

# Understanding Policies, Projects, Initiatives & Strategies as a Valuable Source of Research Data in Educational Context

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## Abstract

Policies, Projects, Initiatives, and Strategies (PPIS) are often developed and implemented in education to improve educational outcomes in the country and the globe. While these efforts are typically evaluated using various metrics, there is growing interest in using PPIS as a research data source to gain insights into their development and impact. This paper provides a comprehensive review of the existing literature on the use of PPIS. We begin by defining PPIS and describing the four components (Policies, Projects, Initiatives, and Strategies) while highlighting the significance of using PPIS data. We then review selected studies that have successfully used PPIS as a research data source, including examples from developed and developing countries. We also provide a thorough review of previous research studies that used PPIS data; practical guidance on how researchers can access and analyze PPIS data; the legal and ethical considerations and emerging trends that must be considered. Finally, utilizing PPIS data can inform decision-making and policy development in the field of education, which can promote positive change. Therefore, researchers need to consider utilizing PPIS data to gain insights into policy implementation and effectiveness, ultimately improving educational systems and outcomes.

**Keywords:** Policies, Projects, Initiatives & Strategies (PPIS), Source of Research Data, Education Research

**DOI:** 10.7176/JEP/15-4-06

**Publication date:** March 31<sup>st</sup> 2024

## 1.0 Introduction

Policies, Projects, Initiatives, and Strategies (PPIS) are concepts that have been developed over time in the field of research methodology and are now widely recognized as valuable sources of data for research studies in various fields, including public administration and public policy (Link, Paton & Siegel, 2002; Erismann, et al., 2021), education (Campbell, Levin & Cambell, 2009; Cardno, 2018; Kaguhangire-Barifajjo, Namara, Nkata & Komakech, 2023), business (Daft & Macintosh, 1984; Nkosi, 2015; Olson, Slater, Hult & Olson, 2018; Komakech & Ombati, 2023), and social sciences (Butler, 1995; Link et al., 2002). PPIS are activities and programmes designed to achieve specific goals and objectives, and as such, can provide rich and valuable data for research studies. Their versatility and reliability have made them an established practice in research methodology, and they are now a common research approach in many areas of study.

PPIS data has been utilized in numerous studies across various fields, such as public policy, business, social sciences, and more. For instance, it has been used to evaluate the effectiveness of government policies and programmes, analyze the success of marketing strategies and business operations (Olson, et al., 2018) and examine the impact of social welfare programmes and community development initiatives (Bulsara, 1958; Butler, 1995). Butler (1995) used Poland as a case study to examine the impact of social welfare policies on self-initiative and family structure. The study found that the slower-than-expected increase in economic activity in Poland was due to structural impediments to economic activity and the absence of specific skills required for a market economy. In today's fast-paced world, organizations and institutions constantly strive to improve their performance and make data-driven decisions. To achieve this, they often develop and implement various PPIS to achieve specific goals and objectives. These PPIS can provide a wealth of valuable data that can be used to inform research and decision-making processes in various contexts.

Campbell & Levin (2008) argues that using data in decision-making can support educational improvement by providing a more accurate and comprehensive understanding of student performance, identifying areas of strength and weakness in educational programmes, and informing targeted interventions to improve student outcomes. The authors emphasize the importance of using a range of data sources, including both quantitative and qualitative data, to ensure a holistic understanding of educational systems and the factors that contribute to student success. They also emphasize the importance of building a culture of data use within educational institutions, where data is viewed as a valuable tool for continuous improvement rather than a punitive measure. Cardno (2018) further points out that policy document analysis is a practical tool that can be extremely valuable for educational leaders. The author emphasized the adoption of PPIS as a research method to inform our decision-making processes and research.

This paper aims to define PPIS and describe each of the four components (Policies, Projects, Initiatives, and

Strategies) as a source of research data and to explore the potential of PPIS as a valuable source of research data in the context of education research. The paper will examine the strategies for accessing and analyzing PPIS data, providing practical guidance for researchers interested in utilizing this data type. Additionally, by reviewing previous research studies that have used PPIS data as a source of research data, this paper aims to demonstrate the significance and value of PPIS data in informing decision-making and policy development as well as emerging trends. Through this study, readers will gain a deeper understanding of the potential of PPIS as a valuable source of data in education research, and how it can be used to improve educational outcomes and promote sustainable development in various contexts.

