaining largely anonymous. They attend informational sessions on research and policy issues where “ideas from the academic literature are regularly discussed by Hill staffers, bureaucrats, and lobbyists” (Kingdon, 2003, p. 54). Also, professional staff are not impacted by election results in the same sense as politicians. Professional staff may continue in the same or a similar role, regardless of which politicians win or lose elections. Professional staff fulfill a key role in a policy context as gatekeepers to politicians. Politicians can be overwhelmed with information, including research. In response, politicians create systems and strategies to cope with information overload. These “lines of defense” are dependent on professional staff, along with trusted confidants, to help politicians determine which information merits their attention at any given time (Walgrave & DeJaeghere, 2017).

As research brokers, professional staff are charged with preparing and presenting research to politicians who count on them as “a kind of life memory of facts and figures to be mobilized any time” (Walgrave & DeJaeghere, 2017, p. 236). As gatekeepers, professional staff help determine which research and researchers get an audience with politicians. For example, legislative staffers, largely early-career professionals or interns who rotate regularly, filter information for politicians. Department heads who run major federal or state agencies are gatekeepers charged with directing, synthesizing, or presenting research for use by politicians. At the school district level, administrators are professional staff who influence what information is presented to elected school governing board members.

Conversely, politicians serve a more public role than professional staff and use more general information to communicate a broader message to a broader audience. As public figures, politicians have electoral responsibilities and accountability that extend beyond their technical role to set public policy. Compelled by electoral forces, politicians are responsible for fund-raising and maintaining political allegiances. They are required to explain, promote, and defend policy ideas to groups of laypersons away from the halls of government and to communicate their points through the media. Unlike professional staff, politicians rely on soundbites, anecdotes, and stories to communicate their points to general audiences. Lastly, as public figures, politicians are not anonymous. Their names and faces become associated with specific policy proposals that they must explain and defend before diverse, non-technical audiences.

The ability of professional staff to impact policy is constrained by the policy positions held by politicians

Professional staff serve at the discretion of politicians or, at a minimum, work in agencies that are charged with carrying out policies set forth by elected bodies, a dynamic that has not changed in the almost 50 years of research utilization covered in this review. As Florio, Behrmann, and Goltz (1979) observed, “members of Congress retain final authority to veto staff recommendations; staffers work within the con-

straints of the policy directions and orientations of the members for whom they work” (p. 61). Thus, professional staff can only influence policy formation as fast and as far as politicians are willing to go, and only when politicians are ready to move. As Kingdon (2003) noted:

It is important to remember, however, that staffers do all of these things within limits that are set by the senators and representatives who hire and can fire them. Even respondents with the highest estimates of staff importance frequently refer to the staff’s need to “sell their boss” on an idea. (p. 41)

At the agency level, previous research has found that professional staff often do not view themselves as making policy decisions. Rather, they view themselves as responding to mandates from their political superiors. As Nelson and colleagues (2009) noted, “In our study, the most frequently mentioned factor in both facilitating and impeding change was the need to react to policy, legislation, and mandates from the top down” (p. 11).

Certainly, street-level bureaucrats have discretion in policy implementation (Lipsky, 1980; Taylor, 2007), but in situations where professional staff disagree with political leaders, it is a delicate, even perilous task for professional staff to get out in front of the policy positions held by elected and appointed officials. When professional staff embark on dramatic policy shifts, these actions are contingent on the permission of politicians (Hart-Tervalon & Garcia, 2014). At best, professional staff can take advantage of whatever latitude is available to them to influence the range of policy options available *after* politicians have set the policy direction (Florio et al., 1979).

Therefore, when one reads about how school district administrators use research (Coburn, Honig & Stein, 2009; Coburn & Talbert, 2006), their actions are limited by the policies set forth by locally elected school governing boards who hire and fire them. Research use by federal and state agency officials is limited by the policy positions of politicians who make policy decisions with electoral implications in mind (Barnes, Goertz, & Massell, 2014; McDonnell, 1988).

Methods

The Arksey and O’Malley (2005) framework for a scoping review is appropriate for this study because mapping out the participants in research utilization studies by the roles they play in the policy process is a novel analytical approach in the research utilization literature. The study encompasses the breadth of the academic literature on research utilization in U.S. K-20 education policy without assessing the quality or rigour of the studies as a requisite for inclusion (Levac, Colquhoun, & O’Brien, 2010; Munn, Peters, Stern, Tufanaru, McArthur, & Aromataris, 2018). A scoping study is also appropriate for clarifying key concepts and characteristics in the literature and identifying knowledge gaps (Davis, Drey, & Gould, 2009).

