

Assessment on the Utilization of Completed Basic Education Research Fund in SOCSARGEN: Basis for Policy Enhancement

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Originality: 100%

Grammarly: 97%

Plagiarism: 0%

ABSTRACT

Article History:

Received: 22 Feb 2023

Revised: 25 Aug 2023

Accepted: 20 Oct 2023

Published: 30 Oct 2023

Keywords - Education, descriptive correlational, funded research, proficiency of learners, teacher researchers, Philippines

An assessment of the utilization of the Completed Basic Education Research Fund (BERF) in the divisions of South Cotabato, Sarangani, and General Santos City, Philippines, was conducted using a descriptive-correlational research design on the 40 BERF-recipient, teacher-researchers from School Year 2019-2021. It looked into whether the utilization had a significant influence on the proficiency of learners. The quantitative results revealed that completed BERF research was moderately utilized. Likewise, learners' proficiency in the recipient school during the first quarter of School Year 2022-23 was very



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satisfactory. Furthermore, using a Spearman Rank correlation, the variables in utilizing completed BERF did not significantly influence learners' proficiency in the recipient school. It can be seen that the research findings may not have reached the intended audience in a way that is accessible, understandable, and relevant to their needs. Accordingly, the learners had a very satisfactory performance. This can be attributed to their improved digital skills during the pandemic may have contributed to their face-to-face classes' performance. The translation of research findings into actionable strategies and interventions was likely affected by other concerns in school management. Therefore, it is imperative to guarantee that the research supported by BERF closely corresponds with the unique requirements and difficulties students face in the school system.

INTRODUCTION

Research utilization is the process of applying research findings to inform practice. It is a crucial aspect of evidence-based decision-making. Globally, there is a growing appreciation of the importance of research utilization in various fields, including healthcare, education, and public policy (Nutley et al., 2007). Despite its importance, research utilization faces several challenges, including accessibility and relevance of research, the capacity of decision-makers to understand and apply research, the complex relationship between research, policy, and practice. In many cases, research findings are not effectively translated into practice, leading to a gap between what is known from research and what is done in practice (Grimshaw et al., 2012).

Furthermore, several strategies have been proposed to enhance the utilization of research findings. These include improvements in disseminating research findings, supporting decision-makers, and nurturing collaborations among researchers and decision-makers (Lomas, 2007). Research utilization in developing countries is even more challenging. These include limited resources for research and the poor capability to use research findings. Still, they see the vital contribution of research in these contexts, and mechanisms are being undertaken to promote the use of research findings in decision-making (Lavis et al., 2010).

Accordingly, research utilization is critical to policymaking and practice in Southeast Asia. Countries in the region are trying to strengthen their research capacities and use research findings to inform decision-making. Despite these efforts, research utilization in Southeast Asia faces several challenges. These include a lack of access to relevant research, limited capacity to understand and apply research findings, and a lack of coordination between researchers and decision-makers. Research findings often are not effectively translated into policy or practice (Sutcliffe, 2005).

In the Philippines, the research advocacies have been institutionalized in all public schools through the Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001, which mandates the Department of Education (DepEd) to undertake educational research studies as a basis for necessary reforms and policy inputs to improve the learning outcomes of Filipino learners (R.A 9155). The undertakings are funded through the Basic Education Research Fund (BERF) anchored on the Basic Education Research Agenda that focuses on specific thematic areas such as Governance, Human Resources, Child Protection, and Teaching and Learning (DepEd Order No. 43, s. 2015). However, despite the DepEd's mandates, initiatives, and programs, teachers' research productivity in the Philippines' primary education remains low (Mapa, 2017; Vinluan, 2011).

In 2022, the Philippines participated in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). According to recent results, learners from the Philippines are still among the least proficient globally, specifically in math, reading, and science. The nation's performance in 2018 did not significantly improve as measured by the most current PISA 2022 test results (Chi, 2023). These results underscore the urgent need to address the quality of basic education in the Philippines. Evaluating the extent to which completed funded research is utilized in the field is necessary. Accordingly, limited studies have been conducted on research utilization, especially in basic education in the Philippine public school system.

Furthermore, D.O 24 s. 2010, states that BERF should be undertaken to answer the decrease in learners' performance, increase learners' participation rate, and improve quality education, to mention a few. Hence, it is vital to know the utilization level of completed BERF and whether it had a significant influence on the proficiency of learners. On this premise, the researchers investigated whether completed research conducted by the BERF-recipient teachers in South Cotabato, Sarangani, and General Santos City, Philippines, was utilized following the strict BERF guidelines. Issues about whether approved research was utilized or well disseminated were the most concern of this study. The results may lead to recommendatory policy enhancements to the current Research Management Guidelines of the Department of Education.

