Use of evidence in Finnish education policy making

European Union funded Regional Programme Supporting Education Reforms & Skills in the Eastern Partnership region (SER)

Peer-learning workshop on the Use of Evidence in Education Policies, ETF, 29 May - 31 May, Turin

Johannes Peltola, Specialist, Department for General Upper Secondary Education and Vocational Education and Training
What is evidence?

Source: Van Damme, D. (2022), The Power of Proofs: (Much) Beyond RCT's, Center for Curriculum Redesign
Why use evidence in policy making?

• To evaluate the effectiveness and of implemented policy measures and investments
• To maximize the social and economic impact of policy choices
• To increase trust in and between policy makers, researchers and practitioners
Challenges on using evidence

• Policy decisions have complex outcomes, and societal changes affect education. Problems in education often lack a definitive solution.

• Even when evidence is available, it’s quality and relevance may be insufficient.

• Decision-making is characterized by a level of uncertainty, however robust the evidence.

• Lack of alignment: the timeframe of the decision-making process often doesn’t match the timeframe required for scientific research.

• Educational challenges and policy choices are not purely scientific, they have an ideological dimension as well.
Systems approach as means to strengthen the impact of education research

- Knowledge transfer shouldn’t be linear. Instead, multi-directional taking into account the whole system.
  - If we want relevant and good quality data, data infrastructures should be up to par.
  - Bridge building processes between policymakers, researchers and practitioners promote a positive culture on use of evidence.
  - Deeper relationships between actors increase understanding of each others’ perspective.


Inspired by the QURE framework in Rickinson, M. et al. (2020)
Ways of using evidence in Finnish education administration

1. **Information service type use** (for media, citizens and stakeholders - either answered or managed as a self-service through some reporting system)
   - Data source: Vipunen (real-time EMIS data etc.), Statistics Finland public registers

2. **Operational use** (e.g. background information on funding, foresight and other data produced directly for certain processes)
   - Vipunen, Statistics Finland public registers, Finnish National Agency for Education financial data, separate procurements from Statistics Finland

3. **Strategic decision-making**, policy analyses and impact assessment
   - Vipunen, Statistics Finland public data, remote access to Statistics Finland micro data, “Data Room”, data from researchers, other data sources …
Example 1A, Information service type use: Excel-type reports (Applicants and those who accepted a place in a higher education institution)

### Filters
- Extent of the study program
- Region of study program
- Municipality of study program
- Higher education institution
- Faculty/campus

### Column width

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Applicants and those who accepted a place in a higher education...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Applicants expressing first preference</th>
<th>All applicants</th>
<th>Selected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>175,563</td>
<td>175,563</td>
<td>58,968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>190,374</td>
<td>190,374</td>
<td>69,075</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>191,763</td>
<td>191,766</td>
<td>70,203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>200,925</td>
<td>200,937</td>
<td>73,422</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>176,019</td>
<td>176,031</td>
<td>61,776</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>207,390</td>
<td>207,390</td>
<td>77,889</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021</td>
<td>48,681</td>
<td>48,684</td>
<td>17,547</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### PivotTable Fields

Choose fields:
- Variables
  - Accepted a study place
  - All applicants
    - All applicants (no sorting)
    - Applicants expressing...
      - Enrolled as present
      - Intake
      - Selected

### Drag fields between areas below:

- **FILTERS**
- **VALUES**
  - Year (start of study...)
  - Term (start of study...)
  - Higher education institution
  - Accepted a study place

---

Example 1B, Information service type use: PowerBI Dashboards (Matriculation examination grades of tertiary education students)

https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoiZGFkZjFiNjNGEtY2MyNTUxMDMwZjBiYzFhNzgsIiwidCI6IjkxMDczODlkLTFkYjg5YzRmMDY1ZTNlZGdiN2Y2ZjgwMDU0IiwidHi6IjUyMzkyMDZiYzUyMzc4NjFhY2I2YjYxOTEwNTUwOTQ2In0&language=fi-FI
Example 2, Operational use: Background information determining VET funding

**STRATEGY FUNDING**
(a maximum of 4% of the total funding)

**IMPUTED FUNDING**
(a minimum of 96% of the total funding)

70% **CORE FUNDING**
- student-years

**Creates**
- preconditions for the future provision of education in all fields and for all students
- a foreseeable foundation for the provision of education and qualifications

20% **PERFORMANCE-BASED FUNDING**
- qualifications and modules

Guides and encourages to
- target education and qualifications in accordance with competence needs
- intensify study processes
- complete qualifications and modules in accordance with the set objectives

10% **EFFECTIVENESS-BASED FUNDING**
- access to employment
- further studies

Encourages to
- redirect education to fields where labour force is needed
- ensure that education corresponds to the needs of the working life and is of high quality
- provide readiness for further studies
Example 3A, Strategic decision-making: Two-year pre-primary education trial

Previous government programme (2019)
- “An action plan will be implemented to strengthen the quality and equality of early childhood education and care and to raise the participation rate. As part of the action plan … a two-year pre-primary education will be piloted … A research project will be created around the trial to monitor the effectiveness and results of the measures.”

Preparation
- Extensive research project with researchers from several universities and institutes
- Act on the two-year pre-primary education trial (2020)
- Randomization (target population: children born in 2016 and 2017 in 148 municipalities)

Implementation
- Two-year pre-primary education in approximately 400 establishments (approx. 15,000 children)
  - Control group: current system in approximately 600 establishments (approx. 20,000 children)
- Follow-up study (interim report 2023, final report 2025)
**Example 3B, Strategic decision-making: Data Room**

- Pilot project for the promotion of data driven policy making funded by the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Education and Culture.

- Purpose is to combine the latest individual level registry data to produce **accurate analysis at a fast pace to support decision-making** better and to evaluate the effects of political decisions.

- Different research topics related to economical, environmental and education / labor topics among others. Currently underway is a study on the effects of income limits for student financial aid.
Example 3C, Strategic decision-making: Policy analyses within the Ministry of Education and Culture

- Day-to-day analyses for policymakers’ needs
- Impact assessment of new legislation
- Broader analyses, such as ‘Bildung Review’ series: an annually published review is to create an overall picture of the extensive administrative branch as a whole
Contact information:
johannes.peltola@gov.fi