



**Bridging the Gap:
Simplifying Access to Research for
K-12 Educators**

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Abstract

While educators value research, only 8% engage with it daily, and many prefer informal sources like blogs and social media over traditional academic publications (Boohera, et al, 2020). Educational research holds significant potential to improve K-12 instruction, yet numerous barriers, including time constraints and accessibility issues, hinder its effective use by educators. Using survey data from 263 participants on how they access and use research as K-12 practitioners, the study highlights key challenges to using research and evidence based practices. The survey was grounded in Levin's Knowledge Mobilization Theory (2013), particularly his concept of knowledge use.

The findings reveal educators' priority areas of interest, including social-emotional learning, differentiated instruction, and behavior management, with notable differences based on urban, suburban, and rural settings. Respondents emphasize the need for concise, practical dissemination methods such as infographics, videos, and clear action steps, which align with their classroom realities. Additionally, professional development and peer discussions were identified as highly valuable but often misaligned with educators' needs.

The study underscores the importance of stronger partnerships between K-12 schools and higher education institutions, as only 21% of administrators reported formal relationships with universities. Such collaborations could enhance research relevance and application. Recommendations include fostering research-practice partnerships, improving dissemination formats, and addressing systemic barriers like time limitations. These efforts could empower educators to integrate evidence-based practices effectively, ultimately benefiting student learning.

Keywords: Educational Research: Research Utilization: Evidence-Based Practice:

Teacher Attitudes: Teacher Participation

Introduction

Educational research holds significant potential to improve K-12 instruction, yet numerous barriers hinder its effective use by educators. Bridging the gap between research and the classroom remains a complex challenge, as K-12 educators face a multifaceted array of structural and

individual obstacles. Primary among these is a pervasive lack of time and an overwhelming professional workload, which leaves teachers with little capacity to engage with new findings (O'Reilly et al., 2025). Even when time is available, the technical nature of academic writing often acts as a deterrent; research is frequently perceived as jargon-heavy and disconnected from the practical "nitty-gritty" of daily instruction (Foster, 2014). The implementation of evidence-based practices is often hindered by high levels of teacher stress and burnout, which can lead to "implementation forgetfulness" or a lack of compatibility between a strategy and a specific classroom context (Cook et al., 2022). Organizational barriers, such as insufficient data literacy training and a lack of structured collaborative time, further exacerbate the issue (Moore & Croft, 2018). Ultimately, the successful adoption of research depends on administrative support and in overcoming individual skepticism and increasing a teacher's self-efficacy regarding new methodologies (Long et al., 2022). Additionally, teachers tend to find research credible only when it aligns with their personal experiences (Adedoyin, 2015). The purpose of the study was to solicit insights from K-12 educators as to how to make educational research more accessible and usable to impact positive changes in K-12 education including improvements in student achievement and mental health.

Theoretical Framework

This study was grounded in Levin's Knowledge Mobilization Theory, which explains how research moves (or fails to move) into policy and practice and emphasizes that evidence is most likely to be used when it is accessible, contextually relevant, and shared through reciprocal, collaborative relationships between researchers and practitioners (Levin, 2013). Levin (2013) proposed that effective mobilization requires attention to three interrelated domains: knowledge production (how research questions are generated and studies are designed so findings fit the realities of practice), knowledge use (how practitioners locate, interpret, adapt, and implement evidence within their local constraints), and knowledge mediation (the people, processes, and formats that translate and broker research so it is understandable and actionable). In this study, the primary analytic emphasis was on knowledge use and mediation: K-12 educators were asked what impedes their use of research as it is currently presented (e.g., time, access, credibility, and applicability) and what dissemination approaches would better support their engagement with evidence-informed practices. This theoretical framing provides a lens for interpreting educators' reported behaviors and barriers not as individual deficits, but as indicators of where the research-

to-practice system can be strengthened through more practitioner-centered communication, translation, and partnership. Given these persistent barriers to research use in K–12 settings, the following literature review synthesizes prior scholarship on practitioner research engagement and knowledge mobilization, with particular attention to Levin’s (2013) domains of knowledge use and mediation.

