

Systematic Review Title Registration Form

Congratulations on securing funding for your systematic review.

The EPPI-Centre has already agreed to register and offer support for your review with:

1. A web space for distance learning and support (Moodle - <http://moodle.org/>)
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We have ten years' experience of supporting review groups, working with the international development community since 2007. Recent topics have included health insurance, social franchising, workforce management, micro-finance, infrastructure procurement and aid delivery. Funding in this area has come from the Alliance for Health Policy and Systems Research, WHO; and the UK Department for International Development. Systematic reviews are relatively new for international development so methods are still developing and everyone will be learning, both review teams and EPPI-Centre staff.

Please complete the form below to help us work with you and your team. Where there have been no changes since you submitted a proposal feel free to cut and paste text into this document. Extend the boxes as necessary.

Funder: AusAID

Number and title of review originally requested from funder:

2. What are the impacts of standardised national assessments (for example, of reading and numeracy) on policy, resource allocation and learning achievement for primary and secondary schools in developing countries?

Title of review agreed at time of confirmed funding:

The Impact of National and International Assessment Programs on Educational Policy, Resource Allocation and Teaching and Learning Practices in Developing Countries

Now confirmed as: The Impact of National and International Assessment Programmes on Educational Policy, Particularly Policies Regarding Resource Allocation and Teaching and Learning Practices in Developing Countries

Host organisation(s) for review team:

Australian Council *for* Educational Research (ACER)

Review team members			
Surname	First name	Email address*	Role
Lietz	Petra	lietz@acer.edu.au	Lead-Principal investigator
Lonsdale	Michele	lonsdale@acer.edu.au	Principal investigator
Nugroho	Dita	nugroho@acer.edu.au	Research Assistant
Tobin	Mollie	tobin@acer.edu.au	Project Coordinator/Research Assistant
Knight	Pat	Knight@acer.edu.au	Librarian: Material search and retrieval
Ainley	John	ainley@acer.edu.au	Content Advisor
Lockwood	Craig	craig.lockwood@adelaide.edu.au	Systematic review expertise

Situate the question in the literature, including describing the existing evidence and literature, estimated size and quality of the evidence base and your familiarity with it.

This review will examine the impact of national assessment programs on education policy, resource allocation and learning practices in developing countries, and what factors have influenced impact. In this review, national assessment is understood to be “a survey of schools and students that is designed to provide evidence about the levels of student achievement in curriculum areas” (Postlethwaite & Kellaghan 2008). This includes population-based assessments as well those that use nationally-representative samples of students. Also included are assessments that are part of an internationally organised program, such as the OECD’s Programme in International Student Assessment (PISA) and assessments that are part of the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ), as they also have the potential to influence education system and learning processes. Accordingly, we have included “international assessment” in our proposed title.

We have removed reference to learning achievement in the original question and propose instead that this be amended to teaching and learning practices. Although ultimately the goal of national assessment programs is to improve learning achievement or outcomes, the relationship between program findings and learning outcomes is an indirect one. National assessment programs may have a direct or indirect (through policy or resource allocation) impact on teaching and learning practices, which in turn may impact upon learning achievement or outcomes. Due to the extended time lag needed to establish these two sets of relationships, however, we believe that it will be more fruitful for this review to focus on the impact of assessments on teaching and learning practices. Additionally, establishing the link from assessment to achievement could prove difficult because the tool to assess achievement is most often national assessment program, which in this instance is the intervention that is being reviewed.

Consistent with an increased global focus on improving the quality of education – illustrated by several international declarations including from the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand – national assessment programs have been rapidly gaining

importance in the past two decades. Much of this rise has occurred among developing countries, where most only began conducting national assessment programs in the early 1990s (*ibid*). Although industrialised countries have had a longer and richer experience with such programs, having begun conducting them in the 1960s, a global survey found that by 2006 half of all developing countries had carried out a national assessment program (Benavot & Tanner 2007).