FRAMEWORK

The theory that best explains the relationship between research utilization and learners' proficiency is the "Diffusion of Innovations" theory by Everett Rogers (1987). This theory provides insights into how innovations, such as research findings from BERF research, are adopted and utilized within a

social system. It can help to understand the factors that influence the adoption and utilization of completed BERF research in SOCSARGEN, such as the characteristics of the innovation and the communication channels used. In the context of this research, the theory can be used to identify different levels of utilization of completed BERF research among schools in SOCSARGEN. These can help determine how the utilization level relates to learners' proficiency. The Diffusion of Innovations theory may provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the adoption, utilization, and impact of completed BERF research on learners' proficiency. It considers the social and communication dynamics involved in research utilization, which can help inform strategies for promoting effective research knowledge utilization in educational settings.

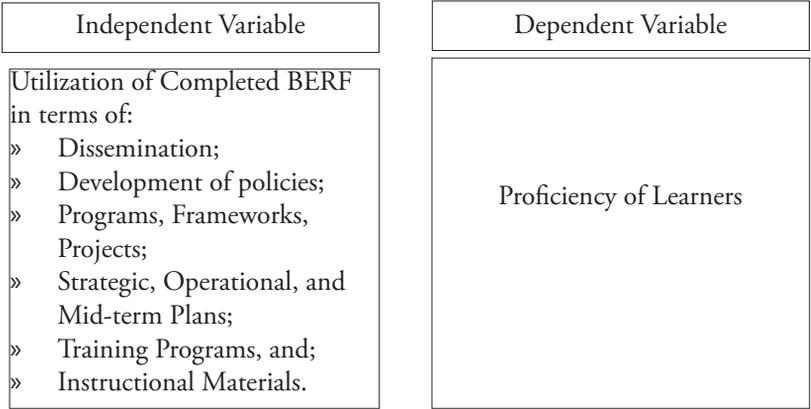


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study investigated the utilization of completed BERF in SOCSARGEN and the learners' proficiency among the BERF-recipient schools. Specifically, it sought to determine the utilization level of the completed BERF in SOCSARGEN regarding Dissemination, Development of policies, Programs, Frameworks, Projects, Strategic, Operational, and Mid-term Plans, Training Programs, and Instructional Materials. Likewise, it determined the learners' proficiency level among the BERF-recipient schools. Finally, it determined the relationship between the utilization level of completed BERF in SOCSARGEN and the overall proficiency among the learners in the BERF-recipient school.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The researchers used a descriptive correlational research design in this study. A descriptive correlational study is a research design used to describe the relationship between two or more variables without determining cause and effect. It involves collecting data to determine whether and to what degree a relationship exists between two or more quantifiable variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The researchers conducted a survey to get a snapshot and describe the utilization of funded research. Likewise, the study also described the proficiency of the learners where the teacher-researchers are teaching. This study used the research design to examine the relationship between the utilization of completed BERF among the teachers-researchers and the overall learner proficiency in their respective schools.

Research Site

The study was conducted in the three Divisions of Region XII (SOCSARGEN), specifically the South Cotabato Division, Sarangani Division, and General Santos City Division. There were six schools in South Cotabato where the BERF-recipient teacher-researchers were stationed. In General Santos City, there were six schools where the BERF-recipient teacher-researchers were teaching. Finally, in Sarangani, there were two schools where the BERF-recipient teacher researchers were located. In summary, there were 14 schools where the study was conducted. These three divisions were chosen as the research site since they have the greatest number of completed research outputs not funded by BERF and many research presentations in the Regional Research Congress. Research colloquiums from the school level up to the division level is one of the sought-after activities every school year in this division.

Participants

The study's respondents are the population of teacher-researchers (N=40) who were the recipients of BERF from the 2019-2021 school year. By including all 40 recipients, the research findings may accurately represent the entire population of BERF research recipients. This helps draw precise conclusions and make informed decisions based on the data. Furthermore, the respondents belonged to Teacher I-III and Master Teacher I positions. According to the Basic Education Research Agenda by the Department of Education, there should be four themes from which research must spawn. These are Teaching and Learning, Human Resources, Child Protection, and Governance. However, D.O 24 s. 2010 emphasizes the need to address specific challenges directly impacting

learners’ performance. Hence, by narrowing the focus of the study to Teaching and Learning, there is an alignment with the objectives outlined in the order, which makes excluding completed BERF research in Human Resources, Child Protection, and Governance justifiable. In this study, the teacher-researchers must have completed research funded under BERF in the Teacher and Learning Theme to be included as respondents.