Literature Review

Researchers need to understand the context in which practitioners work and the complexities of actual classrooms. Levin’s second domain is that of knowledge use. Researchers need a comprehensive understanding of how to engage K-12 educators with their findings and how to ensure the presentation of the research does not inhibit its use. Related to knowledge use is knowledge mediation which identifies the most meaningful ways to present research findings to practitioners. Adedoyin (2015) identified that teachers need additional support in understanding and accessing research, which are policy points Levin would articulate need to be addressed for successful integration of new research into K-12 systems.

Challenges for Practitioners

Research (Boohera et al., 2020; Behrstock et al., 2009). indicated that K-12 teachers generally value educational research and are interested in using it to inform their practice However, teachers face challenges in accessing, evaluating, and applying research to their teaching (Boohera et al., 2020). K-12 educators tend to seek research when facing immediate concerns and prefer sources that are easily accessible, credible, and relevant to their context (Behrstock et al., 2009; Miller, et al., 2010b). Miller, Drill, and Behrstock (2010a) went further suggesting that teachers use research more effectively as part of a group that reviews research findings, such as professional learning communities (PLCs). Teachers’ criteria for credible research often differ from those of professional researchers, emphasizing applicability to their classroom (Behrstock et al., 2009). Collaboration between teachers, schools, and universities can enhance research engagement and application (Martinovic et al., 2012).

Viewed through Levin’s (2013) Knowledge Mobilization Theory, these practitioner-reported barriers reflect breakdowns primarily in the domains of knowledge use and knowledge mediation. From a knowledge-use perspective, teachers’ limited time and the tendency to seek research only when immediate problems arise constrain opportunities for sustained inquiry, collective sensemaking, and iterative implementation. From a knowledge-mediation perspective,

the channels through which research reaches educators (e.g., professional development, peer conversations, and readily available online sources) frequently privilege speed and accessibility over methodological detail, contributing to uncertainty about credibility and difficulty interpreting findings. The challenge, therefore, is not simply increasing the amount of available research, but improving the “fit” between research and the conditions of practice by translating findings into context-specific, actionable guidance and embedding opportunities for discussion and adaptation within existing school routines (e.g., PLC structures). This framing also suggests implications for knowledge production: when educators emphasize relevance and applicability, they are signaling that research is most likely to be used when it is designed with practitioner contexts in mind and communicated in forms that support practical decision-making.

Researcher – Practitioner Partnerships

Williams and Cole (2007) identified that one of the barriers to K-12 educators using research is a lack of information literacy skills. Teachers expressed less confidence in finding research in comparison with more general information to support their teaching. Sjolund, et al., (2022) found educators worked with research more effectively through research-practice partnerships. Farrell et al (n.d.) defined research-practice in education as “a long-term collaboration aimed at educational improvement or equitable transformation through engagement with research. These partnerships are intentionally organized to connect diverse forms of expertise and shift power relations in the research endeavor to ensure that all partners have a say in the joint work.” While there is little evidence that research utilization undermines teachers’ values, the movement for research-based practice may be seen as an attempt to shift the basis of teachers’ decision-making (Cain, 2016). Ultimately, improving the alignment between teachers’ needs and research output could enhance research utilization in education (Behrstock et al., 2009).

The Need for More Effective Practice

Politicians, philanthropists, and educators are routinely speaking to the need for change in how K-12 is organized, how instruction is conducted, and how the progress of learning is measured. Mihajla et al. (2024) noted that research over the past decade has highlighted that increasing work intensification, heavy workload demands, and administrative burdens on teachers have significantly reduced the time they can dedicate to their core mission of educating students.

In the current state of education, these additional demands and expectations are leading K-12 educators to report high levels of burnout.

A National Education Association (NEA) study on teacher stress and burnout from 2022 reported that 90% of its members reported burnout as a serious problem. 55% of educators in the same study responded that they were considering leaving education sooner than originally planned (Jotkoff, 2022). Spector's (2024) article further discussed the role of artificial intelligence (AI) in education, including its potential to automate tasks like grading and lesson planning, freeing teachers to focus on more human-centric aspects of their work. However, it is unclear how the benefits of these new technologies are to transition the existing research into practice.

Research Impact

Although hundreds of millions of dollars in funding are infused into educational research on various aspects of teaching and learning (Institute of Educational Sciences, 2021), it doesn't appear to be impacting the effectiveness of K-12 education as measured by standardized test scores on the US's National Report Card (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2023).

