A meta-evaluation and synthesis of evaluations of South African education programmes 2013-2018

Author: Eleanor Hazell, JET Education Services (JET), ehazell@jet.org.za

JET EDUCATION SERVICES

Rationale

- Quality education for all is one of the key development issues of our time.
- In a context of poor education outcomes, substantial spending on education and limited documented evidence regarding "what works", a meta-evaluation was conducted of evaluations which report on the impact of education programmes on learners' education outcomes.
- The aim was to review and synthesise evidence regarding effectiveness and impact.
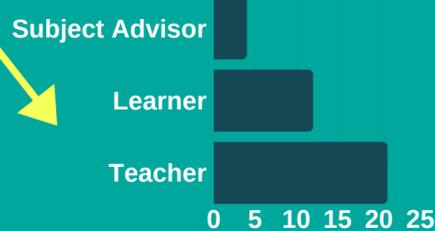
Methodology

Research Questions

1. What interventions have been conducted in South African schools since 2012 with the aim of improving education outcomes for learners?
2. What types of evaluations are undertaken to assess the efficacy of such interventions?
3. Who are the evaluations commissioned by and undertaken by?
4. Are the evaluation findings published?
5. What interventions seem to be most successful in terms of improving education outcomes for learners?
6. What lessons can be drawn to improve education programming?

Overview of Research Design

1) Sourcing documents

2) Reviewing and classifying documents (80)

3) Developing (a) quality assessment criteria & (b) a coding framework

4) (a) Quality assessment and (b) coding (32)

5) Analysis

6) Reporting

32 impact evaluations of 41 school-based interventions were assessed and coded.

Key Findings

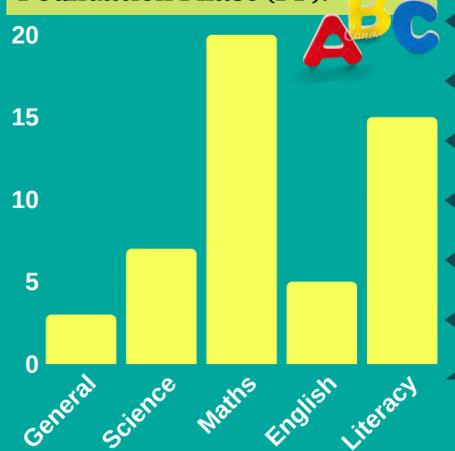**The most successful are interventions that:**
1. offer a 'triple cocktail" of high quality LTSM, lesson plans and individual coaching or
2. commence with diagnostic testing and target LTSM and teaching to learners' current ability level.
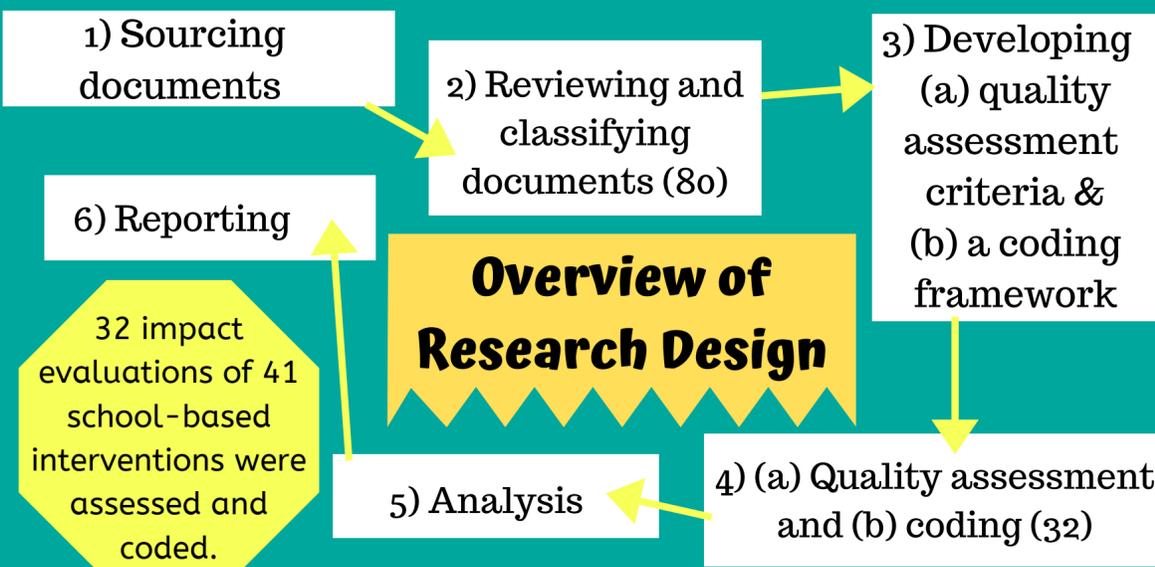
Just more than half of the interventions (21/41) targeted teachers

Subject Advisor / Learner / Teacher
0 5 10 15 20 25

The schooling phase most frequently targeted was the Foundation Phase (FP).

General, Science, Maths, English, Literacy
0 5 10 15 20

Funders of Evaluations
Donor (national) 16
Donor (international) 7
Not specified 6
Government 3

Who is conducting evaluations?
20 Research agency
17 Academic
4 Government

8 Types of Interventions were found:
1. pedagogical
2. learner placement
3. nutrition support
4. ICT
5. community/parent involvement
6. learner accademic support
7. additional teachers
8. an additional year of schooling

The majority of evaluations were quasi-experimental (20/32) designs.

Of the 37 learning-focused interventions, the majority (20/37) targeted mathematics and 18 targeted literacy and/or English.

Recommendations

For education programming
Emphasis on teachers as primary target group is justified, but there is also need to involve school management and district officials.
Focus on FP is justified, but an emphasis on Grade R and the IP (specifically Grade 4) is highly recommended.
Focus on mathematics, literacy and English is also justified, however home language literacy should also be emphasised.
There are some promising pedagogical interventions:
The "education triple cocktail" is being tested in different contexts and with different subject matter: if the results are positive it may be ready for scaling.
Diagnostic testing, LTSM and teaching targeted at learners' current ability level, shows potential for addressing learning gaps and is worthwhile testing jet medium-large scale in other contexts.

For evaluation
Using an experimental or quasi-experimental design to assess multiple treatment arms is cost-effective and worthwhile.
Integrating programme theory and including a case study component strengthens credibility and usefulness of such studies.
Create a central education evaluation repository which could be accessed by programme designers and evaluators.
Impact evaluation should be designed alongside education programmes if they are to be credible and useful.
Non-counterfactual impact assessment designs offer potential for assessing the impact of complex interventions