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The Impact of Evidence-Based Practices on School Performance

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the influence of evidence-based practices (EBPs) on school performance, drawing on a comprehensive review of empirical studies, case analyses, and mixed-method research. Rooted in the principles of data-informed decision-making, EBPs have increasingly shaped educational policy and classroom practice, particularly for students with special needs such as autism spectrum disorder. The research investigates how EBPs affect both student and teacher performance, the theoretical frameworks guiding their adoption, and the barriers hindering effective implementation. Findings from national case studies and systematic reviews reveal that while EBPs are positively correlated with improved academic outcomes and behavioral engagement, challenges such as low fidelity of implementation, limited school capacity, and policy misalignment persist. Moreover, despite mandates promoting EBP integration, sustainability and consistent application remain elusive in many educational settings. The study recommends strategies for reinforcing systemic support, aligning educational policy with validated practices, and fostering a culture of continuous improvement. By bridging research and practice, schools can achieve more equitable and measurable student success.

Keywords: Evidence-Based Practices (EBPs), School Performance, Educational Policy, Student Outcomes, Teacher Performance, Implementation Fidelity, Autism Spectrum Disorder.

INTRODUCTION

Educational practices grounded in research are termed evidence-based practices, originating from the medical field. "Evidence" typically signifies knowledge based on data supporting a practice. A systematic review of literature analyzed the link between the implementation of evidence-based interventions in schools and pupil outcomes. Thirteen studies with thirty-two effect sizes showed that effective execution of evidence-based practices correlates with enhanced pupil performance. Notably, fidelity of implementation is seldom measured, but when assessed clearly and robustly, adherence to program protocols yields significant outcomes. However, data categorization of evidence-based practices risks compromising fidelity measurement, while modeling latent variable growth in sound educational programs is technically feasible. Practical challenges in implementing evidence-based interventions in schools were also investigated. A literature search from 2000 to 2017 identified 589 papers on "evidence-based" or similar terms in health and education. Initially, a broad analysis was employed to explore the complexity of implementing these practices. Detailed examination of thirty-five papers revealed limitations, leading to the inclusion of four more studies despite not meeting all criteria set beforehand. This enhanced analysis and communication of findings, which are broadly applicable. The review noted that the observational nature of many studies limits strong causal conclusions [1, 2].

Understanding Evidence-Based Practices

Evidence-based practices (EBPs) and therapies offer effective ways for families to support students with autism spectrum disorders (ASD). However, implementing research-based methods for improving support can be challenging. ASD encompasses a range of severity and complex behavioral traits, making it difficult to understand. Teaching children with ASD proves to be a challenge, as they often struggle to absorb, process, and react to stimuli in their surroundings. Educators report that these children may

display behavioral issues, such as aggression or self-injury, leading to their removal from general education settings to maintain order. Despite these challenges, effective teaching and communication strategies for students with ASD are available. There is a significant need to investigate EBPs in developmental disabilities. The field of conduct disorders has received extensive research attention, and there is a growing body of work on behavioral interventions for autism and early intervention programs. Behavior analysis and therapy are crucial to scientific developments in child behavior change within this emerging field [3, 4].

Theoretical Framework

Educational programs increasingly emphasize evidence-based practices (EBPs) that demonstrate efficacy in improving student outcomes. Stakeholders at various educational levels invest considerably in selecting and implementing effective programs, with federal and state laws highlighting the necessity for EBPs to enhance social, emotional, behavioral, and academic results. Legislators monitor the effectiveness of these programs and the implications of providing or withholding EBPs. The educational sector is filled with initiatives, mandates, training, and evaluations promoting the use of EBPs, yet many schools still struggle to offer the necessary programs and supports for student success. Concerns persist regarding the quality of programs employed, with many not being EBPs and failing to instigate meaningful improvement. Despite extensive educational support aimed at enhancing student outcomes, issues like rising rates of mental health problems, including depression and anxiety disorders, remain prevalent. While early intervention offers significant long-term advantages, many students including those excelling academically do not receive suitable services. EBPs may not align with the priorities of an education system focused heavily on standardized testing, which hinders the teaching of mental health skills. This study aims to explore the factors influencing the implementation of EBPs in schools, spotlighting two prominent models: Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports and the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [5, 6].