Adelabu (2023) raised concerns that because student achievement in literacy and numeracy was dropping even prior to the remote learning caused by COVID, it appeared that educational research was not being-utilized or embedded into practice. Adelabu suggested that educational researchers need to build better relationships with educational leaders. Further, teacher preparation programs need to do a better job of engaging with public school systems to build a pathway to share research with practitioners. Adeluba (2023) and Martinovic et al. (2012) both emphasized the need for research to be more effectively disseminated in formats that are accessible and practical for K-12 educators. Evidence has been established that policy development similarly needs to be grounded in research. According to Adeluba's work, only 12 of 67 grants funded by the Investing in Innovation (i3) Fund improved at least one student outcome. Each of those programs has a tight implementation plan. Only about 12% of studies showed positive results, so it is imperative to ensure the results of those programs and the necessary policy and implementation knowledge to replicate those positive results (Sparks, 2018). Building on this literature and Levin's (2013) knowledge mobilization framework, the next section describes the study design, participants, instrumentation, and procedures used to examine educators' research use and preferred dissemination supports.

Method

This study employed a cross-sectional online survey to solicit insights from K–12 educators regarding how educational research can be made more accessible and usable in school settings, consistent with Levin’s (2013) knowledge mobilization framework. The survey was administered via SurveyMonkey, and responses were anonymous. The survey was designed to capture (a) educators’ current patterns of engaging with research and evidence-based practices (knowledge use) and (b) educators’ preferences for how research should be communicated and delivered to support classroom decision-making (knowledge mediation). Survey items included questions on the frequency with which educators seek research or best practices, the sources they use to access research (e.g., professional development, colleagues, online resources, and journals), and the factors that influence which sources they trust and select. Instrument development was collaborative, involving current K–12 educators, university faculty, and a state-level educational consultant to ensure the items reflected practitioner language and addressed common constraints in schools (e.g., time, access, and contextual fit).

Instrumentation

The survey was used to capture data on educator’s research engagement to solicit the current status of K-12 educator use of research (knowledge use) and how educational researchers could improve their outreach to K-12 educators (knowledge mediation). The survey was developed collaboratively between current K-12 educators, university faculty, and a state level educational consultant to K-12 schools.

The survey included five demographic questions including questions on their experience, role, and the type of district in which they worked. Six questions asked about their interaction within educational research materials. Administrators were asked two additional questions about higher education partnerships. The survey finished with two open-ended questions for educators to share additional information about what educational researchers could do to be more effective in communicating with K-12 educators and what other information they wished to share with educational researchers.

The sample population for the study was K-12 educators with a focus on classroom teachers. This study used a non-probability sampling approach, combining convenience and voluntary response sampling methods. While this approach allowed for the collection of diverse perspectives from active K-12 educators in a variety of venues. This online survey was shared with

K-12 educators primarily in the Midwest via direct electronic solicitation through contact lists developed by the researchers.

Procedures

The survey was distributed electronically to K–12 educators using researcher-developed contact lists and professional networks, with an emphasis on reaching participants across Midwestern school contexts. Potential respondents received an email invitation that described the purpose of the study, included consent information, and provided a link to the online survey. To broaden participation, the invitation was also shared through educator social media channels, and recipients were encouraged to forward the survey to colleagues who met the study criteria. The survey remained open for a defined one month window, and one follow-up e-mail reminder was sent to increase response rates; no identifying information was collected beyond the demographic items included in the instrument.

Findings

A total of 263 educators (n= 263) completed the survey. To describe participants’ current engagement with educational research and best practices, responses were examined by role (e.g., classroom teachers, instructional coaches, administrators, and other support roles), with Table 1 summarizing patterns of engagement across groups. Ten percent of classroom teachers responded that they never look for educational research or best practices. Instructional coaches were the only group in which all respondents (100%) reported seeking out educational research or best practices weekly. Among counselors, librarians, and social workers, 32% reported doing so daily, the highest daily rate of any group. See Table 1 for a complete breakdown of responses.