All articles that included references to any data collection were considered empirical, regardless of study design. Articles that did not involve empirical research methods were coded as “non-empirical” and excluded from the analysis. In total, 52 percent of the records identified through the search procedures were non-empirical. Most of the non-empirical studies provided theoretical perspectives or advice without

empirical research in support (Oliver & Cairney, 2019). In other cases, authors conducted literature reviews that yielded meta-findings or syntheses about the state of the research utilization literature but did not conduct empirical research themselves (Cousins & Leithwood, 1986; Gorard, See, & Siddiqui, 2020; Henig, 2012; Herbert, 2014; Jung & Kirst, 1986). Lastly, this study focused on articles that examined research utilization in the U.S. policy context.³

Search procedures

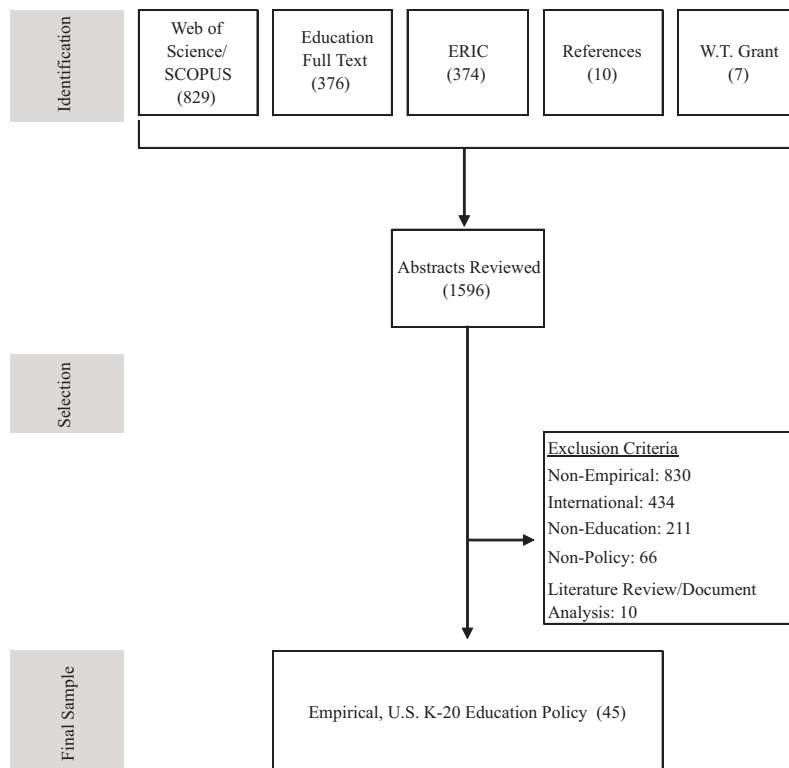
The search procedure included the sources suggested by Arksey and O'Malley (2005) as part of an expansive review, including electronic databases, reference lists, citations from selected journals (in this case citations from a seminal article), and a relevant organization in the field. The four electronic databases were chosen because they are fruitful sources of empirical research on education policy and research utilization (Figure 1).

1. Web of Science/SCOPUS: The search terms "Weiss, C*" in the full text, "meanings" in the reference section, and the words "policy" and "research" in the abstract were input to identify articles that cited Weiss' (1979) seminal article, "The Many Meanings of Research Utilization."⁴ The Web of Science/SCOPUS search yielded 829 results.
2. Education Full Text (EBSCOHost): The ERIC and EBSCOHost searches were conducted using the descriptors "research utilization," "research use," "knowledge utilization," or "knowledge mobilization" along with the word "policy" as the base terms for all searches. "Policy" was included as a search term to filter out articles about research utilization in other settings such as in classrooms or among higher education professionals and students. The initial searches included the terms "evidence-based" and "data-driven." These terms were excluded in later searches, however, because they yielded a high number of records on data use at the school level among teachers for the purpose of making student instructional decisions, and the focus of this article is on the inclusion of politicians in empirical studies. The Education Full Text search yielded 376 records.
3. Education Resources Information Center (ERIC): The ERIC search was conducted using the same search terms as the EBSCOHost search and yielded 374 records.
4. Reference Sections: The reference sections of the final sample were searched for any additional articles that met the search criteria. The references yielded 10 unique records.
5. W.T. Grant Foundation: The William T. Grant Foundation has funded a dedicated grant program on "Improving the Use of Research Evidence" since 2003. Summaries of the grant awards are archived on the William T. Grant Foundation website (wtgrantfoundation.org). The summaries were downloaded and searched using the words "policymaker" and "policymakers," yielding 37 grant projects. The published articles associated with the W.T. Grant awards were captured using the aforementioned search engines along with Google Scholar. The W.T. Grant Foundation did not award any grants that involved the words "politician" or "politicians" but did include two studies involving "legislators." This search yielded seven unique records.

The search procedures effectively excluded the “grey” literature because very few empirical studies were found in the initial searches that included the grey literature, an outcome consistent with a previous study that included the grey literature (Oliver & Cairney, 2019).

To focus on empirical research, all records were excluded if they were tagged as guides, reviews, speeches, opinion papers, reference materials, or editorials. Records included journal articles, reports (descriptive, evaluative, general), books, book sections, or historical materials. Hereafter, records are referred to as “articles.”

Figure 1. Record identification and selection to final sample



Article selection

The inclusion criteria involved English language articles published from 1970 to 2022. A total of 1,596 abstracts were downloaded into Mendeley for management (Figure 1). All the abstracts were read in full, and the following tags were used to identify those studies that aligned with research utilization in U.S. K-20 education policy:

1. “Empirical” or non-empirical”: Articles were identified as “empirical” if the abstracts included references to any type of data collection (e.g., surveys, interviews, focus groups) or any mention of research methods (e.g., samples, case studies). Articles identified as “non-empirical” did not include any mention of data collection, research methods, or involved literature or document reviews. The abstracts for all articles were read twice to ensure that those identified as “non-empirical” did not include research methods. Only “empirical” articles were included in the final sample.
2. “U.S.” or “international”: Articles where the research was conducted in the United States were tagged separately from articles where the research was conducted in an international context outside the U.S. Only studies conducted in or about research use in the U.S. were included in the final sample.

