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#59 What Makes Education Research Impactful – Case Studies of Research Projects in Singapore

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Objectives/aims

This study examines how research users and researchers perceive impact and the factors that contribute to impact. With an increasing emphasis across education systems for education research to generate greater research impact, and improve policies, practice and teacher education, there is a paucity of knowledge in how impact is perceived by Singapore's education researchers and research users, and what has been done to optimize the impact arising from the education research projects. To address this gap, two research questions are framed to provide empirical insights and to contribute to the literature by distilling common lessons and good practices across the various "impactful" education research studies undertaken in the Singapore context.

1. How do research users and researchers perceive impact from education research conducted in Singapore?
2. What factors (e.g., approaches, strategies, relationships, etc.) contribute to impact?

Methods

This study adopts a multiple case study approach to understand the phenomenon of impact across eight cases of local research projects in context-specific settings. The case study approach is chosen as the contexts across research projects and the lived experiences of participants can be diverse. Findings from case studies could be presented as vignettes or episodes of storytelling to communicate illustratively, and with its nuances.



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The eight research projects are selected to reflect the diverse impact research had on policy, practice, including teacher education, and student outcomes, and to enable us to learn from the phenomenon. As there are no established impact criteria in education research in Singapore, the cases were identified based on three qualitative criteria: (a) is the project relatively well-known to the research users, (b) are the project findings utilised by research users, and (c) does the research project intentionally seek to increase its impact to stakeholders? While the criteria may seem rudimentary, they suffice for our objective to select cases that are more likely to yield insights into our topic of study. A total of seven research users and eight researchers were interviewed and data analysis on the field notes and interview transcripts was conducted individually and collectively as a research team.

Main findings

Perception of impact:

Across the case studies, both research users and researchers perceive the research findings as having an instrumental impact on policy and practice. For research users, the instrumental impact tends to be related to the nature of their work and the intent of being involved in the research projects. Varying types of impact were seen to affect practice level, such as capacity building of teachers, provision of teaching and learning guides and resources, and policy level at the Ministry of Education informing syllabus and curriculum development and changes. Conceptual impact undergirding the instrumental impact, and the impact at practice level leading to changes in teachers and students' dispositions are sometimes observed.

Factors contributing to research impact

Although the research users and researchers may have different perceptions of attribution of research impact, factors observed to contribute to research impact are:

- Relevance and timeliness of research findings to the system
- Relationship building between researchers and policymakers/practitioners
- Research collaborators
- Research communication engagement

Factors inhibiting impact were also highlighted through the case studies. Drawing from the findings, emerging principles that can guide in improving research impact, and two unanswered questions are proposed for stakeholders in the education ecosystem to consider as the emphasis on, indeed the demand for, research impact beyond the academia continues to grow. Thus, besides its strong utility to the Singapore education landscape, this study contributes to the growing body of scholarship to inform the researchers and stakeholders in strengthening the research-practice-policy nexus.

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