Table 1

Patterns of Research Engagement Among Educators by Role

	All respondents	Classroom teachers	Instr. Coaches	Administrators	Counselors, Librarians, Social workers, Others
Daily	8%	6%	0%	0%	32%
Weekly	24%	22%	100%	38%	18%
Monthly	25%	24%	0%	38%	28%
A few times a year	35%	40%	0%	15%	18%
Rarely or never	9%	10%	0%	8%	5%

Topics of Interest to K-12 Practitioners

Across all school settings, urban, suburban, and rural, educators identified social-emotional learning as the highest area of interest with 44% of educators identifying it as one of their top three areas of need. Differentiated instruction was second with 38% of educators. Student behavior management ranked as the third most important topic overall, with 35% of respondents prioritizing it. Student behavior was the only issue that was divided by the type of district. Student behavior was identified as a particularly significant issue among suburban educators (42%) and rural educators (35%). In contrast, only 16% of urban educators felt student behavior was one of their top three concerns; less than half the percentage of suburban and rural educators. Urban educators' third priority at 30% was the READ Act and the Science of Reading. Table 2 shows a complete breakdown by setting.

There were 19 additional less common responses presented, which included topics such as student engagement, mental health issues, staff shortages, impact of cell phones or school culture, special education issues, gifted and talented instruction, career and technical education lesson planning, STEAM instruction, personalized learning, professional learning communities, family instability, autism and neurodiversity-affirming practices, and school counseling related topics.

Table 2

Topics of Interest to K-12 Practitioners

	All	Urban	Suburban	Rural
Social emotional learning	44%	51%	42%	43%
Differentiated instruction	38%	30%	38%	41%
Student behavior management and PBIS	35%	16%	42%	35%
Subject matter techniques	32%	22%	28%	40%
Technology including AI	26%	27%	26%	27%
Culturally responsive instruction	24%	24%	29%	18%
READ Act/Science of Reading	24%	30%	21%	27%
MTSS	20%	19%	23%	18%
Inclusion best practices	20%	27%	21%	16%
Parent involvement	14%	16%	12%	15%
Addressing learning loss	10%	14%	8%	12%
Multilingual learning	10%	11%	13%	5%

Sources Practitioners use to Access Research

The respondents provided insights into the sources K-12 educators use to stay informed about educational research, as well as the sources they consider most valuable for accessing this information. Table 3 lists the various sources educators, from urban, suburban, and rural schools, utilize for staying up to date with educational research. It shows in-district professional development, discussions with colleagues, and digital platforms such as educational blogs as key sources. Educators reported using educational blogs and other social media tools at twice the rate of using academic journals or professional magazines. Even basic search engines were more commonly used tools than academic journals. Table 4 identified the sources educators deem most valuable, showing preferences for discussions with colleagues, professional conferences, and in-district professional development.

A pattern emerged where the frequency of sources used (Table 3), and the perceived value of those sources (Table 4) did not align. While in-district professional development and online tools such as blogs and social media (51%) are among the most frequently accessed sources, they are not considered as valuable as academic or professional journals (27% and 21% respectively). Educators prioritized convenience and accessibility. This underscores the need for better curation and simplified access to credible research through easy to access tools.

Conversely, discussions with colleagues and professional conferences, while slightly less frequently used, rank higher in perceived value, indicating a preference for interactive and contextually relevant learning experiences. These findings suggest a gap between the availability and the usefulness of certain research dissemination methods and point to the need for professional development formats that are collaborative, practical, and educator-informed.

Table 3*Sources Practitioners use to Access Research*

	All	Urban	Suburban	Rural
In-district professional development	79%	86%	80%	76%
Discussions with colleagues	72%	78%	72%	71%
Professional conferences or workshops	59%	51%	58%	63%
Educational blogs, podcasts, etc.	58%	68%	57%	55%
Social media	54%	62%	55%	49%
Basic search engines	51%	49%	48%	56%
Academic journals	27%	27%	26%	27%
Professional journals	21%	19%	19%	22%
Other	5%	3%	5%	6%

Table 4*Most Valuable Sources for Practitioners to Access Research*

	All	Urban	Suburban	Rural
Discussions with colleagues	59%	59%	66%	52%
Professional conferences or workshops	58%	43%	55%	68%
In-district professional development	50%	32%	59%	46%
Educational blogs, podcasts, etc.	45%	59%	42%	43%
Social media	31%	32%	33%	28%
Academic journals	20%	32%	19%	13%
Professional journals	9%	11%	8%	10%
Other	5%	5%	3%	5%

Primary Factors in Selecting Sources

The primary factors identified by the findings, influencing K-12 educators' choices for educational research sources emphasize relevance, ease of access, and peer recommendations reflecting a strong desire for practicality and applicability in their professional learning. According to the data, relevance to their teaching or school context is the most significant factor, with 83% of educators indicating it as a key consideration. This indicates that educators are more likely to engage with research that directly addresses the specific challenges they face in their classrooms, such as student behavior, differentiated instruction, or social-emotional learning.