There appears to be common understanding that the main aim of conducting national assessments is to provide information on the outcomes of a country's educational outcomes, which in turn assists policy-makers and other stakeholders in the education system with making policy and resourcing decisions for improvement (Forster 2001; Braun & Kanjee 2006; Benavot & Tanner 2007; Postlethwaite & Kellaghan 2008). Data resulting from assessment programs can be reported to describe the extent to which an education system is teaching its students what is expected, differences in these achievement levels by sub-groups (such as gender or region) and, if background data are collected, factors that contribute to reaching different levels of achievement. Either as part of the official reporting process or resulting from secondary analysis (e.g. Lietz, Wagemaker, Neuschmidt & Hencke 2008), this information is often also utilised to formulate recommendations to improve education outcomes.

Braun and Kanjee (2006) proposed that a general criterion to examine whether or not an assessment strategy can contribute constructively to an education system is that of 'systemic validity', referring to the assessment practice and system generating useful information that supports improvements in education access, quality, efficiency and equity. A more recent World Bank report posited more comprehensively, based on the experience of a number of countries, a set of prerequisites for effective use of national assessment findings. These included the dissemination of results in a clear and timely fashion to key users, encouraging use by classroom teachers as part of key users, and ensuring continued political support (Kellaghan, Greaney & Murray 2009).

The extent to which national assessment findings are having an impact on policies and resource allocation decisions, or on teaching and learning processes, have come under scrutiny in more recent years. Despite the growing popularity of national assessment programs and the potential value of the information they can provide, the 2009 World Bank report found that available evidence indicates that findings of these programs are not widely used, noting the limited amount of information on this topic (*ibid*). This lack of evidence can be attributed to the relative short history of national assessments in developing countries, the complexity of education policy making processes of which national assessment data is only one contributor and time gap between the implementation of a national assessment program and any resulting influence on education systems.

Some studies can shed light on this topic. Mostly, these have been instigated by the involvement of international stakeholders in national assessment programs or the establishment of international cooperation in assessment. For example, reviews have been conducted on the impact of the IEA's Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) on policies in developing countries, some done to monitor the effectiveness of the support the World Bank provided to these countries to enable them to participate. Reviews have also

been conducted as part of SACMEQ, with participating ministries periodically required to report any observed impacts of the assessment on their countries' policies.

In addition to studies that set out to establish the impact of particular assessment programs (many of which have come from Latin America), two other types of studies contain analyses that are relevant to this review. The first are more general reviews of national assessment programs, which at times involve an examination of the impact they have had on policies and practices in the country. These can be formal review processes embedded in the political systems or independent studies undertaken by researchers within and outside of the country. Secondly, studies on the driving forces of education reform or teaching practice transformations may also result in attributing those changes to the findings of assessment programs.

Please describe the limitations of the systematic review, including issues of evidence type, issues resulting from different methodological approaches to studies and issues arising from contextual challenges. [up to 300 words].

The body of literature around this topic is overwhelmingly qualitative in nature. Based on our knowledge of the literature, we anticipate that studies relating to this topic will be limited to post-test surveys without a control group, and that quantitative studies will be limited to opinion surveys. The relevant primary studies that we are familiar with mostly utilise analyses of policy documents, observations and interviews to collect their data, some supplemented with surveys of policy-makers. This poses an early challenge as there is less of a consensus on how qualitative data should be treated in systematic reviews.

From a preliminary electronic search of databases, we conclude that published studies will not sufficiently inform this review. Some articles and reports on the impact of national assessments on policy were located, but they are often secondary studies of unpublished or published documents without providing sufficient information to assess biases, and the majority are focused on industrialised countries. The nature of the evidence could also present challenges to the appraisal stage of this review. Considering the anticipated characteristics of the literature, and that the relevance of information within the studies is not linked to a particular design, we propose not to exclude studies based on predetermined study design conditions.

One of the issues surrounding the synthesis of qualitative evidence is the often held notion that qualitative research is strongly dependent on its context and is therefore not generalisable. On this matter, we agree with Thomas & Harden's (2008) conclusion that there is still a strong case for the value of qualitative research.

Methodology

What types of studies are to be included and excluded, and what methods of analysis are envisaged, including critical appraisal approach, methods(s) of synthesis and analysis of heterogeneity of results? Describe eligible study designs, outcome measures and list possible studies to be included in the review (this list need not be comprehensive) [up to

500 words excluding list]. If you wish to include a methodology list; please add as an appendix.

