GOVERNMENT
OF
THE
REPUBLIC
OF
VANUATU

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Research Guideline

Policy and Planning Directorate

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CONTENTS

FOREWORD

This Research Guideline enables the Ministry of Education and Training to better oversee, coordinate and direct relevant and timely research to achieve the outputs, intermediate outcomes and outcomes outlined in the Vanuatu Education and Training Sector Strategy. Education is a critical investment in our country's future growth, and development and the right kind of knowledge development is critical.

This Research Guideline will guide individuals and institutions to conduct studies that can improve decision-making and education sector development in the coming years to ensure that the investments we are making in our children today support our national priorities and goals.

Our plans are ambitious, but focused on addressing challenges and helping our children obtain the skills and knowledge they need to become productive members of our society.

Three goals have been identified to support the Education sector in our country. These goals are to increase equitable access to education for all, to provide quality education, and improve planning, fiscal, and financial management. All these three goals are to nurture transparency, fairness, equity, and respect.

I wish to express my gratitude to all the staff of the Ministry of Education and our affiliated agencies, to the development partners and to all the many other stakeholders who have contributed to putting this Research Guide in place for MoET.

Director General Ministry of Education   Director Policy and Planning

Introduction[1]

Educational research is an important activity for the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET). The Policy and Planning Directorate (PPD) will be responsible for overseeing all knowledge generation that will assist MoET achieve the mission of the education sector. More specifically the Research and Development unit within the PPD will be directly responsible for the entire review and approval process starting from the research design to the final report.

MoET's mission as summarized in Vanuatu's Education and Training Sector Strategy (VETSS) 2020-2030, is "to provide a quality, student-centred education that is accessible, relevant, sustainable, inclusive, and responsive."[2] More detailed goals of the education sector are described in the three-year Corporate Plan.[3]

Research in the education sector is the orderly investigation of subject matter for the purpose of adding to existing knowledge. Research can investigate a new problem or phenomenon with the view to adding new information or finding solutions to a problem or direction for sector activities. It can also mean studying again what is already known because of constraints in achieving goals or problems with implementation.

Research is important to Vanuatu's education sector in (i) providing an understanding of what is going on in the education sector; (ii) highlighting and/or understanding issues or constraints to achieving the VETSS goals; and (iii) providing possible solutions and/or direction for resolving problems. MoET's policy is to support research that will enable the country implement its education mission of providing access and quality education.

This research guide describes, for individuals and institutions, the process of obtaining from the PPD permission to conduct high quality research and analysis across the sector. Guidelines and expectations for both internal and external researchers are included in this document.

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[1] These Guidelines were prepared with the assistance of the assistance of the Vanuatu Education Support Program, which is managed by Tetra Tech International Development, on behalf of the Australian Government.
[2] Webpage
[3] Webpage

Source: Corporate Plan 2022-2026

1. Research scope

The research agenda supported by MoET will uphold and prioritize the areas included in the VETSS. All submissions, including research directly related to the VETSS areas and requests for research in other areas will be considered on a case-by-case bases. Researchers and research teams are encouraged to focus on the key areas in the VETSS including management of each of these key areas. In addition, the MoETs Corporate Plan describes the intermediate and end outcomes for the VETSS and any challenges to achieving these outcomes are important research areas.

The first pillar of the VETSS is access and equity. The following areas fall under this pillar.

- Education financing;

- Quality education (including teaching and learning, instructional materials, formative assessment etc.);
- School infrastructure (classroom space, building, equity, especially gender, children with disability, children from social disadvantaged communities;
- Disaster mitigation and disaster preparedness;
- Out of school children, grade repetition and transition;
- Partnership, and community involvement;
- Public schooling, government aided schooling, and private schooling

The second pillar focuses on quality education. The following areas fall under this pillar

- Language of instruction,
- Teaching and learning,
- The role of IT in schooling,
- Curriculum development, implementation and assessment,
- Teacher management,
- Enrolment and quality in tertiary education,
- Enrolment and quality in vocational/technical education

2. Objectives and functions of research

Education is a complex field with many different actors including parents, students, teachers, principals, educational administrators etc. involved with either participating or providing services. To achieve the VETSS intermediate and end outcomes as outlined in the Corporate Plan, the field also requires long term commitment of personnel and students and the use of a variety instructional material. The sector encounters many constrains to ensure consistent attendance and teaching and learning. The way in which education services are provided across Vanuatu will also vary.