Instrumentation

The primary research instrument in this study was anchored on the Research Management Guidelines (D.O 16 s. 2017). The indicators, including Dissemination, Development of Policies, Programs, Frameworks, Projects, Strategic, Operational, and Mid-term Plans, Training Programs, and Instructional Materials, were underscored by the Department of Education in D.O 16 s. 2017 as the areas where completed research outputs must be heavily utilized. Accordingly, to determine the utilization level of the completed research funded under BERF in SOCSARGEN, a four-point Likert scale was used:

Quantification Scale of Research Utilization
(the Scale used was suggested by the accredited statistician of the university)

Range of Means	Description	Interpretation
3.25 – 4.00	Strongly Agree	Highly Utilized
2.50 – 3.24	Agree	Moderately Utilized
1.75 – 2.49	Disagree	Poorly Utilized
1.00 – 1.74	Strongly Disagree	Not Utilized

Another primary instrument in this study is the learners’ proficiency that the BERF recipient teacher researchers are teaching for the school year 2022-2023. Specifically, the grades in the first quarter were collected and analyzed. The grades were obtained from the school’s academic records section and were provided by the school guidance counselor, ensuring their authenticity and accuracy. The grades cover the different subjects and represent the learners’ academic performance during the first quarter of the academic year.

Furthermore, the interpreted data used the range in SF 9 (report card) based on D.O 8 s. 2015 with the following descriptions:

Descriptor	Grading Scale
Outstanding	90-100
Very Satisfactory	85-89
Satisfactory	80-84
Fairly Satisfactory	75-79
Did not meet Expectations	75 and below

Validation of Instrument

Content and face validation of the questionnaire in this study was achieved through meticulous scrutiny and revisions by the action research enthusiasts in DepEd Region XII. Three PhDs validated the questionnaire; two were BERF recipients, and the other was a BERF Program Implementer. Using a validation tool prescribed by Mindanao State University General Santos City, the appropriateness of use and relevance of every item were assessed to measure the dimensions of the constructs. The experts were asked to assess whether individual items would be applicable and appropriate to the underscored indicator and whether the items would effectively measure all aspects of the indicators. The experts' comments, suggestions, and recommendations were integrated into the questionnaire (Pentang, 2023).

After the content and face validation, the instrument underwent reliability testing. Consequently, reliability was also achieved by obtaining a Cronbach's alpha (0.98) value for the Likert-type responses.

Research Ethics Protocol

Safeguarding the well-being of informants in research endeavors is paramount in maintaining ethical standards. The researcher implemented appropriate measures and procedures to ensure ethical compliance during the pre-data collection phase of the study. Before collecting data, consent from the informants was secured by asking them to sign the informed consent form. These documents gave the essential details about the research and a statement of assurance that the participants had fully grasped the implications of their involvement. This study likewise followed the regulations outlined in the Republic Act No. 10173, also known as the Data Privacy Act of 2012, as mandated by the Republic of the Philippines. The researcher ensured the confidentiality of

the information obtained from the informants by keeping it undisclosed and restricted to the terms of the agreement. The researcher highly regarded the privacy and anonymity of the participants. The study also demonstrated a commitment to meticulousness, impartiality, integrity, and precision in the confidential preservation, examination, and elucidation of the obtained data.

The Institutional Ethics Review Committee (IERC) of Mindanao State University-General Santos City has reviewed the study and was approved to proceed with ethics clearance No. 001-2023-MSUGSC-IERC on January 25, 2023.

Data Collection

After securing the informed consent, the researchers personally administered the survey questionnaire to the participants at the designated time. Since all BERF recipients under the teaching and learning theme were included as respondents, the researchers personally met each one of them in their respective provinces, municipalities, and schools. The researchers also met with the school guidance counselor and principals to ask for the Grade Point Average of all the learners enrolled in their respective schools. Upon completing the questionnaire, the researcher collected and tallied data using Microsoft Excel.

