

Global Education Evidence Advisory Panel

Objective

This note outlines the rationale for and scope of the new Global Education Evidence Advisory Panel (GEEAP). The panel's objective is to review and assess evidence-based and cost-effective practices that can improve education outcomes, to help policymakers in low- and middle-income countries make decisions.

Rationale

Demand for education evidence in a form that is useful for decision-making is constantly increasing. With the explosion in good evidence on education over the past 20 years, understanding what works requires keeping up with the literature and reading and interpreting meta-analyses. The problem is that the target audience—the policymakers, senior advisers, technical staff from development partners, and others who are designing and implementing education policies and programs—typically lack the time to delve through all this evidence.

In some other fields, advisory panels provide much-needed guidance to help these busy policymakers make sense of the evidence base. Advisory panels are common in the health field, for example. The US Food and Drug Administration has 47 technical and scientific advisory committees and panels, composed of scientific experts and other stakeholders. These panels, which meet regularly, provide technical advice on new drug and medical product applications. In the environmental field, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) produces new reports every few years that advise governments on the drivers and impacts of climate change.

In the field of education policy for low- and middle-income countries, however, there is no expert advisory panel that is fully analogous to the FDA panels or the IPCC. To be sure, there are some bodies and publication series that partially fill this niche with very useful syntheses. One example is *3ie*, which produces, advises on, and synthesizes rigorous evidence on development effectiveness, including in education. Another example is the Policy Insights series of J-PAL (the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab), which synthesizes insights on different types of interventions. But what is missing is an independent, cross-disciplinary body composed of leading experts, with the backing from multiple institutions that can distil key policy lessons, disseminate its recommendations, and translate them into policy.

The Global Education Evidence Advisory Panel, convened by UK Aid, the World Bank, UNICEF and USAID, will fill this gap. Because this international panel consists of leading researchers and policymakers who have contributed to and applied the burgeoning evidence base in education, its recommendations will both have a sound evidentiary basis and be credible to the intended audience. This Panel will thus be able to influence policymaking in the way that other bodies in health, climate, and other sectors do.

Panel structure

Membership

The panel consists of a diverse set of evidence-oriented experts. Panelists have been selected for their expertise in generating and using good evidence in education. The panel's size is set at between 10 and 15 members, large enough to allow a wealth of diverse experiences but small enough for vigorous discussion. Membership is drawn from among economists, educationalists, psychologists, and policymakers. The panelists already participate in many other networks and panels, including domestic advisory panels and topic-based panels. The GEEAP aims to knit together that expertise into a global group that can provide guidance on education broadly for low- and middle-income countries.

Panelists have been selected for their depth and breadth of expertise, in both education research and implementation, and they have been drawn from across multiple disciplines and countries. Under the GEEAP design, this panel needs to be able to provide guidance on all types of education interventions in LICs and MICs, rather than having separate panels convened for each subfield of education. For this reason, it is important to have panelists who, together, have expertise in the major subfields of education, but who also can think broadly and comparatively about different interventions and contexts.

Independence

The panel is an independent body whose recommendations are based only on the evidence. The panel's recommendations will be useful only if they are regarded as impartial—meaning that they are not influenced by the interests of any governments, international organizations, or NGOs currently implementing policies or programs. This independence will be safeguarded by two main factors. First, the large majority of the panelists are outside experts, with initially only one representative each from UK Aid and the World Bank serving on the panel¹. Second, panelists are well established in their fields, with strong reputations as researchers that they will want to protect.

The convening organizations serve as the technical team to curate the initial evidence for consideration by the panel on an approximately annual basis. This means that they carry out or contract background research on behalf of the panel.

The GEEAP will be supported by a secretariat, however the recommendations on interventions will solely be the province of the panel.

Terms of reference

The panel is asked to make recommendations in three areas:

- **On the expected cost-effectiveness of specific types of interventions:** To come up with these judgments, the panel will draw heavily on the types of evidence provided by rigorous evaluations of those interventions in LIC and MIC contexts.
- **On relative value of different interventions:** The panel will be asked to group interventions into broad classes based on their expected cost-effectiveness (for example, “highly cost-effective,” “moderately cost-effective,” “not cost-effective,” and “more evidence needed”).

¹ Currently, only one Panel member is from a convening organization.

- **On how to implement these interventions:** The panel will also provide advice on what are likely to be key technical and implementation issues to watch out for when implementing specific interventions. It will consult with policymakers as it develops this guidance.

In each case, the panel will combine its global recommendations with guidance on the context in which an intervention is most likely to work. Even though there may be some global lessons, the success of most types of interventions is highly dependent on context. The panel will include this contextual information in their recommendations—for example, by noting that “intervention X is more likely to work in countries or school districts with the following characteristics.”

The goal is to develop consensus recommendations. The panel will strive to come to consensus on a global verdict on the cost-effectiveness of each type of intervention. Where this is not possible, however, panelists may decide to issue majority and minority opinions.

The panel will present these recommendations in the form of “smart buys” notes. Before each meeting, panel members will receive a draft list of suggested “smart buys” in education—meaning interventions that, according to rigorous evidence, are often both effective and cost-effective—as well as other interventions that don’t meet that test. Members are expected to prepare for and participate actively in the discussion. The panel’s smart buys notes will be disseminated widely within the Building Evidence in Education (BE²) members and other organizations, and used to inform and guide their education investments.

The panel’s other products, beyond the recommendations, may include reports on different interventions or other supporting materials. What will make the panel’s output useful to the policymakers and their staff is not only the overall recommendations but also the information on implementation and context.

Inputs to the panel’s deliberations

In coming up with its recommendations, the panel will draw on several sources of evidence:

- **Panelists’ existing knowledge:** Panelists have been selected for their wealth of knowledge from rigorous evaluations, implementation experience, and other types of research and experience.
- **Qualitative evidence on implementation:** Because the panel’s decisions will take into account real-world implementability, panelists will also hold discussions with or solicit inputs from policymakers and experts on what is likely to succeed in the real world, at scale, and at reasonable cost.
- **Discussions with other evidence-synthesizing bodies:** To the extent that its other sources of information do not already cover this, the panel may want to hold discussions with other organizations that synthesize evidence in education.

The convening agencies prepared background research for the first meeting of the Panel, which took place in July 2020. The background research was based on a review of the universe of rigorous evaluations, and grouping of the interventions based on their cost-effectiveness. This research was intended to supplement and update the panelists’ extensive knowledge of the existing literature and experience with policy implementation.