Closely following this, 71% of educators indicated that ease of access or availability is also a key consideration, highlighting how limited time and resources shape their engagement with research. This suggests that even high-quality research may go unused if it is not readily available in a format or platform that teachers can access quickly and without barriers such as paywalls or dense academic language. Furthermore, 50% of educators reported that recommendations from colleagues influence their decision to use a source. This underscores the importance of peer networks and collaborative cultures in schools, where teachers trust and value the insights shared within their professional communities.

The perceived reputation of the source played a role for nearly half of respondents (46%), indicating that while accessibility matters, perceived credibility still influenced decision-making. Additionally, 41% of educators considered whether the research aligned with their personal teaching philosophy, suggesting that educators are discerning in their selection and look for research that resonates with their individual pedagogical values and approaches.

Only 2% of respondents selected “Other” as a reason, reinforcing that educators’ preferences are strongly centered on a small number of practical and familiar factors. These patterns suggest that efforts to improve research dissemination should prioritize user-centered design, presenting research in contextually relevant, easily accessible, and personally meaningful ways. Creating collaborative, peer-driven dissemination strategies and integrating research into familiar professional development settings may further support more consistent engagement with evidence-based practices. See Table 6 for a complete breakdown of these findings by school setting.

Challenges in Accessing and Understanding Research

Time constraints were identified as a major barrier preventing teachers from accessing and applying research in their practice. Many teachers reported limited capacity to explore research independently and requested administrative support in identifying and distilling relevant findings. They also highlighted the importance of structural support, particularly protected time within their schedules, to meaningfully engage with and apply new practices. Additionally, many educators voiced a desire for research that addresses pressing, real-world issues in classrooms, including behavior management, social-emotional learning (SEL), and strategies for supporting students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds and with disabilities. See Table 6.

Table 5*Primary Factors in Selecting Sources*

	All	Urban	Suburban	Rural
Relevant to your teaching or school context	83%	83%	83%	84%
Ease of access/Availability	71%	81%	73%	65%
Recommendations from colleagues	50%	47%	55%	44%
Reputation of the source	46%	47%	48%	44%
Alignment to personal teaching philosophy	41%	44%	45%	33%
Other	2%	0%	3%	1%

Response to Open Ended Questions

When asked what suggestions do you have for improving how educational research is shared and communicated to K-12 teachers and other educators? The responses from K-12 educators reveal key considerations for effectively disseminating research insights to support their practice. A predominant theme is the need for research to be both relevant and practical, with teachers expressing a strong preference for findings that align with the specific contexts of their classrooms, including grade level, subject area, and the unique needs of their students. Educators noted the importance of providing clear, actionable steps for implementation, rather than abstract or overly theoretical insights. To this end, they emphasized the value of simplicity and accessibility, requesting that research findings be presented in concise, digestible formats such as bullet points, infographics, or brief videos. Long-form articles laden with academic jargon were deemed less useful given the time constraints teachers face.

Moreover, respondents underscored the importance of researcher familiarity with the realities of classroom life. Educators expressed frustration with research and professional development initiatives that seem disconnected from the daily challenges of teaching, suggesting that researchers with firsthand classroom experience or those who actively engage with educators are more likely to produce relevant, applicable insights. There was also a strong preference for professional development that promotes collaboration and active discussion, ideally scheduled outside of standard classroom hours to allow uninterrupted focus on integrating new strategies.

