



Strengthening Kenya's Education Evidence Ecosystem: Nurturing a Culture of Evidence Use

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Introduction

Kenya's education sector is undergoing significant transformation through the implementation of Competency-Based Education (CBE), expanded access, and digital integration initiatives (KICD, 2022; World Bank, 2023). These reforms have increased demand for timely, credible, and actionable evidence to inform decision-making at all levels of the education system. While Kenya has made substantial investments in data systems, assessments, monitoring, and policy reform processes, the use of evidence remains uneven and insufficiently institutionalised.

Globally, there is growing recognition that evidence-informed decision-making is not simply a technical exercise involving data collection and research production. Effective evidence use depends on the interaction of institutions, systems, incentives, leadership, culture, and capacity (OECD, 2024; Learning First, 2021). High-performing education systems increasingly view evidence as a core component of governance and continuous improvement rather than as a compliance requirement.

This note summarises insights and recommendations from *Strengthening the Use of Evidence in Education Decision Making: A Desktop Review of Global and Regional Education Frameworks—Examining Mindsets, Capacities, and Practices that Strengthen the Use of Evidence* and *A Situational Analysis of Evidence Use Culture and Practice in Kenya*. Together, these reports synthesise lessons from global and regional frameworks, examine the current state of Kenya's education evidence ecosystem, and identify priority actions to strengthen the systematic use of evidence in education policy, planning, implementation, and reform.

Key Insights

- Kenya has strong foundations for evidence-informed reform. Robust policy frameworks, national data systems, assessment institutions, and recent reform processes provide a solid basis for strengthening evidence use across the education sector.
- The challenge is not evidence generation but evidence use. Kenya produces substantial amounts of data and research, yet the translation of evidence into policy decisions, implementation improvements, and classroom practice remains inconsistent.
- Fragmentation limits impact. Data systems, institutional mandates, and decision-making processes are often disconnected, reducing opportunities for learning, coordination, and collective action.
- Evidence use is as much about people as it is about structures and procedures. Leadership, trust, incentives, organizational culture, and capacity are as important as technical infrastructure in determining whether evidence informs decision-making (OECD, 2024; Learning First, 2021).
- Sustainability requires institutionalisation. Long-term impact depends on embedding evidence use within government structures, processes, performance systems, and budgets, rather than relying on project-based initiatives and donor support (Booth & Unsworth, 2014; UNESCO, 2019).

Lessons from Global and Regional Frameworks

Global and regional frameworks converge on a common principle: sustainable education reform requires systems that continuously generate, synthesise, share, and apply evidence.

UNESCO's Education 2030 framework emphasises multi-level governance, technical coordination structures, learning networks, and strong monitoring systems that connect global knowledge with national priorities (UNESCO, 2024). The OECD highlights the importance of organisational cultures that reward inquiry, learning, and adaptation (OECD, 2024). The What Works Hub for Global Education promotes embedded evidence systems in which policymakers, researchers, and practitioners collaborate to test, learn, and improve policies in real time. Education Evidence Labs (Jacobs Foundation, Innovations for Poverty Action) demonstrate the value of co-creating learning agendas between governments and research institutions, while the RISE Programme highlighted the importance of understanding how policies, institutions, incentives, and classroom practices interact.

At the regional level, the African Union's Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 16–25) promotes data-driven planning, accountability, and peer learning. The East African Community Education Protocol similarly emphasises collaborative research, benchmarking, and harmonisation among member states.

Collectively, these frameworks demonstrate that effective evidence ecosystems require:

- Strong governance and institutional arrangements.
- Reliable, interoperable data systems.
- Continuous monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL).
- Knowledge translation and evidence synthesis mechanisms.
- Leadership that champions evidence use.
- Incentives that reward learning and adaptation.
- Stakeholder engagement and feedback processes.
- Sustainable financing and capacity development.

Kenya's Evidence Ecosystem: Progress and Persistent Challenges

Kenya has established a strong policy and institutional foundation for evidence-informed decision-making. The Constitution of Kenya (2010), the Basic Education Act (2013), Sessional Paper No. 1 of 2019, and the National Education Sector Strategic Plan (NESSP) all emphasise the importance of evidence in education planning and reform.

Recent reforms, including Competency-Based Education and associated monitoring processes such as the Presidential Working Party on Education Reforms (PWPER), have demonstrated a growing demand for evidence-informed policymaking.

Despite these advances, several challenges continue to constrain evidence use.

Fragmented Systems and Weak Coordination

Data and evidence are generated across multiple institutions using different systems, standards, and reporting processes. Limited interoperability among KEMIS, assessment systems, teacher management systems, and other data sources restricts comprehensive analysis and decision-making. Coordination challenges also exist between national and county levels, resulting in uneven implementation and use of evidence.

Weak Feedback Loops

Although substantial amounts of information are collected, evidence does not consistently flow back to decision-makers, schools, and communities in ways that support learning and adaptation. Reporting systems remain largely upward facing, with limited opportunities for reflection, learning, and action at local levels (UNICEF, 2021; Ministry of Education, 2022).

