

## Rapid Response Brief

### September 2023

### What can research evidence tell us about:

## Empowering Educators: Transforming Teachers into Researchers in Uganda's Education Transformation"

### *Key messages*

- The transformation of teachers into researchers needs teachers to be equipped with skills and knowledge of action research.
  - This approach is inherently systematic and cyclical, involving a series of key steps: problem or challenge identification, data collection related to the challenge, strategy development to address the challenge, strategy implementation, and observation of its impact
  - It is crucial to adopt evidence-based practices, not limited to Action Research, to allow for an inclusive approach for teachers lacking research skills.
- Some of the benefits of transforming teachers into researchers include:
  - To the learners, it leads to better learning outcomes through Increased freedom and independence, Increased active participation in learning, Individualized instruction by teachers, Improved instruction by teachers, and Inclusion of learners in the research process.
  - To the teachers and the education sector, it leads to overall improvement in the quality of the sector through Increased willingness to use research findings, More empowerment for teachers, Development of new skill sets, More involvement in directing the sector, More opportunities for career advancement, Increased confidence in decisions and actions taken, Improved ability to reflect and Increased dependency on evidence-based practices.
- Institutionalization of action research is required to protect the gains of transforming teachers into researchers.
  - Pre-service and in-service training of teachers coupled with strategic changes at school, local, and central government levels are key in achieving institutionalization.
- Challenges that one needs to consider in the transformation process include: Cost (both time and resources), Negative perceptions towards the change and Training and re-training inadequacy

### Where did this Rapid Response come from?

This document was created in response to a specific question from a policymaker in Uganda in 2023.

It was prepared by the Center for Rapid Evidence Synthesis (ACRES) at the Uganda country node of the Regional East African Community Health (REACH) Policy Initiative.

### **+** Included:

- **Key findings** from research
- **Considerations about the relevance** of this research for health system decisions in Uganda

### **X** Not included:

- Recommendations
- Detailed descriptions



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## Summary

**Background:** The government of Uganda constituted The Education Policy Review Commission to draft the macro policy framework for the education and sports sector. This framework is expected to guide the development of new policies in the sector that align with Uganda's Vision 2040, "A transformed society from a peasant to a modern and prosperous country within 30 years". This transformation necessitates the imparting of knowledge to students using the most effective pedagogical methods and the latest information available. In this context, the role of teachers is central. Teachers will need to be transformed into researchers to achieve this goal. Against this backdrop, the Education Policy Review Commission (EPRC) seeks input from various stakeholders in developing the nation's new education and sports framework. This brief delves into the significance of transforming teachers into action researchers and outlines the critical considerations for accomplishing this transformation.

**Rapid Response Question:** *What are the advantages of empowering teachers to act as researchers, and what factors should be considered to facilitate this transformation?*

### Findings:

The transformation of teachers into researchers will need teachers to be equipped with skills and knowledge of action research. Action research is the most applicable research method for teachers as it allows teachers to interrogate their environment (the learners, pedagogy and instruction materials), identifying areas that need change, identifying strategies/ interventions to address these challenges, implement these strategies and observing the impacts achieved.

Action research has benefits to the learners, the teachers and the sector at large. These are listed below;

#### To the learners

- Increased freedom and independence
- Better socialization
- Increased active participation in learning
- Individualized instruction by teachers
- Improved instruction by teachers
- Increased enjoyment in learning
- Better learning outcomes
- Inclusion of learners in the research process

#### To the teachers and the sector

- Increased willingness to use research findings
- Individualized instruction for learners
- More empowerment for teachers
- Development of new skills set
- More involvement in directing the sector
- More opportunities for career advancement
- Increased confidence in decisions and actions taken
- More collaboration among teachers
- Reflective practitioners
- Increased dependency on evidence-based practices.

There are specific considerations that one needs to adhere to achieve the positive impacts of transforming teachers into researchers. These considerations range from skilling teachers and education sector administrators, activities expected of both local and central government, to getting buy-in from the community at large. Ultimately, these should result in the institutionalization of action research to avoid erosion of gains over time.

There are some challenges that one needs to consider in this process, and these are: (1) the process is costly in both terms of time and resources, (2) negative perceptions towards the change can result in pushback, (3) inadequacy of training can affect implementation, (4) without retraining, the knowledge and skills obtained can decay with time, (5) biased results from the research activities and (6) exposure to conflicting opinions, ideas or perspectives, leading implantation of ineffective strategies.