## 1.2 Policies, Projects, Initiatives, and Strategies (PPIS) Defined

Komakech & Ombati (2023) define PPIS as “a range of activities and programmes that organizations and institutions develop and implement to achieve specific goals and objectives”. The adds that concepts have developed over time in research methodology and have been used in various fields, such as public policy, public administration, business, and social sciences. With each of the four components of PPIS, namely Policies, Projects, Initiatives, and Strategies, plays a unique role in data collection, research, and decision-making processes. The use of PPIS as sources of research data is based on the recognition that these activities and programmes are designed to achieve specific goals and objectives, and as such, can provide rich and valuable data for research studies. Below is a detailed description of each of the four (4) components PPIS and highlights of the strengths and weaknesses:

- a) *Policies (P)*: These are formal statements or plans of action adopted by a government or organization to guide decision-making or achieve a particular objective. Examples of policies include healthcare policies, education policies, and environmental policies. Therefore, education policies set by national or regional governments can provide valuable data on education systems. In addition, education policies can be used to analyze issues such as access to education and teacher qualifications. For example, the Kenyan government's Basic Education Act (2013) outlines the rights and responsibilities of students, teachers, and parents and can be used to analyze the impact of the policy on education outcomes.
- b) *Projects (P)*: Are temporary activities designed to achieve specific objectives within a defined timeframe and budget. Examples of projects include infrastructure development projects, community development projects, and research projects. In education, development projects aimed at improving education can generate data on their impact in education. For example, the World Bank's Partnership for Education project in Rwanda provides funding and support for education initiatives. This project can be used to analyze the effectiveness of the project in improving access and quality of education and to generate data on education outcomes.
- c) *Initiatives (I)*: These are specific actions or programmes addressing particular issues or problems. Examples of initiatives include public health campaigns, environmental sustainability programmes, and social welfare programmes. In the context of education, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other initiatives can also provide data on education. For example, the African Women's Development Fund's "Enhancing Girls' Education through Innovative Solutions" initiative provides support and resources to girls in Uganda, Tanzania, and Ghana. This initiative can be used to analyze the impact of the programme on enrollment and retention rates and to generate data on education outcomes.
- d) *Strategies (S)*: These are comprehensive plans or frameworks that guide decision-making and actions to achieve a particular goal or objective. Examples of strategies include marketing strategies, business strategies, and cyber-security strategies. In the context of education, strategies developed by governments and other organizations can provide data on education. For example, the African Union's Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 16-25) outlines a framework for improving education across the continent. This strategy can be used to analyze progress toward achieving education-related goals and to generate data on education outcomes.

Therefore, PPIS can be a valuable source of data for analyzing various aspects of education such as access, quality, and effectiveness; for instance, education policies can provide information on the rights and responsibilities of students, teachers, and parents, while development projects and initiatives aimed at improving education can generate data on their impact. Education strategies developed by governments and organizations can also provide a comprehensive framework for analyzing progress toward achieving education-related goals. Analyzing PPIS data can inform policy-making, improve educational outcomes, and promote sustainable development in various contexts. However, researchers and stakeholders must know the strengths and weaknesses of using PPIS data for analysis.

The strength of PPIS data includes its versatility, reliability, ability to provide comprehensive information and insights into a particular issue or problem, and a broad perspective which makes it ideal for analyzing the impact of specific interventions or initiatives on education outcomes. Moreover, PPIS data has well-defined objectives, implementation processes, and outcomes, allowing for longitudinal analysis. However, Komakech & Ombati (2023) revealed that using PPIS data has some limitations such as; biases in reporting, limited

generalizability, lack of comparability across regions, and limited accessibility. They argued that combining PPIS data with other data sources can provide a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of education systems and policies. It can also inform decision-making for improved education outcomes. Finally, while using PPIS data has its strengths and weaknesses, it remains an essential tool for analyzing education systems and policies, and researchers and stakeholders should use it cautiously and critically.