Limited Capacity for Evidence Use

Capacity constraints remain significant, particularly at the county and school levels. Many actors lack the skills and support needed to interpret data, assess research findings, and translate evidence into practical decisions. Sustainable evidence use requires strategic competencies among policymakers, analytical skills among technical staff, and data literacy throughout the system (UNESCO IIEP, 2022; UNICEF, 2023).

Trust and Accountability Challenges

Perceived data quality issues, fragmented reporting systems, and limited transparency can undermine confidence in evidence. Existing accountability mechanisms are not always sufficiently connected to learning and evidence use. Trust, transparency, and accountability are increasingly recognised as prerequisites for effective evidence-informed decision-making (UNESCO, 2024; OECD, 2024).

Behavioural and Cultural Barriers

Evidence use is influenced by organisational norms, incentives, leadership behaviours, and professional cultures. In many instances, evidence is viewed as a compliance requirement rather than as a tool for learning and improvement. Research highlights the importance of leadership mindsets, peer networks, organisational culture, and openness to learning in shaping evidence use (OECD, 2024; Learning First, 2021).

Sustainability and Donor Dependence

Many evidence-related initiatives rely heavily on external funding and technical assistance. This reliance creates risks for continuity, institutional ownership, and long-term sustainability. Evidence systems require predictable financing and long-term government commitment to remain effective (Booth & Unsworth, 2014; UNESCO, 2019).

A Pathway to a Stronger Evidence Ecosystem

Strengthening Kenya's evidence ecosystem requires a whole-system approach that addresses technical, institutional, behavioural, and financial dimensions simultaneously.

Strengthen Institutional Architecture

Establish a clearly mandated and adequately resourced evidence function within the Ministry of Education to coordinate evidence generation, synthesis, translation, and use across the sector. Formal cross-directorate mechanisms should facilitate collaboration among policy, planning, curriculum, assessment, teacher management, and implementation functions (UNESCO, 2024; IPA, 2024).

Create an Integrated Evidence System

Improve interoperability among KEMIS, KNEC, TSC, and other data systems while strengthening the Education Evidence Hub as a platform for evidence synthesis and knowledge sharing. An evidence lifecycle approach that encompasses generation, synthesis, uptake, and feedback would support more systematic use of evidence across the education system (IPA, 2024; UNESCO, 2015).

Institutionalise Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning

Embed MEL within all major education programmes and link findings directly to NESSP priorities. Regular review cycles should ensure that evidence informs policy adjustments, implementation improvements, and resource allocation decisions (UNICEF, 2023).

Build Capacity at All Levels

Develop a national evidence-use competency framework that defines the knowledge and skills required by policymakers, technical officers, county education staff, school leaders, and teachers. Capacity development should move beyond one-off training to mentorship, peer learning, embedded coaching, and practical application in routine work (UNESCO IIEP, 2022; UNICEF, 2023).

Strengthen Trust, Transparency and Accountability

Strengthen trust through transparent communication, shared indicators, stakeholder engagement, and visible use of evidence in decision-making. Public dashboards, annual evidence reports, validation processes, and co-design approaches can improve confidence in data and reinforce accountability (EdTech Hub & MoE, 2023).

Align Incentives and Leadership

Evidence-informed decision-making should be reinforced through performance contracts, staff appraisals, leadership development programmes, and professional recognition mechanisms. Senior leaders should visibly champion evidence use and create safe spaces for learning and adaptation (TSC & MoE, 2024; OECD, 2024).

Ensure Sustainable Financing

Evidence systems should be financed through dedicated budget lines within national and county education budgets. Long-term sustainability will require reducing reliance on donor funding through domestic financing, co-financing arrangements, and stronger institutional ownership (Booth & Unsworth, 2014; UNESCO, 2019).

High-Level Recommendations

1. Establish and resource a central education evidence function within the Ministry of Education to coordinate evidence generation, synthesis, and uptake.
2. Accelerate interoperability among data systems, including KEMIS, assessment systems, teacher management systems, and emerging evidence platforms.
3. Institutionalise monitoring, evaluation, and learning across all education programmes and link findings directly to policy and budgeting decisions.
4. Develop a national evidence-use competency framework and invest in continuous capacity development at the national, county, and school levels.
5. Strengthen transparency, stakeholder engagement, and accountability through public reporting, feedback mechanisms, and evidence-informed performance management.
6. Secure sustainable financing for evidence systems through dedicated government budget allocations and long-term institutional commitments.

Conclusion

Kenya has built strong foundations for evidence-informed education reform through investments in policy frameworks, data systems, assessment mechanisms, and institutional partnerships. However, achieving the full benefits of these investments requires moving beyond evidence generation toward the systematic use of evidence in decision-making, implementation, and continuous improvement.

A stronger evidence ecosystem will depend on integrated systems, capable institutions, trusted data, supportive incentives, effective leadership, and sustainable financing. By addressing these interconnected challenges and institutionalising evidence use across all levels of the education system, Kenya will be better positioned to adapt, innovate, and deliver equitable, high-quality learning outcomes for all learners.

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