



Summary

Evidence use in schools: a national snapshot

December 2022

Background

This national snapshot provides a baseline of how evidence is used by teachers and leaders across Australian schools.

Better use of evidence is proven to lift student outcomes, so it's important to understand and advance its use in schools. This national snapshot helps to do this by bringing together new and existing information to see a more complete picture of how teachers and leaders use evidence.

In examining the use of evidence, we distinguish between:

- **research evidence:** academic research, such as causal research or synthesis research, which uses rigorous methods to provide insights into educational practice.
- **teacher-generated evidence:** evidence generated by teachers through their daily practice (for example, teacher observations, information gained from formative or summative assessments or insights from student feedback on teacher practices).

We examine use of evidence-based practices: educational approaches that research evidence shows will have a positive impact on student learning. We focus on 4 evidence-based practices:

- formative assessment
- explicit instruction
- mastery learning
- classroom management/focused classrooms.

Evidence makes a difference when it is rigorous, reliable and implemented well. We also distinguish between:

- **quality of evidence use:** when evidence is engaged with thoughtfully, appropriately and implemented well.
- **using high-quality evidence:** when evidence is rigorous and reliable, and teachers and leaders have the skills and confidence to assess rigour and reliability.

Key findings

Teachers are more likely to use evidence generated through their daily practice than research evidence

School teachers and leaders more frequently report using teacher-generated evidence than research evidence:

- 67% of respondents from AERO's evidence use survey¹ report using forms of teacher-generated evidence "often" or "very often"
- 41% report using forms of research evidence "often" or "very often".

Confidence plays a big role in whether teachers and school leaders use evidence

Teachers and leaders who are confident in their skills in assessing the quality and relevance of academic research, are around twice as likely to report that they "often" or "very often" consulted academic research to improve their knowledge about the effectiveness of an instructional practice. AERO's evidence use survey found:

- 54% of teachers and 81% of leaders who were confident in their skills reported consulting academic research "often" or "very often"
- 29% of teachers and 37% of leaders who were not confident in their skills reported consulting academic research "often" or "very often".

Leaders encourage evidence use, but coaching and dedicated time are also necessary

Teachers value support from their leaders, in the form of encouragement to use evidence, facilitating opportunities for collaboration and knowledge exchange, and ensuring professional learning opportunities are available and suitable. Interestingly, the evidence use survey found that while over 80% of teachers "agree" or "strongly agree" their leaders encourage them to use evidence or to share and discuss evidence, a lower proportion report the availability of professional learning activities to support them use evidence in their practice. For example:

- only 64% of survey respondents report having regular access to coaching to help them use evidence to change their practice
- only 73% report that at their school, they have set aside regular times or meetings to discuss evidence that could improve their practice
- only 66% indicate that their school system (Government, Catholic or Independent) provides easily accessible information, resources, training or other support to help them use evidence to inform their practice.

¹ 932 Australian school teachers and leaders responded to AERO's evidence use survey. Learn more about the survey in our methodology report.

Encouragement from leaders to use evidence use is important, but support in other forms is also needed for teachers to access and use evidence. Dedicated time is particularly important, as many teachers report time as a barrier to engaging with evidence. This professional learning can take many shapes, including formal training courses as well as opportunities for collaboration, and knowledge-exchange to build skills to assess quality, rigour and relevance of evidence.

A culture of sharing and discussing evidence within schools is emerging

Teachers and leaders find discussions with colleagues as good opportunities to discuss evidence to improve their practice. But many teachers do not report cultures of evidence use that are embedded and strong enough to the point where staff encourage each other to change their practice based on the evidence.

- Only 45% of survey respondents “agree” or “strongly agree” they will encourage colleagues to stop using an instructional practice if evidence from academic research shows it doesn’t work.
- Only 36% “agree” or “strongly agree” they will encourage colleagues to stop using an instructional practice if evidence they collected from their classroom shows it doesn’t work.

Not all evidence-based practices are used frequently

Over three quarters of Australian teachers who respond to international educational surveys report regularly using evidence-based practices. Explicit instruction and formative assessment are most frequently reported, and some practices seem to be more frequent in classrooms with younger students.

But not all evidence-based practices are used frequently. Classroom management, through the enforcement of rules and routines at classroom and school level is the least implemented among the evidence-based practices investigated.

- Only 66% of Year 4 students, 60% of Year 4 teachers and 38% of Year 8 teachers agree that the school’s rules are enforced in a fair and consistent manner.
- Only 61% of teachers frequently tell students to follow classroom rules.

There are also early indicators that some teachers may not be making use of the full range of strategies that evidence-based practices encompass, meaning the practice is only partly used and perhaps not providing the full benefit to students.

Teachers report using evidence-based practices more than students report experiencing them

This suggests the need for better approaches to measure the use of quality evidence and the implementation of evidence-based practices. Existing surveys of students and teachers rarely ask about these issues, and so there is not much data related to evidence use in Australian classrooms. Generating and bringing together more data from teachers and students will provide complementary insights into how teaching is implemented and experienced. Together these insights can also help teachers and school leaders better plan to improve teaching and learning.

Recommendations and next steps

This baseline of evidence use in schools provides several next steps for organisations that engage with teachers and leaders, as well as AERO.

Organisations should:

- support teachers and leaders to use evidence and evidence-based practices well
- promote the ultimate purpose of using evidence: to improve outcomes for students
- be clear and consistent with terminology to avoid confusion about what evidence is
- develop measures of evidence use that are comprehensive, reliable and relevant
- use these measures to track and understand evidence use and impact on student learning.

Next steps for AERO

- Investigate how to effectively embed evidence into professional learning. [Read more on this topic.](#)
- Provide guidance for effective internal professional learning activities.
- Develop measures of evidence-based practices that are comprehensive, reliable and relevant. [View our rubrics for teachers.](#)
- Further investigate what contributes to classroom management and develop measures to track change.
- Conduct and support large-scale research to demonstrate the effectiveness of using evidence and evidence-based practices.
- Continue providing accessible and practical information about the impact of using evidence.
- Continue providing accessible and practical information to support evidence use. Visit the [AERO website](#) for existing resources.

More information

This snapshot is based on findings from the [AERO evidence use survey](#), a rapid review of existing literature on use of evidence and evidence-based practices, findings from 4 international student and teacher surveys and early findings from interviews with school teachers and leaders. See [Methodology](#) for further information on the qualitative and quantitative data sources and analyses for this research and its limitations.