3. “Education” or “non-education”: Articles were tagged as pertaining to education if the studies were conducted in or about K-20 education. This tag effectively eliminated research conducted in other fields, such as nursing and social work, from the final sample.
4. Context: Articles coded as “policy” were conducted in contexts where either education policy is set (Congress, state legislatures, school district governing boards) or implemented (federal agencies, state education agencies, school district offices), including research in higher education policy. Articles related to research use among or by academics, education researchers, or postsecondary students were excluded because they were not conducted in a policy context (e.g., Farley-Ripple, Oliver, & Boaz, 2020; Kezar, 2000). Articles that involved data or research use among teachers or administrators within schools, almost exclusively for student achievement or school improvement purposes, also were excluded.

Final sample

The final sample included 45 empirical studies in a U.S. K-20 education policy context at either the federal, state, or school district levels. The search procedures and article selection criteria yielded a final sample count consistent with recent literature reviews on research use.⁵ All articles in the final sample were retrieved in their entirety for analysis. For all articles in the final sample, the quotes from individual research participants were coded based on the descriptions or labels provided by the authors (e.g., legislator, legislative aide, district superintendent). Participants were grouped into politicians, professional staff, or outsiders.

1. *Politicians*: politicians at either the federal, state, or district levels.
2. *Professional staff*: officials employed at either the federal, state, or school district levels that work in institutions such as federal departments, state education agencies, or school district central offices, along with legislative staff (e.g., legislative aides, policy advisors).
3. *Outsiders*: those not in a formal political or governmental position who seek to influence or inform policymaking at either the political or agency levels. Outsiders include those representing think tanks, intermediary organizations, advocacy organizations, and academia.

In some cases, the participant’s title was indeterminable based on either the description of the research sample or the labels associated with the quotes or results in the Findings sections. In many of these cases, the research participants were labelled with vague terms such as “policymakers,” “decision-makers,” or “leaders,” wherein one could not determine the participants’ specific roles in the policy process (see for example, Kaplan, Riedy, Van Horne, & Penuel, 2019; McDonnell & Weatherford, 2013; Swanson & Barlage, 2006).

Text analysis

The full text of the Findings sections for the articles in the final sample was downloaded into HyperResearch 4.5 for analysis. All text (quotes and summary findings) was coded per a four-step process. First, *in vivo* codes were used to capture the content of the text from the perspective of the research participants. Second, the text attributed to each research participant was grouped into one of the following

categories: politicians, professional staff, or outsiders. Third, structural coding was used to associate the text with specific roles and responsibilities of the policy process (e.g., communicating with legislators, rule/regulation development). Fourth, the codes were combined into themes, allowing for the identification of patterns by different policy actors, comparison of these patterns across different policy actors and the application of the findings to research use in the specific roles and responsibilities of the policy process (e.g., policy creation or policy implementation).

Findings

Of the 45 empirical studies of research utilization in a K-20 education policy context, 31 (69%) did not include any politicians in the research sample. These studies included outsiders seeking to influence policy or included professional staff at either the agency or site levels. For example, in Table 3, the DeBray, Scott, Lubienski, and Jabbar (2014) study included only outsiders (think tanks, intermediary organizations,

Table 3. Empirical articles on research utilization in a U.S. K-20 education policy setting, non-political

Outsiders	Agency staff	Site practitioners
Ben-Arieh, 2008	Ben-Arieh, 2008	Ben-Arieh, 2008
Debray et al., 2014	Coburn & Talbert, 2006	Corwin & Seashore Louis, 1982
Griswold, 1999	Coburn et al., 2009	Daly et al., 2014
Haselswerdt & Rigby, 2021	Corwin & Seashore Louis, 1982	Heinrich & Good, 2018
Hopkins et al., 2018	Daly et al., 2014	Honig et al., 2017
Natow, 2020a	Farley-Ripple, 2012	Hopkins et al., 2019
Natow, 2020b	Heinrich & Good, 2018	Hubbard & Ottoson, 1997
Orphan et al., 2021	Honig et al., 2017	Massell et al., 2015
Scott et al., 2015	Hopkins et al., 2018	Natow, 2020a
Scott & Jabbar, 2014	Hopkins et al., 2019	Natow, 2020b
Williams & McDermott, 2014	Hubbard & Ottoson, 1997	Ruef & Turnbull, 2001
Winton & Evans, 2016	Kang et al., 2010	Sprunger et al., 2018
	Kaplan et al., 2019	Yoshizawa, 2022
	Massell et al., 2015	
	McDonnell & Weatherford, 2013b	
	Natow, 2020a	
	Natow, 2020b	
	Penuel et al., 2017	
	Penuel et al., 2018	
	Ruef & Turnbull, 2001	
	Sprunger et al., 2018	
	Weiss et al., 2005	
	Yoshizawa, 2022	

advocacy groups),⁶ while the research samples in the Natow studies (Natow 2022a, 2022b) included outsiders (higher education associations), professional staff at the agency level (federal and state officials) and practitioners at the site level (accreditor associations). Only 14 articles included either politicians or legislative staff in the sample (Table 4), and in most of these cases, the sample included participants from

more than one policy group. For example, the research sample in Asen, Gurke, Conners, Solomon, and Gumm (2013) included politicians (school board members), professional staff (district superintendent and administrators) and outsiders (e.g., curriculum adviser). There were no articles on research use in U.S. K-20 education policy where politicians were the sole research participants.

