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Best Policies and Practices in Urban Educational Reform: A Summary of Empirical Analysis Focusing on Student Achievements and Equity

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Abstract :

Presentation of Research

This study involved the Urban Systemic Reform introduced in the United States. The authors looked more specifically at the Urban Systemic Initiative (USI) implemented in 1994 by the National Science Foundation (NSF) within the framework of this reform. The aim of this initiative was to boost the representation of ethnic minorities and their performance in mathematics and science.

This initiative was based on the six drivers of a model developed by the NSF:

- 1) The classroom driver: standards-based curriculum, instruction and assessment for mathematics and science;
- 2) The policy driver: policy support for high quality learning and teaching in mathematics and science, including professional development and student support;
- 3) The resource driver: convergence of resources (financial, intellectual, and material);
- 4) The stakeholder/community driver: support from parents, partnerships and leadership with broad-based support);
- 5) The attainment (achievement) driver: measures of effectiveness focused on student outcomes (mathematics and science);
- 6) The equity driver: achievement of all students in mathematics and science, including those historically underserved.

This study attempted to establish a causality link among the first four drivers (independent variables) and drivers 5 and 6 (dependent variables).

Methodology

Data were collected over a six-year period, i.e. from 1993-1994 to 1999-2000, in 21 high schools across the country.

Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected using the Key Indicator Data System (KIDS), teacher and focus group surveys, individual interviews and document analyses.

Quantitative data was particularly collected on students' mathematics and science scores and the enrolment statistics for these subjects. Qualitative data was collected on the implementation of this initiative, namely in terms of teacher qualification and equal access to quality instruction for all students.

Main Results

Assessment of how the USI was implemented focused more specifically on the following aspects: a) curriculum and instruction, b) policies on quality teaching in mathematics and sciences for all students, c) professional development, d) assessment measures, e) convergence of resources, f) leadership and g) partnership.

The main results of USI implementation regarding the achievement levels of students in mathematics and science were as follows:

- 1) Increased enrolment of students in these two subjects and in higher level courses than in 1993-1994 – Larger participant gains were observed in more mature USI cohorts;
- 2) Reduced enrolment disparities in mathematics and science between ethnic minority students and their peers in the majority group (enrolment increased since 1993-1994);

3) Better performance in mathematics and science of students in the USI program than in 1993-1994 – The achievement gap between minority groups and the majority group narrowed since 1993-1994;

4) More students wanting to pursue postsecondary education – This was indicated by a higher number of students taking college entrance exams.

In conclusion, there is a significant relationship between the implementation of this initiative and student outcomes. The main limitation of this study was the absence of a control group.

Key Words :

Educational Policies, Educational Practices, Reform, Ethnicity, Minorities, Mathematics, Science, National Science Foundation (NSF), Urban Systemic Initiatives (USI), Educational Inequalities, Longitudinal Study, Qualitative Analysis, Quantitative Analysis, Secondary/High School, Newsletter2

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