

Improving the effectiveness of global education policies and programmes

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Highlights

Evidence impact

- International development institutions including USAID, the World Bank and the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade have cited the 3ie-funded study in their policy documents.
- The NGO Pencils of Promise used the findings of the education review to inform existing and new programmes.
- The systematic review has been included in the curriculum for a research course on Education Policy in Developing Countries at Princeton University.

Factors that contributed to impact

- The review included a larger number of studies than any previous review and covered a wider variety of interventions, including those working with children, teachers, schools and education systems.
- 3ie created and consulted with an advisory group of education leaders and champions who helped promote the need for the review and build demand for its findings.
- The review's publication was well timed, closely following the 2015 launch of the Sustainable Development Goals, which included a more ambitious learning agenda.
- 3ie invested heavily in integrated communications and translating review findings through numerous conference panels, national meetings, accessible summaries and briefs to promote the results to a range of audiences.

Systematic review details

Title: [Interventions for improving learning outcomes and access to education in low- a...](#)

Authors: Birte Snilstveit, Jennifer Stevenson, Daniel Phillips, Martina Vojtkova, Emma Gallagher, Tanja Schmidt, Hannah Jobse, Maisie Geelen, Maria Grazia Pastorello and John Evers

Status : Completed December 2015



Context

Improvements in children's school enrolment rates have slowed considerably since 2004 in low- and middle-income countries. Globally, around 262 million children and youth were still out of school in 2017. Access to schooling has also not translated into an improvement in children's learning outcomes in several low- and middle-income countries.

According to UNESCO's 2014 [Education for all global monitoring report](#), approximately 250 million children in low- and middle-income countries cannot read, write or do basic maths. To achieve the ambitious Sustainable Development Goal targets for learning by 2030, UNESCO estimates that donor funding would need to increase to six times its 2010 level. But more funding is not sufficient to address the learning crisis. Resources need to be directed to programmes that work.

In 2015, 3ie completed a comprehensive systematic review of the effectiveness of 21 different types of education programmes on children's school enrolment, attendance, drop-out, completion and learning outcomes. The in-house review included evidence covering more than 16 million children participating in 216 education programmes in 52 low- and middle-income countries.

The findings from this review, which spanned interventions directed at children, households, systems, schools and teachers, aimed to help inform decisions about effective strategies for achieving the education targets. The review also aimed to direct research funding to domains where evidence is scarce.

Evidence

Overall, the results demonstrated there were no 'magic bullets' to ensure high-quality education for all. However, there were several lessons for improving future education programmes. The review found that most education programmes typically improved either school participation or learning outcomes. They rarely improved both.

The review included interventions that worked in most contexts, such as cash transfers and structured pedagogy. Other interventions were promising, such as school feeding and community-based monitoring. The review also covered interventions that did not always work, such as computer-assisted learning and school-based management, and interventions whose effectiveness remained unknown, including reduced user fees and school-based health programmes.

Evidence impacts

Included in an education policy course curriculum

The review is contributing to strengthening the enabling environment for synthesised evidence use. It was included in the curriculum for a research course on education policy in developing countries at the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University. The course coordinator cited the evaluation findings and evidence on programme implementation as valuable resources to inform academic discourse on commissioning and using evaluation evidence in the education sector.

Informed development institutions' education policies and programmes

In November 2018, USAID launched its latest education policy to guide its investments and inform the design of education programmes across several countries. The policy supports strengthening the capacity of partner countries to design and implement programmes to deliver high-quality learning and skills to children and youth. To inform the policy design and improve region- and country-specific programming, USAID has cited the 3ie review and other evidence relevant to its priorities, including interventions to reach marginalised and vulnerable populations.

The review was cited several times in the World Bank's [World Development Report 2018: learning to realize education's promise](#) – the first World Development Report devoted entirely to education. It emphasises the importance of assessing children's learning and calls for evidence-

informed actions to improve learning outcomes and schools themselves.

3ie's systematic review and its summary report offer critical insights on the effectiveness of structured pedagogic programmes, additional instructional time, remedial education and community engagement. — Jaime Saavedra, Minister of Education, Peru

Evidence from the systematic review has been cited in several other important publications, including [The learning generation: investing in education for a changing world](#), produced by the International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity. The United Nations Secretary-General welcomed the commission's report and affirmed his intention to act on its recommendations.

To inform the Australian government's aid investments in education, Education Analytics Services, established by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has synthesised the findings from 18 systematic reviews, meta-analyses and comparative reviews of what works in education for development. This 'super synthesis' cites the 3ie systematic review's key findings on interventions that have an impact on children's learning outcomes and school participation. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's synthesis will inform their work with partner countries to help them deliver comprehensive and high-quality education services.

As part of the Africa Development Forum Series, the World Bank published a book in 2018, [Facing forward: schooling for learning in Africa](#), to highlight priorities for improving learning outcomes and recommendations for aligning national education systems to the wider learning agenda. The book cited the review extensively, particularly the types of interventions that have been identified as being effective in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Pencils of Promise used review findings to design programmes

Pencils of Promise, a global NGO, reported that it had used the findings of the education review, particularly those on community-based monitoring, diagnostic feedback and teacher incentives, to make decisions on new programmes. The organisation works on building schools and providing quality educational programming to increase literacy rates in Ghana, Guatemala, Laos and Nicaragua. The NGO also used findings to develop its existing structured pedagogy and computer-assisted learning programmes.

Suggested citation

International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie), 2020. *Improving the effectiveness of global education policies and programmes* [online summary], Evidence Impact Summaries. New Delhi: 3ie.

Related

www.scidev.net/global/policy/scidev-net-at-large/science-education-policy-3ie.html

<http://blogs.worldbank.org/education/how-use-evidence-improve-student-learning>

Evidence impact summaries aim to demonstrate and encourage the use of evidence to inform programming and policymaking. These reflect the information available to 3ie at the time of posting. Since several factors influence policymaking, the summaries highlight contributions of evidence rather than endorsing a policy or decision or claiming that it can be attributed solely to evidence. If you have any suggestions or updates to improve this summary, please write to influence@3ieimpact.org

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