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a mixed-methods design to examine how secondary schools nationwide have effectively implemented evidence-based practices over the past decade. In Year 1, qualitative interviews were conducted with personnel from four diverse schools, while Years 2 and 3 featured focus groups with a broader sample of schools. The qualitative data informed a comprehensive conceptual framework, while quantitative data assessed changes in school performance related to these practices across three content areas. A national sample from large urban districts was analyzed for school context, the extent of evidence-based practices implemented, and student performance on standardized mathematics and reading assessments. Data covered a significant proportion of schools from Year 1 to Year 3. A nationally representative comparison sample also included analyses to address the clustering of schools within districts. The qualitative strand's guiding research question focuses on the strategies schools used to implement evidence-based practices for improving mathematics, reading, or both. To answer, data from 157 qualitative interviews and 21 focus groups across ten schools were utilized, incorporating perspectives from various school personnel. The school sampling frame was drawn from CBM networks in each district, employing maximum variation sampling to ensure diversity based on characteristics such as urban location, student demographics, and assessment performance in reading or mathematics [7, 8].

Implementation of Evidence-Based Practices

Evidence-based practice (EBP) dissemination, implementation, and effectiveness studies are increasingly common in education. Yet, educational psychologists (EPs) are not aware of review evidence that examines the link between EBP implementation and educational outcomes. This systematic review sought to explore whether the implementation of evidence-based intervention practices in schools is associated with pupil performance outcomes. The studies included were largely studies of randomised or quasi-randomised controlled trials with implementation indices generated from a variety of well-established frameworks. The most common pupil performance measures included academic or subject-specific assessments, while a third of studies used nationally standardised national assessments. A comprehensive list of implementation reporting standards for potentially modifiable dimensions was identified, with multiple univariate and a handful of multivariate regression analyses on the direct association between implementation and pupil outcomes used in the selected papers. Educational psychologists have a distinct knowledge and skills base combining a background in research with familiarity and experience of the environment that mainstream and targeted educational interventions are implemented in. Educational psychologists, as individuals or more usually as a community of practice, are well-positioned to investigate how practitioners in schools can effectively transport evidence-based interventions into school settings to ensure that children can access effective mental health and special

educational needs provision. Educational researchers have begun to explore school-based implementation effects for evidence-based interventions (EBIs). Quantitative reviews have focused on how variability across nine implementation dimensions influences intervention outcomes: fidelity, dosage, quality, participant responsiveness, program differentiation, monitoring of control conditions, program reach, and adaptation [9, 10].

Case Studies

The implementation of evidence-based practices (EBPs) in schools is essential for improving student performance, a task not easy for teachers, administrators, or school mental health professionals. This section outlines a case study of a consortium innovative partner district and state education agency working on a change effort to promote the wider use of mental health EBPs within the schools it serves. The study is based on the conceptual framework of collaborative systemic change between the research and practice communities, created by a group of dynamic innovators and coaches representing academia, foundations, a trained journalist, and state and local policy makers. The initiative for this work came from teacher and administrator requests for evidence-based practices that would help them satisfy the high-stakes academic test requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act. The theory of change emphasizes forming a coalition, creating a vision for change, conducting a staged self-assessment of readiness for change, and action planning. To create an environment in which this work could unfold, the team developed a multi-faceted strategy that included building a local network of support for the initiative, acknowledging and addressing existing capacity, sharing resources about effective practices, identifying and mobilizing local champions, creating an assessment toolkit for schools, building communication infrastructure, and creating a public awareness campaign. The case studies suggested several implications for applied school psychologists, especially those serving as consultants. These implications hold relevance for other professionals involved in direct interventions with families. Suggesting the possibility of successful use of case-study methodology, the cases highlight explicit protocols and interview questions that allow for examination of the use of scientific practices with families and educational agencies. Further research is strongly suggested because as an early stage application of case-study methodology, this work tried to deal with some difficulties concerning measurement of dependent variables, sample selection, spinning out naturally occurring processes, and preventing researcher bias from affecting the question and analysis [11, 12].

