

Research and Evaluation

“improving teaching and learning and the well-being of youth in the Pacific has always been at the heart of PREL’s work”

Improving teaching and learning and the well-being of all children and youth in the Pacific region has always been at the very heart of PREL’s mission and work. To do so, we work with decision makers and those who direct educational programs to examine research and evaluation data to assess which programs, strategies, and interventions work best and in what settings.

At some point in most education, community-based, and social service programs questions arise as to how things are going and whether programs and services are making an important and meaningful difference. These questions are important to those managing and delivering programs, as well as funders and those for whom the project is designed to benefit. To address these questions, PREL works with educators, community members, social service providers, and policy makers to conduct rigorous research and evaluation studies and build capacity in conducting these studies throughout the Pacific region and beyond.

Control Trials

PREL partnered in two randomized control trials with an external research firm. One study, just completed, examined the impact of a video game on 4th graders’ vocabulary knowledge in after-school programs in the San Diego Unified School District. The second study, an ongoing effort of the REL-P, looks at the impacts of a professional development program in reading comprehension on teacher knowledge and classroom practices and student reading achievement in 4th and 5th grades in samples of schools in American Samoa, the CNMI, and on four islands in Hawai’i. Both studies used programs or schools as levels of random assignment, as well as data collection instruments that meet high standards of reliability and validity. PREL worked with external research in all phases of the studies, from design to reporting.

There are 51 schools in the REL-P Pacific CHILD study involving 245 teachers. The analysis of the first year teacher outcomes suggest that treatment teachers participating in the Pacific CHILD professional development program show greater knowledge and better teaching and learning practices in effective reading comprehension and instructional strategies than control school teachers.

External Evaluations

PREL provides extensive evaluation services to external agencies. Both government and nonprofit funders expect evaluations to be thorough, accurate, and valid. Those who practice evaluation must have a solid understanding of the principles of research and know how to conduct meaningful studies. The successful application of these technical skills in the real world requires an understanding of the many barriers to successful program implementation that are commonly encountered in evaluation work. PREL’s experience performing evaluations in Hawai’i and the Pacific region ensure an appropriate mix of technical and practical evaluation skills.

For clients, evaluation is an opportunity to reflect on the logic behind the approaches their programs use. Not only is it a time to measure the effectiveness of a program and find out whether measured outputs are in line with program requirements, but it is also an opportunity to come to agreement from the beginning about how program activities can logically lead to meeting the established goals and objectives. PREL provides training and assistance to help educators understand their own program framework and develop strategies for collecting appropriate outcome data to examine program effectiveness.

In 2009, PREL completed 22 evaluation reports, the largest annual number for the period.