## 2.0 Sources of PPIS Data

The major sources of PPIS data are government and non-governmental organizations that implement policies, projects, initiatives, and strategies related to the field of study. These sources include national and international government agencies, educational institutions, non-profit organizations, private foundations, and other research institutions that collect and disseminate data related to PPIS. PPIS data can also be obtained from publicly available reports, databases, and other sources of information that provide information about the implementation and outcomes of various policies, projects, initiatives, and strategies. Additionally, researchers may conduct interviews or surveys with stakeholders involved in the design, implementation, or evaluation of PPIS to obtain primary data. Furthermore, for researchers to ensure that the PPIS data they are using is a valid, reliable, and valuable source of research data that can provide helpful insights into policies, projects, initiatives, and strategies in a variety of contexts such as education, health and business should consider the following seven (7) criteria to validate PPIS as a valuable source of research data:

- i. *Reliability*: Is the PPIS data consistent and dependable? Is it collected and stored in a way that ensures its accuracy and reliability?
- ii. *Validity*: Does the PPIS data accurately reflect the policies, projects, initiatives, and strategies it represents? Does it provide an accurate representation of the relevant context and circumstances?
- iii. *Representativeness*: Does the PPIS data represent the full range of policies, projects, initiatives, and strategies relevant to the research question or study objectives? Is the data a comprehensive and representative sample of the population under study?
- iv. *Transparency*: Is the process for collecting and storing PPIS data transparent and documented? Are there clear guidelines for accessing and using the data?
- v. *Ethics*: Are there any ethical considerations to consider when accessing and using the PPIS data? Are there any risks to individuals or groups associated with using the data, and have these risks been appropriately addressed?
- vi. *Utility*: Does the PPIS data provide valuable and relevant information for the research question or study objectives? Does it provide insights that cannot be obtained from other research data sources?
- vii. *Accessibility*: Is the PPIS data easily accessible and available for research purposes? Is there sufficient support available to help researchers access and use the data properly?

Following the above criteria, researchers should consider the following questions when deciding whether to use PPIS as a valuable research data source. The questions include:

- a) What specific type of PPIS data is needed for the research question or study objectives?
- b) Are there any legal or ethical considerations when accessing and using the PPIS data?
- c) How is the PPIS data collected and stored, and is it accessible for research purposes?
- d) What are the limitations of using PPIS data as a research data source, and how can these limitations be addressed?
- e) What expertise is needed to properly access and analyze PPIS data, and is sufficient support available to ensure the data is appropriately used?
- f) How has PPIS been used in previous studies, and what insights have been gained from using PPIS data in those studies?
- g) What are the potential benefits of using PPIS data in the research, and how do these benefits compare to using other research data sources?
- h) What are the costs associated with accessing and analyzing PPIS data, and how do these costs compare to using other research data sources?

These questions can help researchers determine whether PPIS data is a suitable and valuable source for their research question or study objectives. It can also help ensure the data is adequately accessed, analyzed, and reported. Finally, researchers must select the most appropriate data collection method(s) based on their research questions, data needs, and context. The PPIS data collection methods include:

- i. *Document analysis*: This involves analyzing documents such as policy reports, project plans, initiative guidelines, and strategy documents to identify key themes, goals, and objectives.
- ii. *Interviews*: Researchers can conduct interviews with policymakers, project managers, and other stakeholders to gain insights into the implementation of PPIS and its impact on the education system.
- iii. *Surveys*: Surveys can be used to collect data on stakeholders' perceptions, attitudes, and experiences regarding the effectiveness of PPIS.

- iv. *Case studies*: Researchers can use case studies to explore the implementation and impact of PPIS in specific contexts or settings.
- v. *Observations*: Researchers can observe the implementation of PPIS in real-world settings to gain insights into how they are being implemented and their impact.
- vi. *Focus groups*: Focus groups can be used to collect data on the perceptions and experiences of stakeholders regarding the implementation of PPIS.