Table 4. Empirical articles on research utilization in a U.S. K-20 education policy setting, political

	Professional staff			
Politicians	Legislative	Agency	Outsiders	Site
Asen et al., 2013	Florio et al., 1979	Asen et al., 2013	Asen et al., 2013	Kennedy, 1984
Gandara, 2019	Gandara, 2019	Huang et al., 2003	Gandara, 2019	
Gandara & Hearn, 2019	Gandara & Hearn, 2019	Jabbar et al., 2014	Gandara & Hearn, 2019	
Huang et al., 2003	Haskins & Margolis, 2014	Kennedy, 1984	Haskins & Margolis, 2014	
Jabbar et al., 2014	Huang et al., 2003	Nelson et al., 2009	Huang et al., 2003	
Kennedy, 1984	Jabbar et al., 2014	Shakespeare, 2008	Jabbar et al., 2014	
Marshall et al., 1985	Marshall et al., 1985		Rigby, 2005	
Nelson et al., 2009	Nelson et al., 2009		Scott et al., 2014	
Scott, et al., 2017	Rigby, 2005		Scott, et al., 2017	
Shakespeare, 2008	Shakespeare, 2008		Shakespeare, 2008	
	Scott et al., 2014			

The themes are organized starting with studies conducted with professional staff, followed by the findings on how politicians use research.

Professional staff

Four themes emerged from the research with professional staff.

Research conducted with professional staff generally focuses on policy implementation

Professional staff at the agency level primarily interact with practitioners to implement education policy. It stands to reason then that research conducted with agency staff focuses on policy implementation. For example, Penuel, Farrell, Allen, Toyama, and Coburn (2018) sampled district staff because decisions at the school district level “reach large numbers of students” (p. 541). Hopkins, Wiley, Penuel, and Farrell (2018) explored “the role of brokers in the exchange of research evidence among State Education Agency (SEA) leaders involved in supporting statewide policy implementation” (p.460). Honig, Venkateswaran, and McNeil (2017) investigated how district staff used research in their duties to help principals grow as instructional leaders, and Ruef and Turnbull (2001) chose their sample of agency officials to focus on “practical solutions to behavioural challenges” (p. 443), rather than policy creation.

Also, agency staff may have limited experience with and knowledge of policy creation because their interactions with politicians are either prohibited or restricted to authorized communication channels (e.g., see University of Texas System Board of Regents, n.d.). Or, as Corwin and Louis (1982) indicated in their study of agency officials at the National Institute of Education (NIE), “NIE employees are not permitted to deal directly with congressional staff. This restriction is intended to reduce ‘lobbying’ by program staff” (p. 629).

Professional staff had academic backgrounds in policy or research, or many years of experience in education

In the Daly, Finnigan, Jordan, Moolenaar, and Che (2014) study of research use in school improvement efforts, the average district leader had 23.5 years of experience as an educator. The research conducted by Hopkins and colleagues (2018) and Hopkins, Weddle, Gluckman, and Gautsch (2019) involved a highly educated sample where over 75 percent of participants held a master’s degree and 25 percent had completed or were completing a doctorate. Sprunger, Harvey, and Quick (2018) studied research utilization among a sample of special education directors and program coordinators where over 70 percent of the participants had 20 or more years in education. Prior educational experiences also were related to how agency staff used research. As Farley-Ripple (2012) noted, “Many decision makers had completed or are currently working toward their doctorate, and several acknowledged the impact of their participation in these programs on their familiarity with research resources” (p. 800), and conceptual research use was more frequent among school district staff who held or were working toward a degree compared to other participants (Penuel, Briggs, Davidson, Herlihy, Sherer, Hill, Farrell, & Allen, 2017).

Professional staff reported using research often and described sophisticated examples of research use

Penuel and colleagues (2017) report that over 80 percent of district administrators “reported that they had used research frequently or all the time” (p. 7) and district administrators maintained “close ties to universities and research organizations, serving on dissertation committees or as writers/editors of professional journals” (Huang, Reiser, Parker, Muniec, & Salvucci, 2003, p. 15). District staff also used research to support their own growth and learning as professionals or to help others develop as informed professionals (Penuel et al., 2018). State agency staff considered themselves as “very well plugged in to what the national literature is saying” (Gándara & Hearn, 2019, p. 24). While a congressional staffer demonstrated a sophisticated application of research in decision-making as they described how they combine “a little bit of what does intuition and experience tell you and what does the research show” (Nelson et al., 2009, p. 22).