Statistical Techniques

A weighted mean was used to determine the utilization level of the Completed BERF in SOCSARGEN. Likewise, the arithmetic mean was used to determine the learners' overall proficiency in the BERF-recipient school. Finally, the Spearman Rank Correlation was used to determine the relationship between the utilization level completed BERF and learners' proficiency among the BERF-recipient schools.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Utilization level of Completed BERF in SOCSARGEN

The Overall Utilization Level of Completed BERF in SOCSARGEN obtained an overall weighted mean of 3.21, which was verbally described as Moderately Utilized. The research findings may not have reached the intended audience in a way that is accessible, understandable, and relevant to their needs. Likewise, researchers and the school could not actively promote and share their findings through appropriate channels. Hence, the potential users may need more access to the results. Moreover, there needed to be more clarity in integrating research results into practice. Finally, limited resources may have hindered the

implementation of research findings, mainly if there are competing priorities at the end of the school.

These findings are similar to the study conducted by Clores (2021), where access policies, professional/work-related concerns, and resource accessibility impede research utilization. In conclusion, leadership, management, access to dissemination tools, research resources, and researcher motivation issues constrain research utilization. According to Mahilum (2010), the low utilization of research output implies more focus on research applications that empower and capacitate communities. The utilization of research outputs is primarily directed toward instructional purposes and is subject to limitations based on the degree of relevance of the research topic to the subject lessons.

The first indicator that obtained the highest weighted mean is the utilization of completed BERF in SOCSARGEN in terms of Training Programs. It obtained an overall weighted mean of 3.35, verbally described as Highly Utilized. This implies that the completed BERF assisted in improving the teacher's delivery of sound teaching. Likewise, it provided valuable insights into effective teaching and learning approaches, leading to improvements in curriculum design and instructional practices that enhance student learning outcomes. The findings agree with Wildt (2010) and Ludwig (2011) that a research-based training system in foreign higher education institutions assisted as a form of active learning. In addition, Spronken-Smith and Walker (2010) state that research-based training can be realized as a means of understanding science and as a method of teaching.

Furthermore, utilizing completed BERF in terms of Strategic, Operational, and Mid-term plans in SOCSARGEN obtained an overall weighted mean of 3.30, verbally described as Highly Utilized. Results revealed from the data gathered that teacher researchers and school administrators significantly utilized the BERF-funded research in the planning process. The research results have provided the School Planning Team with valuable insights and evidence that may inform decision-making. It enabled the school to make informed choices and increased the chances of achieving desired outcomes. These findings align with Moran (2020) who states that planning provides the structure to identify and focus on the institution's problems, difficulties, and issues. Planning enhances communication, enabling all parties to understand their obligations (Mueller, 2015). According to Bresciani (2010), research-based planning collects and combines programmatic outcomes-based assessment information with a pattern, projected volume data, and organizational goals and objectives. The results of this procedure help strategize assets, policy proposals, and program design to realize or reexamine institutional goals and objectives.

On the same level, the utilization of completed BERF in terms

of Instructional Materials was *Highly Utilized* by the respondents in their school, with an overall weighted mean of 3.27. The BERF completed research contributed to better teacher and learner interaction. It also facilitated a better understanding of the concepts taught by the teacher. Likewise, it enabled a sound knowledge transfer from the teacher to the learner. Apostolou et al. (2019) noted that utilizing teaching innovations that are grounded in research and have a high impact has a greater likelihood of positive academic achievements for students.

However, the utilization of completed BERF in developing policies, programs, frameworks, and projects obtained an overall weighted mean of 3.22, which was verbally described as *Moderately Utilized*. The research studies may not have aligned with the specific timing or urgency in crafting policies, programs, frameworks, or projects, or they may not directly address the school's immediate needs. Hence, school heads did not prioritize the research results in decision-making.

The findings were similar to Oliver et al. (2014). They found that the most commonly reported challenges to utilizing research evidence were inadequate access to quality research and delayed research output. Hence, Erismann et al. (2021) propose three essential strategies for enhancing the translation of research into policies and practices. These strategies include engaging stakeholders directly and encouraging them to seek evidence from researchers, involving stakeholders in the entire research process from design to implementation, and adopting participatory and transdisciplinary research approaches to generate knowledge and shape policy collaboratively.

Finally, as evaluated by the BERF recipient teacher-researchers, dissemination as a sub-variable in research utilization obtained an overall weighted mean of 2.93, verbally described as *Moderately Utilized*. The researchers may have encountered issues accessing platforms for dissemination, including conferences or journals, to share their findings. Likewise, the erratic institutional support for dissemination activities may have contributed to the moderate dissemination of research results.