Educational research starts by asking questions about educational phenomenon, and variations in education service delivery across the six regions in Vanuatu especially in the areas that come under the two pillars of access and quality education. This will be followed by a detailed review of all the literature already available on the topic. It is important to ensure that the proposed research is not reinventing the wheel or repeating what has been done, but will help the study uncover new areas and will likely reach useful and relevant conclusions.

The type of research methodology to be used will also need to be decided. It can be quantitative methods or qualitative methods. The former is numeric based on

surveys and the latter is descriptive based on interviews. Multidisciplinary methods, which includes both quantitative and qualitative analysis would be most appropriate and would be preferred. The sample will have to be carefully selected and the research designed in detail. Once the entire research design is finalized in draft the process of applying for permission from the Research and Development unit in the PPU will commence.

3. The application for permission - ni-Vanuatus and international researchers.

The application for permission to conduct research will include a detailed research design and a cover letter.

3.1. Research Design

The Research Design is a document that is prepared by the researcher or research team. The document should include discussion in the following areas:

➢ Describe the field you will be researching and why this field is important.
➢ Provide a literature review of the field. Summarize the current research available in your specific area of interest and highlight any gaps that the proposed research will address. Please make sure to include any research conducted in-country.
➢ List the questions that your study seeks to answer. Provide a rationale for why these specific questions are important and your hypothesis.
➢ Determine the research methods to be used in the study and the rationale for using the specific methods.
➢ Describe your sample and the representativeness of the sample.
➢ Describe whether your research includes primary data collection or secondary data analysis.
➢ Describe the tools you plan to use to gather data (document analysis, interviews, assessments, surveys/questionnaires, case studies, observations, statistical databases, etc.).
➢ Explain how your research will add to the knowledge already existing in the education sector and why your work is important. Specify the pillar in the VETSS, which your proposed research will be examining. Also describe the area/areas listed under the pillar that you will be looking at.
➢ Summarize the strengths and weaknesses/limitations of the approach you are using in the proposed study.
➢ Describe your expected timeline for completing this research.

- ➢ Discuss dissemination strategy and review of the draft report by relevant research participants and MoET before finalization
- ➢ Discuss the ethical implications and the researcher response. It is critical to include gender and child protection areas in the proposal.
- ➢ A sample of the tools could be included in the design

3.2. Cover Letter

A letter from the researcher or if it is a research team from the team lead should accompany the research design and sent to the PPD, Research and Development Unit. The letter includes the background of the research, the rationale for undertaking the research, a very brief summary of the design and a full disclosure of who is financing the research. If it is an external researcher or research team, and an institution is involved, the expectation of the institution will need to be fully described.

3.3. Condition of anonymity

Condition of anonymity and use of the information must be clearly stated and agreed to, in writing by both parties, if necessary. Anonymity, refers to the researcher not knowing the identity of the respondent. Or it could be a situation where the researcher is aware of the identity of the respondent but needs to maintain anonymity in the research by disguising the identity (e.g. by changing their gender, age, changing a disability from one type to another etc.).

3.4. Ownership and Copyright

The PPD will have joint ownership and joint copyright of the final report. PPD will have the freedom to reproduce the full or parts of the report not for commercial purposes but for engaging with the relevant actors identified in the report and for informing the education reform process. In addition, if there are demands from the government hierarchy for the report, the PPD will respond positively to this request without consulting the researcher or research team.

3.5. Child Protection

All researchers must be aware of the Childcare and Protection Act and comply with the relevant MoET Policies and Education Act. Child Protection refers to preventing and responding to violence, exploitation and abuse against children:[4]

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[4] https://education.gov.vu/index.php?id=child-protection

4. Approval Process

4.1. Policy Planning Unit and executive senior management group approval

The Research and Development Unit prepares the package for review and submits to the PPD Director. The Director in consultation with relevant senior officers (senior management group) reviews the cover letter and research design. If the senior officers are unable to take a decision, the PPD Director authorizes the Research and Development unit to organizes a meeting with members of the relevant Directorate to discuss the importance, and implications of the proposed study for the MoET. For example, if the research is on the curriculum, members of the National curriculum and assessment Board can meet to review the research for approval. Additional expertise will be solicited to review the proposal and assist the PPD in making a decision. This will be especially important for sensitive or impactful research proposals and will provide independent scrutiny.