It is anticipated that the body of literature relevant to this review will be mainly qualitative in nature. In the absence of a consensus on the most appropriate methodology to synthesise qualitative research, the methodology of this review will incorporate elements of qualitative systematic reviews approaches from researchers at the Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-ordinating Centre (EPPI-Centre).

Based on our knowledge of the literature, we anticipate that in addition to electronic database searches, we will need to undertake manual searches of the most relevant journals and search extensively in 'grey' literature. We will also use 'snowballing' techniques through citation tracking and contacting relevant academics, policy-makers and other stakeholders to locate relevant primary studies. This process will emphasise inclusion of potential users and relevant stakeholders from developing countries, as well as purposely contacting critics of national assessments to reduce potential bias.

We gave consideration to the use of existing critical appraisal tools to assess the quality of qualitative studies (e.g. Bland et al. 1995; Hill, A. & Spittlehouse, 2003; Milton Keynes Primary Care Trust, 2002). However, some criteria in these appraisals (e.g. study type, sample size and reflexivity) are inappropriate and unlikely to be contained in the literature that is relevant to this review.

Therefore, we will prioritise assessment of the relevance of study content to answering the research question in the appraisal process. This approach is in line with that used by Thomas & Hayden (2008) from the EPPI-Centre in their thematic synthesis of qualitative research in systematic reviews. Examples of the criteria for inclusion will be used to guide the assessment of relevance are included in the attached Methodology List. These will be further refined during the preparation of the review protocol.

The intention of the review is to integrate and aggregate rather than provide an interpretive synthesis of the information. To this end, it is proposed to first classify the material using the EPPI-Centre's educational keywording sheet v. 0.9.7 (including how material was identified, its status, name of assessment program, language, countries covered, subject area, assessment target population, age of learners). To this classification will be added information on the policy and/or resource allocation on which the national assessment program has impacted as well as any details regarding the link. This will be done for each study. The information collected in this way will then be tabulated to arrive at an aggregation of evidence regarding the impact of standardised national assessments on different types of policy and/or resource allocation decisions and processes.

Materials considered in the review will be read by at least two people at each of the inclusion, appraisal and synthesis stages to provide an estimate of inter-rater reliability and reduce bias. We will assess the quality of the literature based on the type of evidence (e.g. opinions of policy makers or stakeholders, authors' observation, document analysis) presented to support the links. This will inform our 'sensitivity analyses' to ascertain the impact of particular types of literature on the overall findings.

Please see Appendices for Methodology List and References.
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Experience of systematic reviewing	
Name	Experience
Dr. Petra Lietz	The Lead principal Investigator has completed and published both quantitative (Lietz 2006a; Lietz 2006b) and qualitative (Crawford, Ho, Lietz, Mummery & Schoffield 2001) meta-analyses.
Dr. Michelle Lonsdale	The Co-Principal investigator has significant experience in undertaking commissioned evidence-based reviews and literature reviews and through sourcing grey literature from developing countries using 'snowballing' techniques (Lonsdale & Nugroho 2010). Co-PI also has significant experience in appraising and working with qualitative studies (Lonsdale 2003; Lonsdale & Ingvarson 2003; Lonsdale 2010).
Craig Lockwood	Craig Lockwood of the Joanna Briggs Institute will provide systematic review expertise. Craig has significant experience undertaking systematic reviews through as evidenced by published (Lockwood 2010a; Lockwood 2010b; Lockwood 2003) and commissioned (Lockwood & Konno 2009) studies.
Dr. John Ainley	Dr John Ainley has significant experience in international assessments and has been responsible for PISA, ICILS and the Australian components of PISA, TIMSS and PIRLS. Dr Ainley has significant experience with policy-oriented research studies undertaken for national and State education authorities and has chaired the steering committees for national research projects. He has been a visiting scholar at the Far West Laboratory for Educational Research in San Francisco and published research on meta-analyses.
Dita Nugroho	Dita Nugroho has significant experience in undertaking commissioned evidence-based reviews and literature reviews, with particular focus on developing countries (Nugroho 2010; Nugroho 2009) and through sourcing grey literature from developing countries using 'snowballing' techniques (Lonsdale & Nugroho 2010).
Pat Knight	Pat Knight is a Senior Librarian (Information Dissemination) in ACER's Cunningham Library with extensive experience in providing and developing knowledge-based products and services as well as extensive prior experience in information services in Australia's tertiary education sector.