As a group, professional staff provided detailed descriptions of research products and intermediary organizations

Most of the detailed descriptions in the academic literature on topics such as the quality of research methods, the characteristics of research products, and the credi-

bility of outside research organizations were provided by professional staff (agency and legislative staff). For example, in Penuel et al. (2018) school district staff mentioned 30 different unique studies and 50 different researchers/academic institutions, all by name. A local school superintendent explained in detail that there is, “a lot of good research and a lot of bad research. Some research journals give you really good results. Some do not. You see papers presenting findings without specifying procedures or limits of data collected” (Huang et al., 2003, p. 18). A congressional staffer “discussed the importance of having a big enough sample and generalizable findings” and another stated that she could not “use a study that looked at just one little population in one small area to support national policy change” (Rigby, 2005, p. 206). Finally, a legislative staffer indicated a preference for “meta-analysis rather than for an individual research study on a particular narrow topic” (Nelson et al., 2009, p. 37).

Professional staff mentioned specific characteristics of research products that made the products conducive to helping them fulfill their duties. For example, a district staff member described *Education Week* as, ‘not high-level research, but it gives you a good idea’ (Jabbar, LaLonde, DeBray, Scott, & Lubienski, 2014, p. 1023). A legislative staffer mentioned search engines by name, such as ERIC, describing it as “very cumbersome” and concluding that ERIC may meet the needs of academics but not those who “work on the Hill” (Huang et al., 2003, p. 52). Legislative staffers also complained that “studies are poorly packaged, contain too much technical jargon” and recommended that academics, “tailor their language to the decision-making audiences in the legislative process” (Florio et al., 1979, p. 69). Lastly, professional staff mentioned the work of specific research bloggers and intermediary organizations via social media outlets, like Twitter (Jabbar et al., 2014).

Professional staff provided insights on the credibility of individual intermediary organizations and were aware of potential biases. As one noted, how they consider research “depends on what the source of the research is, and how reliable it is. There are a lot of companies out there that do research, but the research is conducted toward a specific result, and it is biased” (Nelson et al., 2009, p. 30). As part of their gatekeeping function, professional staff took the credibility of organizations into account as they chose which research to bring forward to politicians. For example, one state agency official indicated that she blacklisted a national group because they provided “erroneous information on Texas, which influenced her perception of other reports from that group ... I know they got it all wrong for us ... I just have a feeling they probably got it wrong for all the other [states]” (Gándara, 2019, p. 1013). Lastly, professional staff had clear opinions about the credibility of intermediary organizations, by name. According to a high-level state legislative staff member, “I trust Cowen (Cowen Institute). I think what they do is good. Picard (Cecil J. Picard Center for Child Development and Lifelong Learning) is sort of questionable. SEDL (Southwest Educational Development Laboratory) is also sort of questionable” (Jabbar et al., 2014, p. 1019).

Politicians

The most striking finding from the limited research studies that included politicians is the vague responses from politicians themselves on how they use research, particularly compared to the rich details provided by professional staff. For example,

Huang et al. (2003) studied a diverse sample including local education agency officials and politicians. The results for local education agency officials covered 18 pages and included details about specific sources that agency staff found most helpful to them as they carried out their duties. The section on politicians, however, was two paragraphs and included one short, direct quote from a politician.

Five major themes emerged from the research on politicians themselves or from professional staffers who commented on how politicians use research.

Politicians recognized their lack of knowledge about and limited experiences with research

When politicians were mentioned or quoted about their research use, their lack of familiarity or limited use were common themes. For example, some elected school governing board members in Asen et al. (2013) demonstrated “a lack of basic research literacy” (p. 44). Nelson and colleagues (2009) noted that among the politicians in their sample that, politicians “do not feel fully versed in research processes, especially in fields where they have little background. Therefore, they are reluctant to use the research evidence in their work” (p.28). Or, as one legislator mentioned about their colleagues, “We don’t want research in Louisiana, and we don’t like to use data, and our elected officials don’t read” (Jabbar et al., 2014, p. 1018).

The lack of knowledge and experiences with research could be a reason why politicians relied heavily on staff to screen and synthesize research. In the school district setting:

Board members across all three districts rely on support staff and administrators as primary liaisons who bring relevant research to their meetings. In all three districts, staff and administrators prepare informational packets for each meeting for board members ... In contrast, board members typically do not bring extensive prepared materials—whether consisting of research or other evidence types—to the meetings, relying instead on the commonly prepared packets. (Asen et al., 2013, p. 55)

Or, as another legislator commented:

You can give me all the research you’ve done since you’ve gotten your doctorate, and it probably is this thick (holds fingers two inches apart) ... I’m actually going to read the executive summary, which is this thick (holds fingers two millimeters apart) ... And I’m going to sit down with (the policy analyst) and say, what does this mean related to our legislative initiative? ... It’s not meant to imply that people like me are either not diligent or intellectually capable, but we only have so much time. (Gándara & Hearn, 2019, p. 23)

Among politicians, research is often used for political purposes

At times, politicians use research that supports their predetermined positions to persuade others to their position on an issue. Weiss (1979) describes this tendency as the political use of evidence where, “partisans flourish the evidence in an attempt to

neutralize opponents, convince waverers, and bolster supporters” (p. 429). For example, Congressional staff members mentioned that, “I don’t think research changes a lot of people’s mind but allows people to do what they want to do already,” “research results were ignored by a politicized, polarised Congress” (Rigby, 2005, p. 204), and that members rejected research in policy formation in favor of political factors. Or politicians used research to persuade other colleagues in public settings (Perna, Orosz, & Kent, 2019). Another congressional staff member put the issue in perspective:

I think research plays a very important role in policy making. It doesn’t mean that it plays the sole role by any means because it is a political process as well. Unfortunately, more often than not, for a variety of reasons, the research is either ignored or thrown to the side because of a member’s personal viewpoint or their background or the political winds, or interest groups and a variety of other things.” (Nelson et al., 2009, p. 24)

In fact, because politicians are not versed in research and are reluctant to become versed in education research, outside groups relied on dramatic methods to attract policymakers’ attention to their issues (Orphan, Laderman, & Gildersleeve, 2020). For example, a Texas intermediary organization plastered a glaringly negative graduation rate statistic on billboards along a major highway to “shock” politicians into paying attention. The organization chose this eye-catching approach “because (legislators) don’t read (studies or reports), and none of that stuff made the newspapers ... you’ve got to create a fight or something ... you’ve got to say something shocking ...” (Gándara & Hearn, 2019, p. 25).

Research use is more prevalent in policy implementation, which does not necessarily involve politicians, rather than policy creation, which involves politicians

Gándara and Hearn (2019) observed that “Research evidence, for its part, was largely absent from college-completion policy deliberations in state-level policymaking” (p. 22).⁷ Yet, Gándara (2019) found that in the policy implementation stages in Colorado and Texas, “research use was more common during Phase 2 (policy implementation) than during policy formulation” (p. 1003).

Research may be used more in policy implementation because professional staff, those who may be more versed in research than politicians, are heavily involved at this technical stage where the process is less political than in policy creation (e.g., Haskins & Margolis, 2014).

Politicians expressed the desire for research evidence to be simplified and summarized

In policymaking, politicians are required to deal with a barrage of information, including research, under compressed time schedules. For example, Huang et al. (2003) noted that:

For both legislators, information overload was an ongoing problem. Both sought information that could be easily accessed. One observed, “Any research document with more than five bullets is hard

to go through.” This respondent added that there was “no way” for legislators to read through documents with more than 40 pages. The second legislator did not want “to be bombarded” with research reports and called for “more of a selective process,” with synopses of information. (p. 45)

A state agency official described interactions with politicians as, “I find that in this work, more times than not, the people that we talk to, in particularly legislative members, they don’t want to be educated on an issue. They want us to distill things down. Matter of fact, one legislator told me: ‘you got to be able to say it in 2 or 3 minutes, you got to have all the data and everything’” (Jabbar et al., 2014, p. 1018). To which, the state agency official responded, “Do you know what you’re asking me to do is virtually impossible . . . in many issues that we’re dealing with, there’s tons of research” (Jabbar et al., 2014, p. 1018). A school governing board member counselled that professional staff should present research “in common language and under some simpler form” (Asen et al., 2013, p. 49).

By contrast, legislative staff were more willing to be presented with detailed information that they could then distill for politicians: “One legislative aide described that in his office, staff doesn’t ‘like to limit—at least initially—the person who gives us information. I mean—our job—I often say to people, too much information is my problem, not yours.” Once armed with information, legislative staff puts it in their personal “black box” for use with politicians at a later time (Gándara & Hearn, 2019, p. 23).

Politicians prefer localized information that is not academic research at all

This last point is especially consequential for academic researchers because politicians are seeking localized information that is generally not available in academic outlets, such as journals and conference presentations. Politicians commonly mentioned the need for “relevant” or “practical” information, which is best described as information that is “directly applied to their situation and can inform decision making with little need for interpretation on their part — and this type of research evidence is in short supply” (Nelson et al., 2009, p. 29). Nelson and colleagues (2009) elaborated further:

In fact, our study identified research relevant to the user’s context as the strongest issue across all groups and levels. Users judge all research evidence and other sources of information against their local context, preexisting understandings, local needs, and expectations. They measure the utility and application of the evidence as it relates (or does not relate) to their specific situation. Policymakers and practitioners in our study placed much more weight on what they considered to be “practical, real-life, or pragmatic” evidence, including local research, local data, their own experience, and the experience of others.” (p. 19)

The desire for localized information was a consistent finding from the earliest research utilization studies. For example, “A heavy emphasis was placed on informa-

tion with direct application to policy issues, rather than general knowledge derived from attempts to tie information to theory or conceptions of social action” (Florio et al., 1979, p. 64). At the state level, Gándara and Hearn (2019) identified the desire among Texas politicians for “Texas-specific” information available through state agencies, “Overwhelmingly, Texas policymakers—at the state legislative and higher-education system levels—expressed a preference for Texas-based (internal) data, including reports produced or repackaged by the coordinating board (a state agency)” (p. 15) and those organizations who could provide local data were in an advantageous position in the policymaking process (Shakespeare, 2008).

In general, politicians desired descriptive studies or detailed accounting that is applicable to a specific context. This level of detail, however, is not available in academic research because of confidentiality requirements or sampling techniques. In addition, politicians were inclined to “conflate ‘data’ and ‘information’ with ‘research’, with an overreliance on trend or descriptive data, often internally produced [by governmental agencies], rather than taking advantage of independent assessments of policy initiatives” (Jabbar et al., 2014, p. 1018). As Florio et al. (1979) observed, “The nature of the legislative process is grounded in bargaining and coalition building. This, to a significant degree, accounts for some problems in finding evaluative studies which will provide evidence useful to most members of the education committees” (p. 74).