The review process will examine the usefulness of the research to national interests first and then global implications. The sampling, methodology, and dissemination will also be examined closely. Issues of confidentiality and/or anonymity will also be reviewed. The decision of the review process will be communicated by the Research and Development unit to the researcher or research team leader in a formal letter, signed by the Director. The decision could be approved; approved with revisions, or denied. If there are any areas that the Ministry requires further analysis, or additional areas to be included or any other requests this will be communicated to the researcher or research team.

If there are any concerns, comments or demands, the researcher will respond and if required revise the research design and resubmit to the PPD. Any differences in opinion, or disagreement will be addressed by the researcher in writing.

Figure 1: Process of Submission for Approval
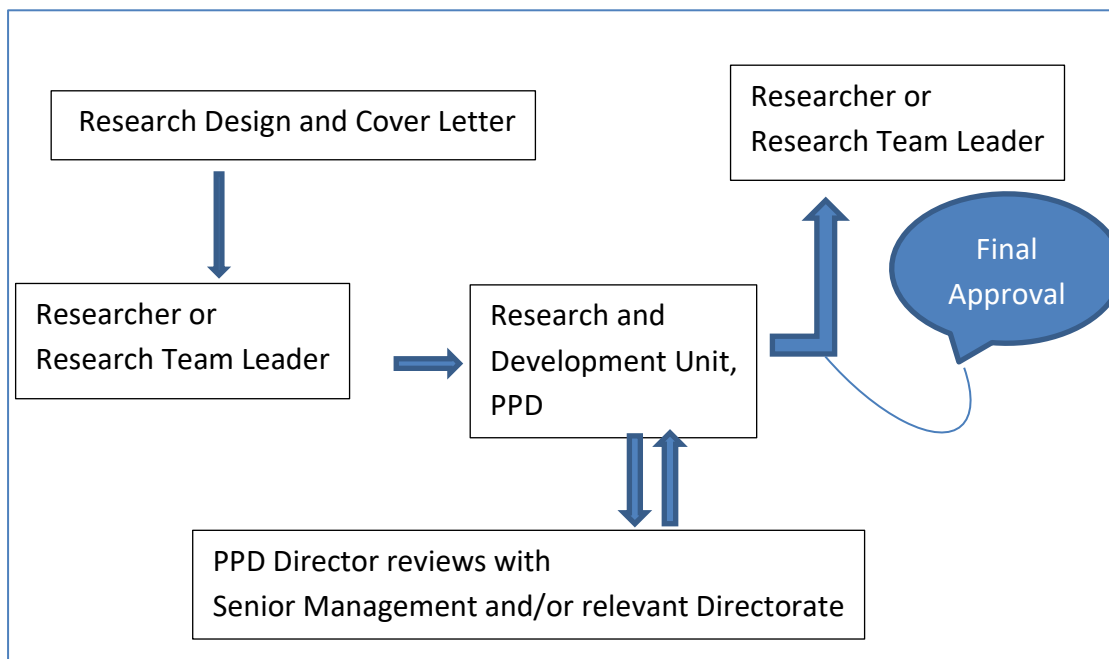
4.2. Protocol for working with the respective division/authorities

The PPD Research and Development team provides guidance on protocol and process for the researcher's work with the relevant directorate. The Research and Development team are given the responsibility for overseeing the research, will guide the researcher or research team on the work in the province or provinces that the researcher had included in the sample.

After the PPU and senior management group have approved the research proposal, then the research design will be forwarded to the respective Directorate or Board to facilitate the study with the researcher. The responsible and relevant Directorate or Board will guide and facilitate the researcher on all areas pertaining to the research. If the research involves primary data collection in the provinces, the Directorate or Board forwards the research design to the provinces.

