

PRESIDENT'S PIECE

POLICY RESEARCH FOR EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT

Ester B. Ogena

President

Philippine Normal University

INTRODUCTION

It is generally viewed that knowledge influences policy. Thus, policy and decision makers need to get good data and information to be able to make good decisions. There are various views on how knowledge must be linked to public policy. It is important to understand how policy research plays an important role in supporting the education sector in the Philippines.

WHAT IS PUBLIC POLICY?

Public policy refers to whatever governments choose to do or not to do (Dye, c 1972). Since governments do many things – like those that relate to regulatory functions; organize instrumentalities to carry out functions; distribute benefits, rewards and incentives; and extract money from society through taxes – public policies therefore serve as vehicles to facilitate all these things separately or altogether at once.

Many social scientists, therefore, direct their studies toward public policies, particularly describing and explaining the causes and consequences of government activities.

WHAT IS POLICY RESEARCH?

Policy research, as described by various policy making organizations, is research that is directly aimed at influencing existing policies or addressing particular issues in the hope of

promoting public policy solutions. Hakim (in Becker, 1997) says that policy research is "ultimately concerned with knowledge for action" and the long-term aim is along the famous dictum that "it is more important to change the world than to understand it." This definition therefore distinguishes research, both fundamental and applied, aimed at the advancement of human knowledge from policy-oriented research directed at promoting practical change.

WHO DOES POLICY RESEARCH?

While policy research has often been associated with political activism, with its roots in U.K., nowadays social and political science specialists, voluntary organizations, even government agencies themselves, are concerned with addressing critical policy issues. Quite often, policy research is expected to articulate the people's voices which are least heard in society. In the Philippine education sector where there are many reforms intended for improvement, policy research would definitely help explain such reforms.

METHODS OF POLICY RESEARCH

Policy research refers to a broad range of activities. Policy research organizations, including educational institutions, undertake studies using various approaches, as shown below in the framework developed by Hogund and Gunn (1984).

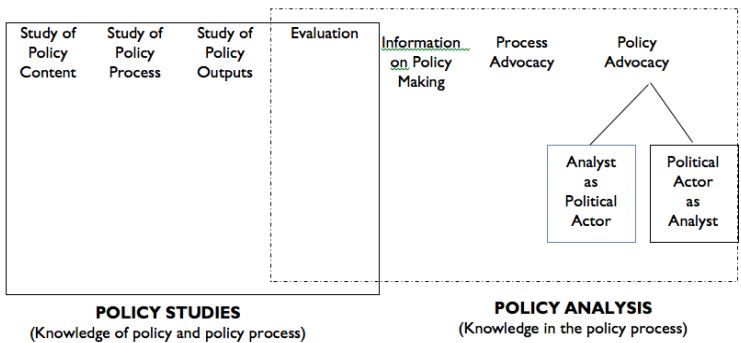


Figure 1. Types of Public Policy Making

The two major approaches to policy research are therefore: (a) *policy studies* aimed at expanding the knowledge of policy and the policy process; and (b) *policy analysis* veered toward increasing knowledge in the policy. Both types of policy making approaches are valuable for Philippine education sector.

In doing policy research, researchers often make use of qualitative and quantitative methods. Policy research should ensure that the methods in the research activities are rigorous. A variety of methods, e.g., combining case studies with questionnaires, as deemed appropriate, must yield the data needed. The research should be able to support any claims made as a result.

Research in policy or *policy studies* includes analysis of policy (that covers the actors, content, process and impact) and *for policy* (that results) in specific policy recommendations or critiques). There is always an academic merit in pursuing policy studies done for descriptive, explanatory or prescriptive purposes. It can be assumed that there is usually no pre-conceived political agenda in the conduct of academic policy studies, especially when finding for such case from the community at large.

On policy analysis. Two key players perform their roles quite actively on analyzing policies:

- a. Government Policy Making Bodies. These include the Philippine Congress, Department of Education, the Commission on Higher Education, State Colleges and Universities, among others. As policy making bodies, they are involved in collecting and analyzing information both for policy making and policy advocacy. Such work entails how to formulate *new* policies and *revise* existing ones. Most of these policies are in the form of:
 - Policy succession which concerns purposive replacement of existing policies by others in the same area of activity;
 - Policy innovation which involves the entry of government into activities not previously involved in; and
 - Policy termination.