Research samples that commingled politicians and others as “policymakers” could result in misleading findings

In some studies, politicians and professional staff were combined into a single group without distinguishing the perspectives of these different policy actors, and it was not clear to which policy actors or roles the findings apply (Ben-Arieh, 2007). For example, Nelson et al. (2009) included a list of seven studies to stress the point that “educational policymakers and practitioners use research evidence in their work” (p. 17). Yet, of the seven studies listed, only one study included politicians (Huang et al., 2003), and the sample for Huang et al. (2003) includes only two politicians, both state legislators. The remaining six studies involved either agency staff or practitioners at the site level (e.g., principals).

Commingling politicians with others in the sample may generate misleading findings about research use in policymaking. For example, Nelson et al. (2009) summarized the Huang et al. (2003) findings as “a majority of the policymakers surveyed (49 of the 71 respondents) indicated they read reports of research studies and/or program evaluations “most of the time” or “just about always” (p. 17). The author conducted a secondary analysis of the Huang et al. (2003) and found that 33 of the 49 high-frequency research users were agency staff, nine were legislative staff, and seven were outsiders (e.g., education association directors). The sample included two legislators, neither of whom was a high-frequency research user. Rather, both politicians reported using research “only some of the time.”⁸

In another example where commingling politicians with others may lead to misleading findings, Jabbar et al. (2014) concluded that “contrary to the popularly held notion that policymakers are seemingly drowning in evidence, our findings suggest that policymakers would enjoy greater access to more — and to more ‘reliable’ —

research” (p. 1019). Yet, of the quotes identified by the authors to support this claim, four were from agency staff, all of whom provide detailed descriptions of research use. There was only one quote from a politician whose entire contribution is to indicate that they were “seldom sent research from other organizations or groups” with no further detail (p. 1019). The politician did not express a desire for more research, specifically.

Closing

In the academic literature on research utilization in U.S. K-20 education policy from the 1970s to 2022, very few empirical studies have been conducted with politicians—those primarily responsible for creating education policy. Rather, most empirical studies of research utilization in education policy have been conducted with professional staff whose primary responsibility is policy implementation. In addition, nearly all the detailed examples of research use in these studies were provided by professional staff whose job experience likely included exposure to education research. Furthermore, professional staff expressed familiarity with research, described sophisticated uses, and provided details about the credibility of specific research providers. There were limited findings on how politicians themselves use research, an outcome that calls into question the generalization of the research evidence from this body of literature to this group of critical policymaking actors. Politicians recognized their limited exposure to education research, acknowledged that professional staff were the experts on education research, and requested that information is provided to them in simplified formats. Most notably, politicians gravitated to local data from their specific political jurisdictions (e.g., state or school district) to inform policymaking. These types of detailed, context-specific data, however, are generally not available in academic articles like those found in peer-reviewed journals.

Given the limited empirical evidence from politicians in K-20 education policy, what are the implications for academics? First, those academics who turn to the research literature for guidance on how to engage with politicians to inform policy with research may be applying the educated perspectives of professional staff, the most common group of research participants, whose familiarity with academic research may have facilitated their detailed descriptions. Conversely, politicians provided scarce accounts, possibly because they are not well-versed in research. If academics generalized from the perspectives of politicians in the academic literature, they may be inclined to approach politicians with more complex and/or detailed information than politicians are interested in receiving. In addition, politicians did not express an interest in getting more involved with the research process through projects such as research collaboratives (Ball, 2012). Rather, politicians recommended that information, including research evidence, is presented to them in simplified formats.

Second, based on what politicians themselves said, it appears that research, at least that which is published in academic outlets, is ill-structured to meet their needs and preferences. What politicians ultimately covet to make policy decisions is data in an accounting format. They want localized information, such as counts and resource allocation data, through which politicians can understand 1) how resources and opportunities are distributed across the people and organizations in their politi-

cal jurisdiction and 2) compare this distribution to other political jurisdictions to engage actively in the highly politicized horse-trading that is characteristic of policy-making (Garcia, 2021).

State and federal agencies appear to be best suited to provide the type of accounting data that politicians found most applicable. At the school district level, administrators are best positioned to provide accounting data to school board members. Academic research, even the most applied academic research, is not directly applicable to any specific context. Research findings must be generalized from the research context(s) to other settings because the subjects, and often the exact locations under study, are anonymized for ethical reasons or locations are excluded via sampling techniques. For politicians, the lack of a direct connection between the context(s) studied and their political jurisdictions means that academic research is never localized enough to apply directly to their constituents.

The author argues elsewhere that research is not “shovel ready” for policymaking precisely because politicians cannot link academic research findings to specific political jurisdictions to inform policymaking (Garcia, 2021). This shortcoming cannot be addressed by incorporating more rigorous research methods or crafting academic research to be more “policy or user relevant” because neither recommendation changes academic research fundamentally to provide the type of accounting data that politicians covet. Therefore, rather than seeking to change academic research to serve a policymaking purpose for which it is ill-suited, academics may be better served to develop novel means to translate or communicate research evidence via the simplified formats that politicians find most useful.