4.3. Data collection

OVEMIS is a source for secondary data analysis. If secondary data (OVEMIS) is being collected and analysed, it would be useful to do this before the visit to the province. The researcher may wish to discuss with the national Directorate or Board, the conclusions being drawn from the secondary data to ensure that the perceptions and analysis are in the right direction before starting work in the province.

Both ni-Vanuatu and international researchers will visit the province and school only after receiving clear instructions from the relevant Directorate or Board as to the cultural expectations and the do and don't during their time in the province.

5. Negotiating entry with participants

Negotiating entry includes national and provincial procedures on the one hand and school level procedures on the other.

5.1. National and provincial procedures

Mainly for data collection, the PPD must provide an introductory letter signed by the Director to the respective Directorate or Board responsible for oversight. Before the researcher enters the province, a letter goes ahead from the national Directorate or Board to the Provincial Education Officer introducing the researcher and the study to the province. The Provincial Education Officer can express reservations or provide comments that have to be considered before the researcher or research team enters the province.

The researcher collaborates with Provincial Education Officers to select the schools that will participate in the study. The researcher and the designated Division will have to select which schools to visit for data collection either in rural or urban areas depending on the proposed topic of research.

The provincial authorities grant permission to collect data from all government schools and government-aided entities. The role of government vis-à-vis private institutions for authorizing data collection is still being decided. The researcher liaises with the Provincial Education Officers and school authorities to establish the schedule for the research activities under the guidance of the responsible Directorate or Board. The Provincial Education Office has to work closely with selected schools, especially the school principal to set up the date and time for data collection in schools.

School authorities can express reservations, which have to be considered. The researcher must have a copy of the approval letter and liaise with Provincial Education Offices and school authorities to enable consultation with the community, principals, teachers, students and parents during data collection or interviews. If the research proposal includes data collection at the student level and could be sensitive for parents, specific parental consent must be sought before commencing data collection. The principals will arrange the location and timing of research activities (data collection, and interviews) with students, teachers, community and parent that causes the least disruption to teaching and learning in the classroom.

5.2. School Procedures

At the province and school levels, the researcher must carefully negotiate entry. The researcher must present proper indentification in schools or in the area in which data collection is taking place. The identity of the person doing the survey must be

distinguished with name tags that reveal his or her identity: name, surname, first name, domicile and nationality. This can help Provincial Education Offices track researchers, and their data collection in various institutions, from students, and teachers in schools.

The researcher or research team must represent integrity and ethical practice during their time in the country and especially in schools. Before investigators begin with data collection in respective areas, the researchers must have with them a recognized form or document that shows the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles and in terms of rights, obligations, benefits to society and fairness. It will help schools and MoET to support the research.

6. Presentation and approval of research report/findings

This section includes separate sections for ni-Vanuatu and international researchers

6.1. Submission of report and approval

A soft and hard copy of the draft research report must be submitted to the PPD for review. The report cannot be finalized without review by the responsible Directorate or Board in charge of the area of research and the PPD Research and Development Unit. A presentation in person may also be required.

The Directorate may, if required, share the findings with the provinces and participants in the study for comment. Feedback on the analysis and conclusions of the draft report is shared with the researcher, which will be incorporated before finalizing the report. The researcher or research team incorporates all the feedback before finalizing the report.

The above paragraphs also apply to international researchers. Draft conclusions of the study must be shared in-country before any dissemination activities are undertaken externally. The researcher or research team incorporates all the feedback before finalizing the report.

A soft and hard copy is submitted to the Research and Development Unit and to the Directorate or Senior Management for final approval.The Research and Development Unit maintains a library of all research that is undertaken in the sector. In addition, though interview transcripts and statistical analysis does not need to be submitted, this information could be requested at any time over a period of 10 years. The researcher or research team is expected to preserve this information for 10 years in case there is a request for this qualitative or quantitative data.

7. Conclusion

Research is a vital tool for MoET in identifying weaknesses, and providing direction and solutions to address challenges in the sector. These Guidelines outline a process for undertaking research in a clear, and ethical way. The Guidelines also allow the MoET and the PPU to provide the needed oversight and direction. Researchers and Research teams must adhere to the research procedures outlined in these Guidelines.