### 3.0 The Significance of PPIS Data

As governments and institutions increasingly rely on data to inform decision making, the importance of PPIS research data cannot be overstated. In this paper, we discussed the various significance of PPIS research data, and they include:

- i. *Improve policy development and implementation*: PPIS data can inform policy development and implementation, enabling policymakers to make more informed decisions based on empirical evidence. By analyzing the effectiveness of past policies, initiatives, and strategies, policymakers can develop more effective policies that better address public needs and priorities.
- ii. *Promote evidence-based decision-making*: By providing empirical evidence, PPIS data can support evidence-based decision-making in education, public administration, and governance. This can help to increase public trust in government institutions and increase transparency in decision-making processes.
- iii. *Enable evaluation of government programmes and initiatives*: PPIS data can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of government programmes and initiatives, enabling policymakers to identify successful programmes and replicate their strategies in other areas.
- iv. *Enhance cross-country and cross-region comparisons*: PPIS data can be used to compare policies and practices across different countries and regions, providing insights into successful policy strategies and enabling the sharing of best practices across different jurisdictions.
- v. *Generate new research questions*: PPIS data can be used to generate new research questions. For example, by analyzing policy or programme data, researchers can identify gaps in knowledge and areas where further research is needed.

With the growing availability and accessibility of PPIS data, researchers, policymakers, and other stakeholders can leverage these data sources to advance knowledge and drive positive change in educational policy and governance. By harnessing the power of PPIS data, we can improve the effectiveness of policies and initiatives, increase transparency and accountability, and ultimately contribute to a better-functioning society.

### 4.0 Analysis of Previous Studies that used PPIS Data

In this subsection, the researchers have conducted a detailed review and synthesis of different research studies using PPIS as a data source. By analyzing these studies, the researchers have identified recurring themes, trends, common methodologies, and critical findings that contribute to a better understanding of the subject matter.

**Table 1: Selected Studies that used PPIS Data**

Source(s)	Research Filed	Research Methods	Types Of Research	Sampling	Data Collection	Data Analysis
Cooper, Levin & Campbell (2009)	Education	Literature Review	Analytical research	Purposive sampling	Documents review	Content analysis
Kaguhangire-Barifajio et al., (2023)	Education	Quantitative and Qualitative	Descriptive research	Purposive sampling	Surveys, interviews & documentary review	Thematic and content analysis
Cardno (2018)	Education	Qualitative	Descriptive research	-	Document review	Content analysis
Erismann, et al (2021)	Health Research Policy	Qualitative	Descriptive research	Purposive sampling	Document review and Interviews	Content summary analysis
Komakech & Ombati (2023)	Business	Qualitative	Case study (multiple case studies)	Purposive sampling	Document review (archival records and publications) and direct observations	Thematic and content analysis

It is essential to note from Table 1 that when studying PPIS data, researchers utilize various research methods

and approaches. In academic research, researchers employ various techniques to scrutinize data associated with PPIS. They recognize that the efficacy of their inquiries hinges on selecting appropriate methodologies that align with the nature and scope of their research inquiries. Some scholars favor qualitative methods (Campbell & Levin, 2008; Cardno, 2018; Erismann, et al. 2021; Komakech & Ombati, 2023) to unearth subtle insights, while others like Kaguhangire-Barifaijo et al. (2023) utilize a blend of quantitative and qualitative approaches for a more comprehensive perspective. This flexibility underscores the significance of tailoring research strategies to suit the multifaceted aspects of PPIS data analysis. As researchers delve deeper into this pivotal domain, an amalgam of methodologies comes to light, enriching our comprehension of the many facets of PPIS data usage. However, the methodology selection is not haphazard but guided by the distinctive research questions, goals, and traits of the PPIS data. This multiplicity of methods demonstrates the adaptability and dynamism required to unravel the intricate features of PPIS data and furnish valuable insights for scholars and policymakers.