Third, academics should refrain from commingling multiple policy actors who serve different roles in policymaking into an indistinguishable group of “policy-makers” and journal editors should require more accurate descriptions of research samples to clarify if the participants are politicians or professional staff (Garcia, 2022). The imprecise use of the term “policymaker” is a common practice in research utilization articles (see Ben-Arieh, 2007; Natow, 2020; Ruef & Turnbull, 2001). Or, as the scoping review found, in other research utilization articles the participants were described as “policymakers,” but politicians themselves were not quoted at all (DeBray et al., 2014; Scott, Jabbar, la Londe, DeBray, & Lubienski, 2015; Scott & Jabbar, 2014).

The generalizability of the academic literature would be improved greatly by clarifying the formal policy roles of research participants. As both Cohen et al. (2007) and Kingdon (2003) observed about the policy process, there is a distinction between setting the aims or direction of policy (i.e., policymaking) and policy implementation. Yet, it is nearly impossible to discern which research findings in the academic literature are applicable to which aspect(s) of the policy process. Those academics who turn to the academic literature on research utilization to inform their policy engagement efforts would certainly find it immensely helpful to understand which findings are generalizable to working with politicians versus professional staff at specific points along the policy creation-to-implementation continuum. In addition, research studies should be more transparent about the policy conditions which are necessary for their findings to hold and provide an assessment of the generalizability of their findings.

Lastly, academics need to fill the gap in knowledge on how politicians use research by conducting studies with politicians, specifically. Carrying out this recommendation, however, is a challenge because politicians are an elite and busy group, making it very difficult to include them in research samples. Politicians may also decline participation in research because they assume the legitimate risk of “saying the wrong thing and falling victim to a freewheeling online public sphere” (Marland & Esselment, 2018, p.2) with little political payoff in the form of direct benefit to their constituents or electoral advantages. Likewise, academics who work directly with politicians may run the risk of becoming too “political” (Henig, 2009). Academics may be encouraged to overcome these challenges if peer-reviewed journals placed a premium on research conducted with politicians because these types of studies are best positioned to advance the academic literature on research utilization in education policy in new directions. Philanthropic foundations can also incentivize scholarly production by funding research projects involving politicians. Collectively, these recommendations offer concrete ways to improve the applicability of education policy research to policymaking.

Notes

1. The terms “research,” “data,” and “information” are often used interchangeably in the academic literature, possibly because practitioners use these terms, and others, interchangeably (Tseng, 2012). This review focuses on research and research evidence, that which is available through traditional academic outlets such as journal articles. The review steers away from studies of how “policy analysis” or “evaluations” are used in policymaking because these products are distinct from academic research in that many are mandated in legislation or are conducted by government agencies, both characteristics that change the dynamics by which these products enter a formal policy context compared to academic research that is both produced and published for purposes outside a formal policy context (Garcia, 2021).
2. Even educators who are elected to school governing boards may find themselves as novices as they encounter the full spectrum of decisions that come before these local governing bodies (Bauld, 2023). On educational matters, educators likely have both academic training and experience to inform their decisions. School governing boards are also faced with many other essential financial decisions involving issues such as establishing the district operating budget or bonding decisions to fund capital projects. With respect to these financial matters, educators may not have academic training or professional experience in business or finance to inform their decisions.
3. International studies were excluded because applying international research to the U.S. policy context requires one to generalize the findings based on the unique dynamics of each specific country, a task beyond the scope of this article. For example, applying the research evidence about the European Evidence-Based Policy (EBP) movement (Head, 2010), or any other specific international policy for that matter, requires one to consider the extent to which the international policy and its political dynamics are at work in the United States.
4. Carol Weiss’ influential research from 1977 to 1980 is essentially the starting point of the research utilization literature and coincides with the scope of this scoping review. Weiss’ work culminated in the short, highly readable article titled “The Many Meanings of Research Utilization,” which previews the six models of research use that serve as the foundation of research utilization even today (Seashore Louis, 2005). “Many Meanings” has been cited 3,328 times, the most cited article on research utilization in Google Scholar (November 21, 2022).
5. For example, Oliver and Cairney’s (2019) search of the empirical and theoretical literature included Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, Wonkhe and yielded 86 articles in the

final sample. Gorard's (2020) search of articles in education policy *and practice* included EBSCOHost, Web of Science, JSTOR, and Google Scholar, yielding 33 articles in the final sample. Lastly, Sengalrayan & Blane's (2025) review of research use in the education *and health* literatures included ERIC, EBSCOHost, and Scopus, yielding 28 articles in the final sample, 17 of which were in education.

6. DeBray et al. (2014) indicated that their larger sample included legislative staff, but none of the quotes in this particular article were from legislative staff.
7. Webber's (1987) empirical study of state legislators has been interpreted as demonstrating the importance of research in policymaking (see Ness, 2010). But Webber (1987) does not focus on research alone. Rather, legislators were asked to comment on "policy information," defined as "scientific and technical information about the ways a policy actually works or would work if it were adopted." This definition included "many types of knowledge about policy matters, ranging from common sense to academic research" (p. 614). This broad definition complicates the generalizability of the findings to academic research and research evidence, specifically.
8. Based on the author's calculations from a disaggregated table (D.1 — Counts by Frequency of Reading Research Reports of Results) provided in Huang et al. (2003). Also, all Chief State School Officers (CSSOs) are either elected or appointed by politicians, and it is not clear in Huang et al. (2003) which CCSSO's participated in the research themselves and in which cases their designees responded on their behalf.

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