**Conclusion:** The transformation of teachers into researchers plays a pivotal role in advancing the education sector. However, there is a need to institutionalize the process to protect the gains of the change in policy.

## Background

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The government of Uganda constituted The Education Policy Review Commission to draft the macro policy framework for the education and sports sector [1]. This framework is designated to replace the 1992 Government White Paper, which has been a guiding document for education policies in Uganda for the past 30 years. The new framework is expected to guide the development of new policies in the sector that align with Uganda's Vision 2040, "*A transformed society from a peasant to a modern and prosperous country within 30 years.*" This initiative underscores the government's recognition of the education sector's pivotal role in driving socio-economic transformation, particularly as Uganda transitions from an agriculture-focused economy to an industrialized one [2].

The education sector presents a vital opportunity to facilitate this transformation. The necessary changes can be instilled within the teaching and learning process, ensuring that students are exposed to the latest advancements in knowledge tailored to their educational levels. In this context, the role of teachers is central. Teachers need to adopt an adventurous and experimental approach, remaining open to innovative teaching methods and staying updated with current knowledge in their respective subjects. This implies that teachers should consider themselves educators and researchers as they carry out their educational responsibilities.

Against this backdrop, the Education Policy Review Commission (EPRC) seeks input from various stakeholders in developing the nation's new education and sports framework.

This rapid response brief is the second installment in a series of briefs developed to support this policy development process. The first brief addressed the possible policy considerations for a teacher as an "agent" of socio-economic transformation. This brief delves into the significance of transforming teachers into action researchers and outlines the critical considerations for accomplishing this transformation.

**Rapid Response Question:** What are the advantages of empowering teachers to act as researchers, and what factors should be considered to facilitate this transformation?

## Summary of findings

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In this report, we summarize the evidence on transforming teachers into researchers. We start by describing what it means to transform a teacher into a researcher. We then delve into the following;

1. Benefits of transforming teachers into researchers.
2. Considerations for transforming teachers into researchers.
3. Expected challenges of transforming teachers into researchers.

The evidence that informed this Rapid Response Brief comes mostly from literature reviews on the topic and two interventional studies. These sources of evidence are, however applicable to answer the Rapid Response Question as the question is exploratory in nature, seeking to draw evidence on what is known about action research.

### How this Rapid Response was prepared

After clarifying the question being asked, we searched for systematic reviews, local or national evidence from Uganda, and other relevant research. The methods used by the SURE Rapid Response Service to find, select and assess research evidence are described here:

[www.evipnet.org/sure/rr/methods](http://www.evipnet.org/sure/rr/methods)

## Transforming Teachers into Researchers

**Action research stands out as the most pertinent form of research for enhancing teachers' practice.** Its suitability lies in the fact that the questions being addressed originate from within the teacher's own practice, the research itself is conducted by the teacher, and the outcomes directly inform and enrich the teacher's practice. This **allows teachers to integrate practice with inquiry, engaging in assessing and improving their practice and the school system as a whole** [3-8].

Action research has been defined in various ways by different researchers, yet they all converge on its fundamental principles. **This approach is inherently systematic and cyclical, involving a series of key steps: problem or challenge identification, data collection related to the challenge, strategy development to address the challenge, strategy implementation, and observation of its impact** [3-6, 9, 10]. This systematic methodology employed by action research offers a precise lens through which to examine not only the teacher's practice but also the realities of students' lives, the intricacies of school systems, and the broader education sector. It serves as a platform for inquiry and problem-solving, harnessing the insights and expertise of sector practitioners.

## Benefits of Teacher Transformation into Researchers

The benefits of teachers utilizing action research can broadly be categorized into three; (1) Benefits to learners, (2) Benefits to teachers, and (3) Benefits to the education sector at large.

### ➤ Benefits to learners

For learners whose teachers use action research to improve their practice and for those who have been trained in their respective age-appropriate use of action research, the approach has the following benefits;[6, 8]

1. Increased student freedom and independence which leads to better learning outcomes and motivation to learn.
2. Better socialization and connection with peers.
3. Increased student active participation in the learning process.
4. Teachers identify and address students' individual needs which enhances individual student's learning experiences.
5. Promotion of opportunities for students to develop enjoyment for reading and learning.
6. Individualized teaching approach and development of learning activities which considers students' multiple intelligences.
7. Learners benefit from improved instruction methods by the teachers and therefore improvements in learning achievements.