### **5.0 How to Access and Analyze PPIS Data**

Kothari (2004) contends that regardless of the nature of research and studies, they all converge on the shared principles of the scientific method. Consequently, scientific research is anticipated to adhere to specific standards, hence accessing and analyzing PPIS data requires a careful consideration of legal and ethical considerations which include the following five (5) steps:

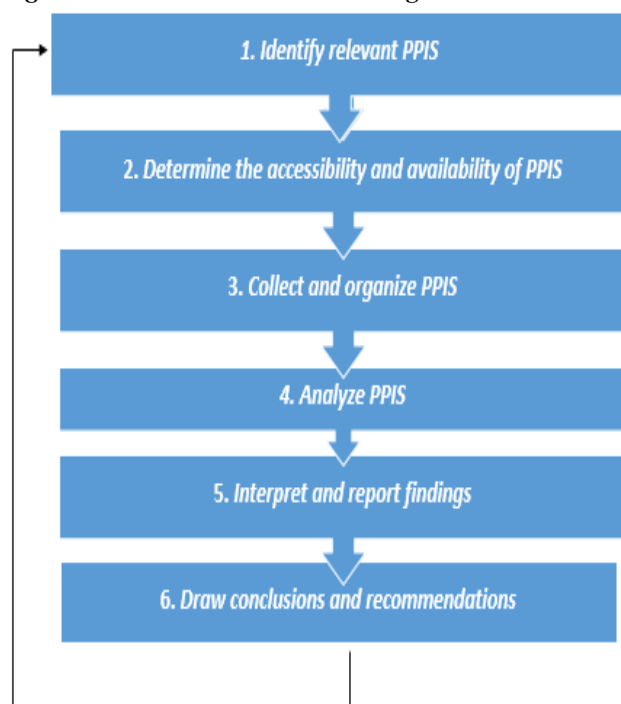
1. *Identify relevant PPIS:* Researchers should identify policies, projects, initiatives, and strategies related to their research questions. This may involve reviewing official documents, such as government reports, policy papers, or project evaluations, or conducting interviews with key stakeholders.
2. *Obtain necessary permissions:* Researchers should obtain necessary permissions to access and use the PPIS data. This may involve obtaining permission from government agencies or other organizations responsible for the policies or initiatives being studied.
3. *Collect and organize data:* Researchers should collect and organize the PPIS data systematically and structured. This may involve developing a coding scheme to categorize the data or using data management software to organize the data.
4. *Analyze data:* Researchers should analyze the PPIS data using appropriate analytical methods. This may involve using statistical analysis to identify trends and patterns or conducting qualitative analysis to explore the implementation and impact of specific policies or programmes.
5. *Consider ethical considerations:* Researchers should consider ethical considerations related to the use of PPIS data, such as confidentiality, informed consent, and the protection of human subjects. Researchers should also be transparent about the limitations of their research and acknowledge any biases or limitations in the data.

Overall, accessing and analyzing PPIS data requires careful consideration of legal and ethical considerations and a systematic approach to data collection and analysis. Researchers should take a cautious and rigorous approach to ensuring their research is valid and ethical.

### **6.0 The Process of Conducting PPIS Data**

The research process involves a sequence of actions or steps that must be followed to conduct the research (Kothari, 2004) effectively. Following the processes below, researchers can effectively access and analyze PPIS data to inform decision-making, policy development, and programme evaluation in various fields. Here is a detailed description of each step:

**Figure 1: The Process of Conducting PPIS Data**



1. *Identify relevant PPIS*: The first step is identifying the policies, projects, initiatives, and strategies related to the research question. This can be done by reviewing relevant literature, government documents, institutional reports, and other sources. Researchers should focus on PPIS that are directly related to their research question and are likely to provide helpful information.

2. *Determine the accessibility and availability of PPIS*: Researchers should then determine the accessibility and availability of the identified PPIS. Some PPIS may be freely available online, while others require access through a specific organization or institution. Researchers should also consider any legal or ethical considerations related to accessing and using the PPIS.

3. *Collect and organize PPIS*: Once the relevant PPIS has been identified and accessed, researchers should collect and organize the data into a usable format. This may involve creating a database, spreadsheet, or other data organization system. Researchers should also consider any

necessary data cleaning or transformation steps to ensure the data is usable for analysis.