Analogous findings in the study of McElfish et al. (2019) revealed five barriers to disseminating results to participants. These include logistical/methodological, financial, systems, regulatory, and the researcher's capacity. They suggested training for research faculty and staff, promotion and tenure incentives, and funding agencies supporting dissemination of results to participants were the solutions to overcome barriers. Likewise, the study (Mahilum, 2013) revealed that the extent of dissemination coverage is restricted or confined to a specific area.

Table 1

Utilization Level of Completed Research under BERF in SOCSARGEN

Indicator	WM	Description
Dissemination	2.93	Moderately Utilized
Development of Policies, Program, Frameworks and Projects	3.22	Moderately Utilized
Strategic, Operational and Mid-term Plans	3.30	Highly Utilized
Training Programs	3.35	Highly Utilized
Instructional Materials	3.27	Highly Utilized
Overall Weighted Mean	3.21	Moderately Utilized

Legend: Highly Utilized 3.25 – 4.00 Moderately Utilized 2.50 – 3.24 Poorly Utilized 1.75 – 2.49 Not Utilized 1.00 – 1.74

Overall Proficiency of Learners

Table 2 shows the overall learners' proficiency of the BERF Recipient schools for the First Quarter of the school year 2022-2023. There were 14 schools where the BERF recipient teacher-researchers were teaching. Out of the 14 BERF-recipient schools in SOCSARGEN, nine schools obtained a very satisfactory rating in the learners' overall proficiency. In comparison, five BERF recipient schools obtained satisfactory ratings in learners' overall proficiency.

The learners' overall proficiency is 85.36%, verbally described as *Very Satisfactory*. The results entail that the learners fared well in their academics. Their improved digital skills during the pandemic may have been carried out in face-to-face classes, leading to their very satisfactory rating. Likewise, remote learning has allowed them to have a more personalized and self-paced learning experience. Furthermore, the pandemic has required learners to adapt to new learning environments, handle disruptions, and demonstrate resilience in the face of challenges.

Kuhfeld et al. (2020) believed missing school longer due to the COVID-19 outbreak will likely positively influence students' academic achievement. Furthermore, the adoption and Integration of ICTs are paramount to accessing knowledge and keeping up with modern developments. Global resources such as digital libraries allow professors, students, and professionals to access and share research and course materials anytime and anywhere, 24 hours a day, seven days a week (Suárez-Rodríguez et al., 2018). New educational approaches are possible in teaching and learning by adopting and integrating

ICTs, which provide higher-order skills such as solving complex real-world problems and improving the perception and understanding of the learning process (Knezek & Christensen, 2016).

Table 2
Overall Learners Proficiency among the BERF Recipient School

Description	Range	Frequency	Percentage
Outstanding	90-100	0	0
Very Satisfactory	85-89	9	64.3%
Satisfactory	80-84	5	35.7%
Fairly Satisfactory	75-79	0	0
Did not meet Expectations	74 and below	0	0
<i>Total</i>		<i>14</i>	<i>100%</i>
<i>Overall Proficiency of Learners</i>	<i>85.36 %</i>		

Legend: Outstanding 90-100, Very Satisfactory 85-89, Satisfactory 80-84 Fairly Satisfactory 75-79, Did Not Meet Expectations 74 and below

Relationship between the Utilization of Completed BERF and Learners’ Proficiency

Table 3 shows the relationship between the utilization of completed BERF and the overall learner’s proficiency in BERF recipient schools. A Spearman’s rank correlation, tested at a 0.05 level of significance, was undertaken to determine the relationship between the utilization of completed research under BERF in SOCSARGEN and the overall level of proficiency among the learners in the BERF-recipient school. The results show that there was a negligible, negative correlation between dissemination and proficiency of learners ($r^s = -.090$, $p = .759$), strategic, operational, and mid-term plans and proficiency of learners ($r^s = -.185$, $p = .527$), instructional materials and proficiency of learners ($r^s = -.144$, $p = .264$). All of which were not statistically significant. Likewise, there was a negligible, positive correlation between policy planning and learners’ proficiency, which was not statistically significant ($r^s = .075$, $p = .799$). Also, there was a weak, negative correlation between training programs and learners’ proficiency, which was not statistically significant ($r^s = -.296$, $p = .304$). Overall, none of the variables on the utilization level affects the academic grade proficiency among the learners of the BERF recipient schools.