Impact on Student Performance

Evidence-Based Programs (EBPs) significantly enhance student performance through school improvement initiatives. This effect spans various contexts, demographics, and student characteristics. Schools engaged in these efforts often gain an advantage, easing their journey towards Effective Schoolware. Reports indicate better school attendance and behavioral engagement, with academic engagement influencing the latter. However, no link was found between student well-being, health, academic success, parental involvement, or school conditions. In low-implementing schools, student responses to inquiries on areas not directly tied to health promotion were notably poorer, affecting perceptions of academic performance, drug and alcohol activities, eating habits, and teacher-student interactions. Even elements of programs not focused on direct implementation may influence student attitudes and behaviors. School resources aimed at health education and mentorship for younger students correlated with positive responses. Enhanced interpersonal relationships among peers and increased staff support were benefits linked to adopting KidCare. Program structures impacting implementation, such as readiness, training, and recruitment, are believed to influence the overall learning and teaching environment [13, 14].

Impact on Teacher Performance

Three broad themes emerged from the qualitative data to improve teacher performance. First, emphasis on a positive work environment and school climate was frequently mentioned as a significant professional empowering factor, more so than student achievement outcomes. Research indicates strong correlations between school climate, principal leadership, shared decision making, and enhanced teacher efficacy. When teachers feel supported, their willingness to take risks and work with challenging students increases. Ongoing support through modeling specific evidence-based practices was also common. Second, current evidence-based practices or strategies for managing challenging behaviors were identified. These practices guide teachers in selecting effective strategies to improve student outcomes, with general behavior modification, Applied Behavior Analysis, and Functional Behavior Analysis being most frequently mentioned. Third, frameworks integrating evidence-based practices in behavior management strategies were discussed, notably Response to Intervention and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports. While teacher performance or value-added assessments showed poor

correlation with student achievement, administrator evaluation of these strategies positively correlated at scheme 3. However, these evaluation procedures contribute minimally to teacher learning and receive low support from teachers. Without this support, recommendations from analysts or policymakers may fail. Although teachers are the primary in-school factors influencing student achievement, there is little correlation between teacher performance and student outcomes within one year. Thus, the effectiveness of current evaluations in enhancing teaching practice and fostering professional development is questioned. The use of mixed definitions of evaluation and supervision and poorly defined practices may hinder improvements in teaching or student achievement without clear distinctions between the two processes [15, 16].

Barriers to Implementation

In recent decades, school systems worldwide have increasingly relied on evidence-based practices (EBPs) to reduce challenging behaviors and enhance social-emotional well-being, academic achievement, and general school functioning in children and adolescents. These approaches broadly comprise evidence-based programs (EBPs) or practices (EBPs or PEDs), effectiveness or efficacy studies, or research-based approaches. Many evidence-based mental-health programs (EBMHPs) have been developed and adapted for schools. However, schools welcome only a fraction of such programs, and many that are adopted are either poorly implemented or not sustained. While there is an increasing understanding of barriers and facilitators to the implementation of EBMHPs, it remains limited in the school context. Schools exhibit fundamental differences from the healthcare context where much of the available literature has emerged. This highlights the need for a more global approach to the implementation of EBMHPs in schools. Capacity, a facilitator examined in other settings, has received little attention in school literature. A more comprehensive understanding of the barriers and facilitators to the implementation of EBMHPs in schools would benefit from a school-centric perspective. Prior studies have primarily examined school-based mental health programs targeting high-risk youth populations or a specific diagnosis. Thus, there is a need for a more in-depth understanding of scale-up initiatives targeting universal population mental health prevention in school systems. The challenge of designing, testing the efficacy, and supporting local agencies to implement EBMHPs in a sustainable way is amplified in this context. Cultivating a sense of ownership and developing cooperative networks are key components of this process, which ultimately determines which programs are truly evidence informed [17, 18].

