

New database puts African education research at the heart of policy and practice

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There is growing recognition of the [quality](#) of research in developing countries and its importance for policy and practice.



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One area where this applies is education. African research is often "[overlooked and undervalued](#)", with knowledge and expertise from the continent neglected in favour of research and researchers from elsewhere. Yet the insights of researchers with firsthand experience of social, cultural and material issues that affect schooling in Africa are extremely valuable.

Such contextually grounded analyses are vital for addressing persistent education challenges in [access](#) and [learning](#) which are key to achieving regional and global priorities like the African Union's [Continental Education Strategy](#) and the UN's [Sustainable Development Goal for Education](#).

To increase the visibility and impact of African education research, [we](#) partnered with the charity [Education Sub-Saharan Africa](#) to create the [African Education Research Database](#). This is a curated [collection](#) of peer-reviewed studies undertaken by researchers in sub-Saharan Africa.

Since work began on the project a year ago, around 2,500 studies have been catalogued in the [online database](#). Studies can be browsed by country and [topic](#).

We hope that increasing the visibility of African research will create a multiplier effect, encouraging more readers, citations and research funding opportunities which are based on local priorities.

The database can be used to identify researchers with expertise in particular thematic areas, countries, or research methods. This will be useful to those seeking to form partnerships with African based institutions and researchers.

Learning from the database

Developing the database has been a valuable opportunity for us to learn more about research in the region.

We have found a wealth of studies relating to education across the life course, from early childhood to adult education. There are studies with a direct bearing on the quality of provision: teaching methods (478 studies), language of instruction (162 studies) and learning outcomes (210 studies). Other studies relate to important curriculum areas, such as literacy (115 studies), mathematics education (134 studies) and science education (188 studies).

There is also a significant amount of research on specific marginalised groups. This includes studies on disability (131 studies), gender disparities (201 studies), early pregnancy and marriage (18 studies), and orphans and vulnerable children (96 studies), as well as inclusive education (158 studies) more generally.

A small but growing evidence base relates to water, sanitation and hygiene in schools (19 studies). This is of particular importance for the [attendance of female students](#).

More to be done

The extent of African scholarship is impressive. At the same time, we have found [scope for greater alignment](#) between the research which is being conducted and education priorities.

This is particularly the case of education provision for the most disadvantaged, such as children from [poor households](#) and those living in [remote, rural communities](#). For instance, a large body of work relates to ICT in education (452 studies). That's problematic, given that [three-quarters](#) of rural schools do not have access to electricity.

Similarly, almost one-third of studies focus on higher education. But this is a phase reached by few children from the poorest households, who are unlikely to [progress beyond a few years of schooling](#).

Instead, more attention is needed on issues which can make a difference to the most marginalised. One example is [early childhood education](#), which accounts for just 3% of studies.

A potential reason for these gaps is the lack of research funding available for those living in sub-Saharan Africa. Only 10% of studies in the database indicated that they had received funding. Increased visibility from the database may help to address this.

The considerable interest in, and support for, the database from researchers, NGOs, and governmental agencies is heartening. But this must be translated into increased use of the evidence, to inform policy and practice. Increased support is also crucial for African based researchers to extend their work. This will be vital for progress towards the continent's education priorities.

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