Table 6*Challenges in Accessing and Understanding Research*

	All	Urban	Suburban	Rural
Lack of time to review research	87%	81%	86%	93%
Difficulty understanding the research methodology and findings	17%	5%	19%	21%
Uncertainty about the credibility or reliability of the research	22%	11%	27%	21%
Difficulty applying research to your specific teaching context	37%	35%	41%	34%
Lack of access to academic journals or other research sources	24%	38%	23%	20%
Other	3%	0%	3%	4%

When asked what other information respondents would like to share with researchers about how to effectively provide research insights to K-12 educators, 99 respondents provided feedback. Beyond content and format, educators articulated the importance of respect and empowerment in the dissemination of research. They noted that a condescending tone or overemphasis on implementation "mandates" can diminish the perceived relevance and value of research findings. Instead, teachers expressed a preference for a collaborative approach, where their expertise and experience are acknowledged and valued.

Lastly, educators suggested the use of digital platforms and social media to share research insights in bite-sized pieces, making findings more accessible and easier to integrate into their daily practice. This multi-channel approach, paired with a focus on practical, well-communicated, and respectful dissemination, was viewed as essential for research to meaningfully impact classroom teaching.

Higher Education Partnerships

A total of six building and ten district administrators took part in the survey. Those respondents were asked to identify if they have a relationship between their school or district and one or more colleges or universities. Only three (21.43%) had a formal relationship with a higher education institution. Two more respondents (14.29%) identified an informal relationship with a

higher education institution. Three identified information relationships with one or more professors but no relationship, formal or informal, with a higher education institution. Forty-two percent responded that they had no ongoing relationship with higher education. Open-ended comments included that some faculty were currently engaged in graduate programs and had the “opportunity to collaborate on topics related to training, supporting, and coaching educators.” Others mentioned inviting speakers from colleges and universities as well as the need for superintendents to engage to create strong relationships with local institutions.

These findings underscore a significant gap in structured collaboration between K-12 school systems and higher education institutions. The limited number of formal partnerships indicates that most engagement with higher education is either incidental or dependent on individual initiative rather than strategic intent. The fact that nearly half of administrators reported no ongoing relationships with higher education with suggested missed opportunities for systemic, mutually beneficial collaboration. Research-practice partnerships, which emphasize co-designed inquiry and sustained interaction, are largely absent or underdeveloped in these settings. This lack of structured interaction may hinder the translation of current educational research into actionable strategies for schools and districts, further contributing to the disconnect between theory and practice as researchers are not fully aware of the context in which practitioners are working. The open-ended responses highlight that while educators are open to engagement with higher education, through graduate programs or guest speakers, there is no clear framework to turn these sporadic interactions into sustained, strategic partnerships. The call for superintendent-level involvement emphasizes that leadership at the district level plays a crucial role in establishing and maintaining these partnerships. Strengthening these ties could lead to more effective long term professional development, better alignment of research with practice, and improved outcomes for both educators and students.

Demographics

The survey had 263 respondents. See Table 7 for a complete breakdown by gender and degree. Among the respondents, the majority (168) had more than ten years of experience in K-12 education.—The second-largest group consisted of new educators with less than four years of experience, totaling 33 members. Those with between four to seven years of experience numbered 28 participants and 20 had from seven to ten years of experience. Of the participants, 60 identified as male, while 167 identified as female. One respondent identified as non-binary, and another

chose not to disclose their gender. See Table 7. Among the respondents, 17% reported working in urban settings, 37% in rural areas, and 47% in suburban schools.

Table 7

Gender and Highest Degree held by Respondents

	Bachelor's	Master's	Specialist's	Doctorate	Other
Female	54	109	14	4	5
Male	10	40	2	6	2
Non-binary	1	0	0	0	0
Prefer not to answer	1	0	1	0	0
Totals	65	150	17	10	7

When asked what their current role is in the education field, the vast majority (82%) served as classroom teachers. 12 participants identified themselves as counselors, librarians, social workers, or similar roles. 12 administrators completed the survey, and five respondents identified as instructional coaches. 12 respondents selected “Other” and responded they served as school psychologist, a PE teacher, special education aides, a consultant, a speech language pathologist, an occupational therapist, and a regional administrator.

Discussion

The purpose of the study was to solicit insights from K-12 educators as to how to make educational research more accessible and usable to impact positive changes in K-12 education particularly by understanding practitioner needs and how to more effectively engage them. The results of this study underscore the significant gap between educational research and its practical application in K-12 settings, as well as the critical need for accessible, relevant, and actionable guidance to better support educators in their work.