Policy Implications

Evidence-based practice in education has come a long way. The Education Sciences Reform Act called for the creation of the Institute of Education Sciences, which includes the What Works Clearinghouse, and moved the U.S. Secretary of Education's office into a research-based mode of operation. So-called comprehensive school reform programs are in place in hundreds of schools across the United States. Many states and districts are moving ahead quickly to implement the mandates of the No Child Left Behind legislation. However, there is still a long way to go before educational practitioners, including educators, administrators, and policy makers, regularly use valid, trustworthy information about educational programs in their decision-making processes. The stakes are enormous. Because the nation's schools have long been more than 1 billion dollars, large-scale state testing programs are in place in over half of the states, and an unprecedented program of federally mandated assessment and accountability is underway. Currently, all aspects of schooling that are deemed important, including dropout rates, SAT performance, and state test scores, are assigned labels describing performance relative to an arbitrary standard. The merit of schools can either rise rapidly or plummet, based on test results, to such an extent that school budget may be cut considerably in a matter of a few months. However, the tests underlying the accountability systems are usually under provided or rarely used for formative purposes. Instead, they are often used badly, as blunt instruments for accountability that write off schools before they have the opportunity to improve. As government, communities, businesses, and others search for answers to how to improve schools, they should take into account scientific research and evidence-based practices. They should look to see what evidence-based practices improve educational outcomes and understand the importance of these children becoming productive citizens as they grow older. School policies, no less than federal legislation such as NCLB and ESEA, should focus on practices proven to work, funded by public policy in well-regarded systems of care and support, and assessed through the appropriate use of valid and reliable measures of achievement beyond solely high-stakes testing [19, 20].

Future Directions

Future research should compare the effects of school-based evidence-based interventions on student outcomes, recognizing that a "one-size-fits-all" model fails to support systematically disengaged Red Zone children. Generic interventions can diminish the impact of evidence-based practices, underscoring

the need for tailored solutions. Understanding the effectiveness variations of these programs is vital for refining interventions. Additionally, evidence shows that different schools yield varying pupil outcomes, affecting Evidence-Based Practice (EBP). Investigating implementation fidelity under real-world conditions is essential, given the challenges faced by school-based EBPs. New curriculum measurement through classroom observations and educator surveys highlighted standards from literature. Findings link faithful execution of curricula to improved student learning, indicating the necessity for continued educator support amid insufficient EBP implementation measures. A common terminology and methodologies are critical to better correlate program fidelity with student outcomes, and adopting grade-level screening may aid excluded pupils. While schools' implementation challenges and factors affecting improvement are recognized, comprehensive empirical analyses are still lacking [21, 22].

CONCLUSION

The integration of evidence-based practices into educational settings is pivotal for advancing student learning, behavioral development, and teacher effectiveness. This study affirms that when EBPs are implemented with fidelity, they significantly enhance both academic performance and school climate. However, successful implementation depends on several interrelated factors: adequate training, systemic readiness, leadership support, stakeholder engagement, and alignment with educational priorities. The persistence of barriers such as capacity constraints, evaluation inconsistencies, and policy fragmentation suggests a need for a more cohesive and school-centered approach. Policymakers and educators must collaborate to embed EBPs within a robust framework of continuous assessment and professional support. Ultimately, the effective adoption of EBPs can transform educational environments, ensuring that schools fulfill their mission of nurturing all learners through practices that are both scientifically grounded and contextually relevant.

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