There could be several factors that contribute to the lack of a significant relationship between the utilization of completed BERF and the proficiency

of learners despite the moderate utilization of research findings and the very satisfactory proficiency level of the learners. One obvious factor is the multifaceted nature of the education system. Basic Education comprises stakeholders, teachers, students, parents, and policymakers. Each one of them has their perspectives and priorities. Translating research findings into classroom practices and policies may face challenges due to various implementation strategies.

While research findings may provide valuable insights into effective teaching methods, learners' proficiency is also influenced by factors outside the classroom, such as socioeconomic status, family support, etc. These external factors may overshadow the direct impact of research utilization on learners' proficiency. Additionally, the timeframe for measuring the relationship between the utilization of completed BERF and the learners' proficiency may have played a role. Research findings may take time to fully integrate into educational practices, and the impact on learners' proficiency may not be immediately evident.

The application of research helps bridge the gap between new ideas and their implementation. Suppose the research findings are not readily available or practical for key stakeholders, such as individuals with disabilities, their families, service providers, advocates, and fellow researchers. In that case, their practical value is significantly reduced (Saurabh et al., 2018). Enhancing the use of research could help mend the current divide between research and policy and between research and practice (Wyse et al., 2018). Many barriers exist to successful implementation, including financial disincentives, lack of time or awareness of extensive evidence resources, limited critical appraisal skills, and difficulties applying evidence in context (Paramonczyk, 2005). Evaluating the effectiveness of implementation strategies and the inter-relating factors associated with effective utilization strategies (Murthy et al., 2012).

Table 3

Relationship between the Utilization of Completed BERF and the Proficiency of Learners

Variables in Utilization	Proficiency of Learners		
	r^s	P	Remarks
Dissemination	-.090	.759	Not Significant
Development of Polices, Program, Frameworks and Projects	.075	.799	Not Significant
Strategic, Operational and Mid-term Plans	-.185	.527	Not Significant

Training Programs	-.296	.304	Not Significant
Instructional Materials	-.144	.264	Not Significant

CONCLUSIONS

The results suggest that there might be other factors at play that contribute more significantly to learner proficiency than the direct utilization of research findings from BERF research. While research is valuable for informing educational practices, its impact may be influenced by various factors, such as teaching methods, teacher-student relationships, and school resources. These factors may have a stronger influence on learners' performance than using research-based strategies. Likewise, the results highlight the importance of considering the quality and relevance of the research being conducted and funded. While moderate utilization implies that research findings are being applied, it does not necessarily mean the research is effective or applicable to a specific educational context. Moreover, the findings emphasize the importance of ongoing collaboration and communication between teacher researchers and school heads. While the direct utilization of research may not significantly impact learners' proficiency, the exchange of knowledge and ideas between teacher-researchers and school heads can lead to the development of innovative practices and evidence-informed practices.

Therefore, it is recommended that the program holders of BERF critically evaluate the funded research to be conducted and ensure its alignment with the needs and characteristics of the learners and the school. It is vital to ensure that research findings are easily accessible and usable by all stakeholders. Accordingly, it is wise to establish a system of continuous evaluation and improvement of research utilization in basic education. This should involve monitoring the implementation of research-based innovation, interventions, and strategies, collecting feedback from stakeholders, and regularly reviewing the effectiveness of policies and programs by continuously evaluating and improving research utilization efforts. The Department of Education can ensure that the utilization of research findings aligns with the evolving needs of learners and the education system.

While this study provided valuable insights into the relationship between the utilization of completed BERF and learners' proficiency, it also has certain limitations. First, the number of respondents, which includes only 40 teacher-researchers, could potentially limit the depth of the findings. Despite

using total enumeration, this relatively small number may not fully represent the diverse range of experiences and perspectives among the teacher-researchers. Secondly, the study's timeframe, covering only the 2019-2021 school years, may not capture the complete picture of the utilization of completed BERF and its relationship to learners' proficiency. In this specific time frame, the world was grappling with the wrath of the pandemic. Thirdly, the exclusion of other themes such as child protection, human resources, and governance might have overlooked potential influence on both the utilization of completed BERF and the learner's proficiency. Lastly, the use of a one-shot survey presents another limitation. This approach captures a snapshot of a single point in time. It may not account for changes, trends, or fluctuations in the utilization of completed funded research or in learners' proficiency that could occur over time.

TRANSLATIONAL RESEARCH

The study findings are a critical component of all disciplines. It is an eye-opener where research findings should be applied in various domains to improve outcomes, inform policies, and drive progress. It helps maximize the impact of scientific research on the real world, making it an essential aspect of knowledge translation.

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