Database of African research on education launched

Blog

Educational research

Encouraging the use of evidence in educational policymaking is a global issue and many initiatives are underway to support increased access to research evidence through databases, portals, communities of practice and other intermediaries in order to ensure that policies and practice are reflecting international and national concerns.

Within an African context, there are additional barriers to accessing research that can be spread over a wide range of different sources – journals, academic institutional websites, and other publications – and in some instances may not be available online, only in hard copy.

The African Education Research Database, an initiative of the Research for Equitable Access and Learning (REAL) Centre at the University of Cambridge and Education Sub Saharan Africa (ESSA) seeks to remedy this by offering access to a curated collection of African education research.

Launched in Paris on 15 June at the French Development Agency, the African Education Research Database, is the first open access database of education research produced by researchers based in sub-Saharan Africa. At the time of the launch, the database hosts more than 2,000 studies from 48 countries, in English, Portuguese and French, with more to follow including resources in Spanish. Sources of the research include both academic and grey literature databases.

The collection spans a range of educational access and quality issues, many specifically related to improving learning, including language of instruction, learning outcomes, teacher deployment, and infrastructure. The database can be searched by country, keyword and research method.

An initial mapping of the research currently available has been undertaken. Initial findings from the mapping question whether education research is addressing the issues that affect the most disadvantaged in terms of access and learning. Most of the research thus far reviewed suggest that research priorities in the region focus on higher education (30% of studies reviewed) rather than primary or secondary education (17.7% and 25.3% respectively). In addition, despite calls of a “learning crisis” in the African region, this is not a major focus of African research. Student learning as a focus amounted to only 7.1% of those papers reviewed.
Early conclusions suggest room for a greater alignment between education research in sub-Saharan Africa and continental and global priorities. Donors can also play a role in helping support research that can influence the quality of education and advocate for improvement. Next steps for the project include synthesising findings from the available research as well as identifying evidence gaps and priorities for future research.

For more information on the African Education Research Database visit the REAL Centre website.