4. *Analyze PPIS*: Researchers can then analyze the PPIS data using appropriate research methods, such as statistical analysis or qualitative coding. The research question should guide the analysis and aim to provide meaningful insights into the research topic.
5. *Interpret and report findings*: Researchers should interpret the findings from the PPIS data analysis and report their results clearly and concisely. This may involve creating visualizations, tables, or other data presentation methods. Researchers should also consider any ethical or legal implications of their findings and ensure their reporting is accurate and transparent.
6. *Draw conclusions and recommendations*: This final step involves drawing conclusions based on the analysis of the PPIS and making recommendations for policy or practice. For example, the researcher may identify gaps in the policy or areas where the procedure could be improved to better support student achievement.

By following the steps above, researchers can leverage PPIS data to inform decision-making, policy development, and programme evaluation in various fields. Using PPIS data can lead to more evidence-based and effective policies and practices that better address public needs and priorities. These steps can also help ensure that the use of PPIS as a source of research data is thorough, systematic, ethical, and provides valuable insights for policy and practice.

### 7.0 Emerging Trends in PPIS Data

The emerging trends in analyzing PPIS data are transforming the way researcher's access, analyze, and report data in various fields, especially in education. This sub-section discusses some of the factors that have led to the increased use of PPIS data and they include:

- a) *Increasing use of big data analytics*: With the availability of large datasets, researchers may increasingly use big data analytics to analyze PPIS data. This could involve using machine learning algorithms and other advanced analytical techniques to identify patterns and trends in the data.
- b) *Integration of qualitative and quantitative data*: While quantitative data is important, it only tells part of the story. Researchers may increasingly integrate qualitative data from sources such as interviews, focus groups, and case studies, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of PPIS on educational outcomes.
- c) *Use of natural language processing*: With the increasing availability of digital documents, Natural Language Processing (NLP) techniques can be used to extract and analyze data from policies, reports, and other documents. This can help researchers identify key themes and trends in education policy and practice.
- d) *Greater attention to ethical considerations*: As the use of PPIS data becomes more widespread, it will be

necessary for researchers to consider ethical issues related to data privacy, confidentiality, and informed consent. Researchers may need to collaborate with policymakers and practitioners to ensure PPIS data is collected, stored, and used ethically.

The increased use of PPIS as a source of research data can improve our understanding of education policy and practice and inform the development of more effective interventions. However, researchers must be mindful of ethical considerations and use rigorous methods to ensure the validity and reliability of their findings.

## 8.0 Conclusion

Policies, Projects, Initiatives, and Strategies (PPIS) are a valuable source of research data that can provide insights across various contexts. Researchers who delve into the intricacies of PPIS can better understand the complexities of policies, initiatives, and strategies implemented by various organizations and governance levels. PPIS data can offer a comprehensive lens for scrutinizing multifaceted phenomena and supporting evidence-based decision-making through careful analysis of documents, surveys, or interviews. However, researchers must thoroughly assess the quality of the data and navigate inherent biases and limitations in its collection and analysis while also considering ethical implications. Technological advancements and data-sharing policies have made accessing and analyzing PPIS data increasingly promising. This research paper serves as a guide for stakeholders interested in utilizing the transformative potential of PPIS data to drive evidence-based decision-making and promote educational enhancement. By providing a comprehensive explanation of PPIS and its many applications in research, the paper inspires the advancement of knowledge and the cultivation of positive change in educational policy and practice. Continued exploration and utilization of PPIS data are crucial for addressing pressing educational challenges and promoting sustainable development across diverse educational landscapes.

Furthermore, it is also important to note that PPIS generates vast amounts of data, which can be difficult to analyze using traditional methods. However, new tools and frameworks can help researchers extract deeper insights from this data. For instance, big data analytics, machine learning algorithms, and data mining techniques can uncover hidden patterns, trends, and correlations in PPIS data while integrated data analysis combines qualitative and quantitative methods to generate richer insights. By leveraging these new tools and frameworks, researchers can unlock deeper insights from PPIS data, leading to a more comprehensive understanding of policy implementation and outcomes. This will solidify the significance of PPIS data as a critical cornerstone of research data in the future.

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