While educators value research, their engagement with it was reported as sporadic, with only 8% seeking research daily. Instructional coaches responded as daily engaging with research, but classroom teachers and administrators are less frequent users, with many responding that they never engage with research. The primary barrier noted by respondents was lack of time, 87%, which is consistent with prior findings (Williams & Cole, 2007). Other less-reported barriers included difficulty applying research to specific teaching contexts (37%) and limited access to academic journals (24%). This aligns with Cain (2016), who noted that research-based practices are often perceived as disconnected from the realities of teaching. Relevance to teaching context, ease of access, and peer recommendations were the most significant factors influencing the use of

research, aligning with Behrstock et al. (2009) and Miller et al. (2010b), who emphasized practicality and accessibility as key motivators for research use.

Educators across all school settings (urban, suburban, rural) identified their top two priorities for information were in the areas of social-emotional learning (SEL), and differentiated instruction. The third most identified need varied slightly amongst school settings with suburban and rural identifying behavior management while urban educators identified the READ Act and Science of Reading, likely influenced by recent Minnesota legislative changes. The need for social-emotional learning (SEL) and behavior management strategies reflects the current pressures of managing increasingly complex classroom environments, supporting the findings by Sjölund et al. (2022). Due to the noted lack of time, educators reported that they heavily rely on informal and easily accessible sources of information, including blogs and social media over academic journals or professional magazines. Peer discussion and professional development were reported as being highly valued, but respondents reported frustration with professional development when it is not applicable or relevant. This supports Boohera et al. (2020), who found that teachers prefer research that is accessible and directly applicable.

Leadership Implications

The findings of this study are critical to the actions of K-12 leaders. It is necessary to understand and respect the classroom realities of educators and it is critical to collaborate to assist educators in having relevant research. As they reported, there's a strong preference for information that is concise, in actionable formats such as bullet points, infographics, or videos. These findings align with Martinovic et al. (2012) and Farrell et al. (n.d.), who advocated for research-practice partnerships as a means to create more practical and collaborative research applications. With only 21% of respondents reporting a formal relationship with a higher education institution, there is a lack of structured collaboration between K-12 and higher education. While informal and sporadic relationships were reported, there is a lack of consistency or intentional alignment. The need for stronger partnerships echoes Adeluba (2023) and Martinovic et al. (2012), who argued for better integration between researchers and practitioners. Additionally, the study reinforces the principles of research-practice partnerships (Farrell et al., n.d.), which emphasized the need for collaboration and mutual respect between researchers and educators. These partnerships are designed to bridge the gap between theoretical insights and classroom application by fostering long-term collaboration and equitable participation. The disconnect observed in this study reflects

a lack of such partnerships and supports the argument for a more systematic approach to integrating research into practice.

Recommendations for Future Research

There's an opportunity for further research to identify best practices to proactively build university-school partnerships between higher education institutions and K-12 schools to foster collaboration to address practical challenges in education. Researchers need to explore if there are effective ways to provide K-12 educators with the necessary time to find and understand how to utilize research within their scope of work. Researchers should study the best ways to effectively package research for consumption by K-12 educators and where possible how to integrate K-12 educators into the research process. Research identifying exemplary partnerships with higher education and K-12 schools would be beneficial to understanding their practices, research collaboration, and academic success. Research could potentially reduce the barriers that impact the ability of educational leaders from both directions. Some consideration should be given to longitudinal studies of identified successful university-school partnerships to determine the long-term impact on student achievement. Finally, case studies of intentional use of research which led to practical applications with enhanced learning experiences and improved outcomes for K-12 students could serve as evidence and rationale for engaging in research.

Conclusion

Data from this study confirms that while K-12 educators value educational research, barriers such as time constraints, accessibility issues, and disconnects between research and practice limit their utility. Addressing these barriers requires a multi-faceted approach, including more accessible dissemination methods, collaborative professional development, and stronger partnerships between K-12 schools and higher education. Additionally, providing ongoing support and resources for educators to engage with research in meaningful ways could enhance its relevance and implementation into classroom spaces. With these improvements, educational research has the potential to be a more effective tool in shaping teaching practices and ultimately supporting student success. Helping to understand the constraints and needs of K-12 educators can also help researchers to tailor their work in a way to provide useful information for driving instruction forward.

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