

RESEARCH INSIGHTS



Look Beyond the Number

5 Questions to Ask When Reviewing Effect Sizes

An effect size helps describe the magnitude of a research finding, but the number alone doesn't tell the whole story. Use these five questions to better understand what the evidence means for your students.

01 How was the study conducted?

Not all studies provide the same level of evidence. Studies that show a relationship between two things do not necessarily prove that one caused the other.

Ask yourself: Does the study show cause and effect, or simply a connection?

02 What was measured, and when?

Results may look different when measured immediately after instruction versus months later. The type of assessment also matters, including whether it was developed independently.

Ask yourself: What was measured, how was it measured, and when?

03 Were the students similar to yours?

Consider the grade levels, student populations, and school settings studied. Also note whether results reflect individual students, schools, or entire districts.

Ask yourself: How closely does the study reflect my students and schools?

04 Did it work in real classrooms?

Results from highly controlled studies may differ from those in everyday classrooms. Implementation, study duration, and school conditions can all influence findings.

Ask yourself: Was the program studied under conditions similar to ours?

05 Have other studies found similar results?

Findings repeated across different schools, settings, and research teams can strengthen confidence in the evidence, particularly when independent researchers are involved.

Ask yourself: Have multiple studies, including independent evaluations, found similar results?

The Bottom Line: Bigger Doesn't Always Mean Better. An effect size is one piece of the research puzzle. Study quality, measurement, participants, and real-world relevance all matter when interpreting the results.

For further insights on effect size, check out: blog.acceleratelearning.com/effect-size-in-education