Communications plan and user engagement

Describe plans to engage with potential users of the research, to communicate the results of the research to such users, and the potential value of the research to users outside the research community. You will be expected to work closely with the relevant 3ie, DFID or AusAID team that initiated the review question, which includes participating in an initial discussion with relevant policy advisory groups to discuss scoping and targeting of the review.

In synthesizing research on the impact national assessment programs have had on policy and resource allocation decisions and practices in developing countries, and examining what factors have influenced impact level, it is anticipated that this review will be of interest to the main stakeholders of national assessment programs, particularly those in developing countries. This includes policy makers in the over 70 developing countries that have had experiences with national assessments and those who are considering undertaking a national assessment. International agencies that conduct or fund international assessments are also likely to find value from this review. As the review will also examine impact on teaching and learning practices, the wider education community in countries of interest may also find use in the review.

To communicate the result to these groups of users, we will develop a communication plan in cooperation with the review funder (AusAID) to target them. We anticipate that this will involve the dissemination of the policy brief and research summary to the education sections of aid agencies in AusAID's networks. ACER's role as a consortium partner within the AusAID Education Resource Facility (ERF) may prove fitting as a venue for this dissemination, with possibilities including a seminar or use of other education publications produced by the ERF. To disseminate the findings to developing country policy-makers, we propose that this is best done with the assistance of the regional groups that we anticipate will take part in the literature search component of this review – including the IEA, SACMEQ, CONAVEL, SPBEA and SEAMEO. ACER has a long tradition of working with policy advisory groups to disseminate commissioned reports and reviews.

Please note that two timetables are given below whereby the **second** one is our **preferred** timetable. The first timetable works with the headings and time indications from the original EPPI Centre document (but also includes a step for the registration of the title). The second timetable attempts to be more realistic in terms of the actual work associated with the review to be undertaken by ACER. It has done so by reducing the time allowed for the peer review of protocol from two months to one month and for the dissemination of the draft report from three to two months. In this way, the second time table allows for more time to be allocated for the searching, assessing, coding and synthesising of studies – the actual work for which the reviewers of ACER's original application found that too little time had been allocated.

Furthermore, in the second timetable the steps "assessing study quality" and "extracting data from studies" have been swapped. In this way, study quality is assessed prior to data being extracted from studies which seems to be the more logical sequence.

Timetable I (some review methods do not include these stages in this order)		
Stage of review	Start date	End date
Registration of title (1 month)	15/06/2011	13/07/2011
Preparing the protocol	14/07/2011	4/08/2011
Peer review of protocol (allow 2 months)	5/08/2011	30/09/2011
Searching for studies	4/10/2011	21/10/2011
Assessing study relevance	24/10/2011	18/11/2011
Extracting data from studies	21/11/2011	16/12/2011
Assessing study quality	19/12/2011	9/01/2012
Synthesising studies	10/01/2012	30/01/2012
Preparing draft report	31/01/2012	20/02/2012
Disseminating draft report (allow 3 months)	21/02/2012	14/05/2012
Revising report	1/06/2012	14/06/2012
Submission for publication with the EPPI-Centre	15/06/2012	

Timetable II (ACER's preferred timetable)		
Stage of review	Start date	End date
Registration of title (1 month)	06/06/2011	06/07/2011
Preparing the protocol	18/07/2011	12/08/2011
Peer review of protocol (allow 1 month)	15/08/2011	7/10/2011
Searching for studies	10/10/2011	4/11/2011
Assessing study relevance	7/11/2011	2/12/2011
Assessing study quality	5/12/2011	06/01/2012
Extracting data from studies	9/01/2012	3/02/2012
Synthesising studies	6/02/2012	2/03/2012
Preparing draft report	05/03/2012	30/03/2012
Disseminating draft report (allow 2 months)	2/04/2012	25/05/2012
Revising report	28/05/2012	14/06/2012
Submission for publication with the EPPI-Centre	15/06/2012	