### ➤ Benefits to the teachers and the education sector

1. Action research equips teachers with the skills and knowledge to get interested in and understand their learners needs. From this, the teachers can adequately plan to improve teaching and learning by tailoring learning activities to specific needs of the learners [10].
2. Action research empowers teachers with the skillset to improve their practice. Teachers can identify the challenges within their practice, and research on ways of how to improve this.

This allows teachers to design their own meaningful pedagogy, and increase their knowledge of teaching and learning [4, 8, 10, 11].

3. Action research can stimulate change in the teacher's thinking and practice, promote self-improvement and self-awareness among teachers. This can improve teachers' writing and research skills [4, 11].
4. Action research can improve school curriculums through input from the results from the research. From the teacher input, trends and practices within the sector can be improved [4]. Likewise, research can improve teaching approaches, strategies, methods, styles and instructional materials [4].
5. Teacher transformation into researchers increases their confidence in the actions they take during teaching and learning. The research bridges the gap between theory and practice during teaching and learning as the practice is informed by evidence [4, 11].
6. Action research has the potential to provide opportunities for career advancement for the teachers [4, 8, 10]. Through action research, teachers can get interest in further studies, and would access to the tools and data to inform research projects. With this upgrading, teacher have the opportunity to shape the future of the profession.
7. Transforming teachers into researchers can foster collaboration among teachers. This collaboration can take on the form of improved communication, sharing of experiences and expertise, which culminate into more knowledgeable and active teachers, benefiting the teachers and the sector at large [10].
8. When teachers are transformed into researchers, their willingness to accept and use research findings to improve their practice increases. It transforms teachers into more critical and responsive consumers of research [11].

### Considerations for Transforming Teachers into Researchers

For a successful introduction of any change, including the transformation of teachers into researchers, to improve teaching and learning in Uganda should consider the following: [12]

- a. **Pre-service teacher training** – Using action research in teaching and learning can be **incorporated into the pre-service teacher training approaches and curricula**. This approach will allow the inculcation of the approach into the teaching profession, where the teachers will experience the impact of the approach but also learn how to use the approach in teaching and learning.
- b. **In-service training of existing teachers** – Any change involves learning something new. **In-service training directly linked to the teachers' practice and context is crucial to introduce teachers to new concepts**. This can be achieved through workshops, conferences, and on-school support from identified experts. In-service training should ensure that the training is coupled with demonstrations and opportunities to practice in a safe environment (non-threatening contexts) with options for in-classroom feedback. The teachers should have access to consultants to guide the ongoing learning process.
- c. **School-level leadership** [13]– Adopting new strategies is more likely to succeed if the school leadership buys into the proposed change. The school leadership can choose to be trained in the use of Action Research in teacher's practice or be enlightened about the importance of Action Research without necessarily understanding the actual practical details of action research. **If the school leadership has bought into the proposed change, it will provide a safe and positive environment for the teachers to implement it.**

- d. **Local government commitment and support for change** – There needs to be a commitment to the proposed changes from the different governing bodies within the sector (The District Education Committee, the LC5 Council for Primary Schools, the Ministry of Education and Sports for the Secondary Schools, among other local government bodies). **These should demonstrate that they support the change both during the initiation of the policy change and during the implementation of the policy.** This can be demonstrated through the dedication of resources to ensure teachers acquire the necessary skills to implement the Action Research and by ensuring ongoing support and supervision of the schools.
- e. **A clear process for implementing and institutionalizing the changes** – The Ministry of Education and Sports should create an organizational structure and process to guide the implementation and institutionalization of the changes within the sector. **These structures and processes should span from schools to the local and central governments.** Planning for these structures and processes should **consider what is practical and politically acceptable within the local context** to maximize the possibility of successful institutionalization of the changes.
- f. **Monitoring, Learning, and Evaluation** – MLE should be part of the strategies to consider when implementing a new change. **The data that feeds into the MLE framework should be obtained from the learners to the teachers, the school administration and the community.** This information should be used to identify the program's weaknesses and strengths and plan for improvements within the program.
- g. **Community Support** – Like in any other sector, the community has a large role to play in successfully implementing new policies. **In education, if the parents support a given change, they are more likely to pressure the school boards to implement the changes, and the reverse is true.** It is, therefore, essential to inform the community about the proposed changes and, where possible, **engage them in the design of the policy change.**
- h. **Environmental stability** – Changes take time to take root and to be fully appreciated by the different stakeholders. Changes within the governance structures that implement a new policy often negatively impact the continuity of the change progress. However, changes are inevitable within the civil service. **Institutionalizing roles, ensuring the wide spread of roles to different offices, and considering the continuity of project activities during administrative transfers can be used to avert the negative impacts of civil service reshuffles.**
- i. **Time commitment** – Teachers and school administrators need to commit time to the implementation of action research. This is because **it takes time to appreciate the process of action research, and also takes time to implement action research** [6].