- b. Non-Government Organizations (NGOs). They normally do studies that exert influence on the government or other public policy making bodies so as to bring about policy making outcomes. Their main mission is policy advocacy; a lot of them are supported and financed by private organizations with clear policy, political or ideological inclination. Examples of NGOs in education are party-list groups in Congress for education and for teachers and associations of public and private universities.

THE POLICY MAKING PROCESS

Research is one element in the policy making process. One single piece of research does not necessarily trigger policy change. Thus, policy research would have value to inform policy debates and policy makers. Policy change usually comes about through a tedious process of *interaction* with research as part in that process. Policy research can also facilitate or *influence* public opinions, especially with the help of mass media.

The policy processes usually follow these steps, but not always in a linear fashion.

1. **Identifying problems.** Demands for government action
2. **Formulating policy proposal.** Initiation and development of public program proposals
3. **Legitimizing policies.** Selecting a proposal, building political support for it, enacting it as a law/measure
4. **Implementing policies.** Organizing bureaucracies, providing payments on services, levying taxes
5. **Evaluating policies.** Studying programs, evaluating outputs and impacts, suggesting changes and adjustments

THE POLICY RESEARCH PROCESS

The main phases of research apply also to policy oriented research. These sets or cycles of activities are equally important in the research process where certain elements may be the main focus at

different times. The four phases are:

1. **Thinking.** The problems are thought through and the issues surrounding them are explored.
2. **Doing.** Development of research design and selection of appropriate methods.
3. **Dissemination and Promotion.** This includes efforts to ensure participation of target groups to generate objective information/data on important issues.
4. **Change.** The research may bring about change in influencing practice on public opinion. May empower the research participants to effect their own changes.

These cycles of activities allow for returning to reflective *thinking* stage and *doing* to monitor and evaluate any effects. Research for change can be a constant in the cycle where the focus may be on any one of those phases.

QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE MEASURES

As mentioned earlier, depending on the design of the research, qualitative and quantitative measures may be utilized following the procedures of doing research.

Recent developments on policy analysis, however, allow for the development of statistical data and indicators for analyzing policies. The setting of indicators for establishing benchmarks and evaluating programs are usually agreed upon with institutions that implement the programs with established models.

WHAT VARIOUS COUNTRIES ARE DOING?

Several information from websites of countries that support and do policy research show that countries establish their own think-tanks to give them information and advice for policy options. They give support for policy research along the functions of governance and in priority areas of technical competence needed for policy advice. Policy research activities are done through: agencies of

government in-charge with policy studies; centers of policy studies based in universities; and independent policy study groups including national academies.

In the US, European and some Asian countries, highly specialized policy research groups are formed in technical fields to give sound advise to government like Japan's National Institute of Education Research (NIER) and the Korean Education Development Institute (KEDI). In the Philippines, the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS) does policy studies related to economic, financial and development programs. The Center for Independent Development Studies (CIDS) based at the University of the Philippines also does academic policy studies related to various issues vital to the government. The mandate of the Philippine Normal University as National Center for Teacher Education under RA 9647, s. 2009 provides for such opportunity to do policy studies in education.

It may be noted that agencies of Philippine government either subcontract policy-related studies, especially those associated with big-ticket item projects, or feasibility studies on reform initiatives; or do policy monitoring work through established sets of accepted indicators.

MAKING RESEARCH PROPOSALS

Policy research usually requires the same rigors in doing social science research. It explores the same survey theories, frameworks, approaches and analytical tools aimed at providing basis for policy analysis.

Policy research likewise requires knowledge of policy context, substantive knowledge of the problem of interest and knowledge of possible approaches to support inquiry into the problem.

Here are some important questions to be considered in doing policy research:

- What policy issue is being addressed and why is it important?

- What are at least two policy alternatives?
- What are at least two policy goals?
- Who is the client relevant to the policy analysis?

In doing policy research, the researcher must understand the role of *formal policy analysis* and *research-based knowledge* in public policy. S/He must also understand the policy process, from planning to evaluation.

CHALLENGES FOR THE PHILIPPINE EDUCATION SECTOR

The challenge for those interested in doing policy research in the Philippine education sector is how to respond to relevant issues and developments inside and outside of the country that can positively impact on inclusive development and competitiveness. Informed decision making for instituting educational reforms must be guided significantly by policy studies and analysis. Such must be appreciated by those who will make decisions at various levels: the executive, legislative and local units and institutions of government. Policy research should be matched with policy advocacy to have the desired results.

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