Using synthesised evidence to improve education

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Ghana Education Evidence Summit
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Challenges of single studies: generalisability and reliability (quality)

Drinking 4 Coffees a Day Is Bad for You, Study Says

Tessa Berenson  @tcberson  May 28, 2015

Less than 400 mg of caffeine per day is safe
A lot of caffeine is bad for your health, according to a new study, and many people are consuming too much of it.

A new report by the European Food

Why Your Coffee Addiction Isn’t So Bad for You

Real Simple  @RealSimple  Jan. 28, 2015

Go ahead and pour yourself another cup
Knocking back a daily cup of Joe (or several) delivers more than a jolt of energy. That morning brew comes with a host of health benefits, according to research. Here’s how coffee can benefit your body and your brain.
Challenge of information overload

How to filter this information?
Why systematic reviews?

- A way of establishing the overall balance of empirical evidence on a particular question
- Separating higher quality from lower quality evidence
- Identifying what is generalisable and what is context specific
- May reject accepted wisdom, confirm what we think we know or identify new findings based on all available evidence
238 studies
216 programmes
16 million children
52 countries
What works in most contexts, what is promising and what is unknown

- **Children**
  - Providing information
  - Merit-based scholarships
  - School-based health
  - School-feeding

- **Households**
  - Providing information
  - Cash transfers
  - Reducing fees

- **Systems**
  - Public-private partnerships
  - School-based management
  - Community-based monitoring

- **Schools**
  - Remedial education
  - New schools and infrastructure
  - Providing materials
  - Structured pedagogy
  - Grouping by ability
  - Extra time
  - Computer-assisted learning

- **Teachers**
  - Teacher training
  - Hiring teachers
  - Teacher incentives and accountability

Legend:
- **Green**: What works in most contexts
- **Orange**: What is promising (may work in some contexts)
- **Red**: What doesn’t always work
- **Blue**: What is unknown
Programmes typically improve either participation or learning, but not both.
Works in most context: Cash transfers and structured pedagogy
Substantial resources are directed to programmes where effects remain unknown.

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<th>Intervention level</th>
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<th>Number of studies</th>
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How can evidence from systematic reviews be used?

‘Evidence based medicine is the conscientious, explicit, and judicious use of current best evidence in making decisions about the care of individual patients. The practice of evidence based medicine means integrating individual clinical expertise with the best available external clinical evidence from systematic research.’ (Sackett et al., 1996, p. 71).
Improve programme design and implementation
Inform decisions about education strategies in specific contexts

WHO recommendation on community mobilization through facilitated participatory learning and action cycles with women’s groups for maternal and newborn health

2014

- Northern Uganda Literacy project in Lango sub-region: effects varied between versions of programme
- Score cards had relatively small effects on learning outcomes
- Removing user fees in primary education: increase in enrolment
Conclusions and policy lessons

• Systematic reviews provide reliable and accessible evidence for informing policy and programming
  ⇒ But need to be interpreted for specific contexts
• Need a framework for institutionalising evidence use – can we learn from health?
  ⇒ problem analysis and capacity of other parts of the school system
  ⇒ acceptability, feasibility, costs
  ⇒ evidence translation through a deliberative process with experts and key stakeholders
• Continuous investment in evidence required
  ⇒ Primary research: interventions, geographical, equity, implementation
  ⇒ Synthesis: Regular updates of SRs + syntheses on new topics
• Technical report, summary report and brief available here:

Thank you

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