**Teachers need to acquire the skills to undertake action research.** This can be achieved through the following ways;

- a. **Collaboration with academic researchers** – Teachers have access and collaborate with researchers who understand and utilize action research. This will allow the teachers to learn from the academic prowess and lived experiences of these researchers as they set out to transform into teacher researchers.
- b. **Participation in workshops and seminars** – Workshops, seminars, and conferences are one of the ways that teachers can remain abreast with the most recent information and advances in action research. They also provide an avenue for teachers to share their experiences and

findings from undertaking action research, and have these critiqued for improvement in practice.

- c. **Developing research grants** – Action research might require funds, which funds might not be readily available in the school budgets. These funds might be needed to attend trainings, or to outsource some aspects of the research such as data analysis, which the teachers might lack. To bridge this gap, teachers will need to apply for funds through grants.
- d. **Have access to research guidelines** – Giving all teachers access to research guidelines is important in ensuring that all teachers are well informed on the processes of conducting action research.
- e. **Develop and encourage mentoring programs** – Mentoring programs allow teachers to have proper instructions as and when needed in executing the research. This will allow the teachers to grow and constantly improve their skills and knowledge in action research.

## Expected Challenges in Transforming Teachers into Researchers.

In this section we provide the challenges that policy makers need to anticipate and plan for when implementing action research.

1. **Time constraints** [14, 15] – There exists a compelling need for teachers to allocate dedicated time to research alongside their teaching responsibilities. Engaging in research activities can indeed be time-consuming for educators, especially when they have not yet fully grasped the profound impact that action research can have on enhancing their practice.
2. **Negative perceptions towards action research** [14] – Not all teachers and administrators fully recognize the value of research within their roles. Some educators may still maintain the belief that research is not essential for enhancing their teaching practice. Such attitudes could potentially influence those who are interested in engaging in action research.
3. **Inadequate training** [14] – Inadequate training for teachers can hinder the development of the necessary skills for conducting action research. This deficiency in skills can erode the teacher's confidence, ultimately leading to a diminished interest in and adoption of action research.
4. **Fading away of knowledge and skills** [14] – There is a high possibility of teachers skills and knowledge fading away with time, if deliberate measures to guard against this are not instituted.
5. **Biased results** [14] – When the same individuals who formulate the research questions also conduct the research and subsequently apply the research findings, a potential bias may emerge due to their preconceived notions about what should or should not work. This bias can influence the research results and can lead to the implementation of ineffective strategies.
6. **Cost** [14] – The action research process can sometimes incur significant costs, particularly when surveys are required or when funding is needed for data analysis. In cases where teachers do not have a dedicated budget allocation for this purpose within the school, it can pose a barrier to the implementation of action research.

## Conclusion

The transformation of teachers into researchers plays a pivotal role in advancing the education sector. The advantages of this transformation extend beyond just the learners and teachers; they have far-reaching positive implications for the entire sector. However, it is crucial for policymakers to make intentional efforts to actualize these benefits. All planned initiatives should be geared towards the institutionalization of action research within the education sector.

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## What is a Rapid Response?

Rapid Responses address the needs of policymakers and managers for research evidence that has been appraised and contextualised in a matter of hours or days, if it is going to be of value to them. The Responses address questions about arrangements for organising, financing and governing health systems, and strategies for implementing changes.

## What is ACRES?

**ACRES** – The Center for Rapid Evidence Synthesis (ACRES) is a center of excellence at Makerere University- in delivering timely evidence, building capacity and improving the understanding the effective, efficient and sustainable use of the rapid evidence syntheses for policy making in Africa. ACRES builds on and supports the Evidence-Informed Policy Network (**EVIPNet**) in Africa and the Regional East African Community Health (**REACH**) Policy Initiative (see back page). ACRES is funded by the Hewlett and Flora foundation. <http://bit.do/eNQG6>

## ACRES' collaborators:



Regional East African Community  
Health Policy Initiative

## Regional East African Community Health Policy Initiative



EVIPnet

## Glossary

of terms used in this report:

[www.evipnet.org/sure/rr/glossary](http://www.evipnet.org/sure/rr/glossary)

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**Conflicts of interest**

None known.

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