Appendix A: Methodology List

Criteria to assess relevance of literature to be included in the review:

Included	Excluded
Reference is made to an assessment or testing program.	No reference is made to an assessment or testing program.
The assessment program has to be 'standardised' - the performance of students and/or schools can be compared across the country by way of test scores or grades.	Assessments or tests that are teacher made or school-based; assessments which involve the subjective rating of students' work, sometimes with some moderation (often done in the creative arts)
The assessment program can be national in design or form part of an international assessment program such as the Progress in International Reading Literacy (PIRLS), Programme for International Student Achievement (PISA), Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), South-East African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ).	-
Refers to at least one developing country ¹ .	Refers to developed countries only.
An explicit link is made between an assessment program and a policy/ resource allocation. The strength of the impact does not have to be quantified.	Discusses the <i>possible</i> impact of an assessment program on policy/resource allocation; is silent or just implies such a link.
Any link between an assessment program and a policy/resource allocation will be included in the review only once.	Literature that refers to the same link. However, for analytical purposes, the number of times a link is mentioned in different publications will be noted.
Is a primary study based on first-hand accounts of links or on analysis of information directly collected (i.e. interviews, surveys, observations, government documents) by the author(s), or a secondary study where primary study sources can be verified*	Literature cites or synthesises relevant primary sources and/or draws findings that are relevant to this review, but the primary literature are not clearly identified and cannot be verified.

¹ This review will use an inclusive classification of developing countries, combining AusAID's list of developing countries as declared by the Minister for Foreign Affairs for the purposes of the Overseas Aid Gift Deduction Scheme established by the Income Tax Assessment Act 1997 (last updated in July 2009) and World Bank's list of low- and middle-income countries (extracted in November 2010). This combined list includes 156 countries, 12 of which are unique to the AusAID list and 7 are unique to the World Bank list.

* We will seek to locate and, if necessary, translate relevant primary sources of literature to be included in the review. When only secondary references can be found, we will attempt to verify the primary study sources by contacting study author(s).

Examples of studies to be included in this review

Crespo, Soares & de Mello e Souza (2000). This study analyses the impact of the Brazilian National System of Evaluation of Basic Education on educational policies and practices, especially at the state level. It utilises data from interviews, site visits, document review, and a survey completed by state education departments and identifies the strong points and weaknesses of the evaluation system.

Gilmore (2005). This study examines the impact of participation in PIRLS and TIMSS on low- and middle-income countries, serving as an evaluation of the value of World Bank support to these countries. Data is obtained by the author herself, including through observing a four-day meeting for each of PIRLS and TIMSS; interviews with the National Research Coordinator (NRC) of each World Bank-funded country and questionnaires sent to the NRC and a nominated senior education official of each country.

Leste (2005). This paper is a presentation by an official from the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Seychelles at a SACMEQ Research Conference. It describes the way SACMEQ data was utilised at different stages of policy development (informing policy-makers, policy dialogue and policy action) resulting in policies against the streaming of students by abilities.

Nzomo & Makuwa (2006). This book chapter described the processes undertaken by the Ministries of Education in Kenya and Namibia in utilising SACMEQ findings to, among others, undertake modifications to the curriculum, allocate budget to monitor education quality and develop programs to improve greater efficiency in the education system. The authors are current and former National Research Co-ordinators in the two countries and extensively cite government policy documents.

Examples of studies to be excluded from this review

Braun & Kanjee (2006). This paper provides a framework of how national assessments can impact upon an education system and discusses the potential uses and impact of national assessments on education policy in developing countries. However, it does not make any reference to actual or existing link between national assessment findings and policy changes.

Lubisi & Murphy (2002). This article reviews assessment policy and practice in South African schools in recent years and overview of historical changes. The focus is on classroom-based assessments and not standardised assessments; therefore it will be excluded from this review.

Sunderman & Orfield (2008). This study examines the response of state education departments that are tasked with designing interventions in underperforming schools in the mandated yearly standardised tests in elementary and middle school under the No Child Left Behind Act. The authors collect data from interviews, analysis of policy and program

documents, and budget and staffing information. As it only references the United States, however, it will be excluded from this review.

Appendix B: References

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