Barriers to Effective Curriculum Implementation

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ABSTRACT

Teachers are central to whether a curriculum is delivered consistently, effectively, and with efficacy to enable the support of student progress and growth. Understanding the barriers to complete implementation of a new curriculum could provide education administrators with tools to address teacher concerns and could provide vital training for successful implementation. To ensure that curricular innovations are implemented with fidelity, instructional practices should be aligned to the specific learning goals provided in the curriculum. Curricular implementation encompasses different components, including the delivery of the curriculum through resources and instructional practices. To implement curricula with fidelity, instructional practices must align with the curriculum as well as support the individual needs of the students. In addition, teacher preparedness for curriculum implementation plays a vital role.

Keywords: Curriculum, Fidelity, Phonics, Professional development, Curriculum changes

Both public and private schools continue to experience rapid and regular changes in their curricula. These changes require teachers to possess the skills and knowledge to implement curricula with fidelity. Adopting new curricula requires teachers to feel confident in the delivery and purpose of the materials they use in order to ensure accurate implementation. Identifying reasons that support or prevent teachers' effective implementation of a new curriculum may provide direction for helping them with curriculum changes. Teachers are central to whether a curriculum is delivered consistently, effectively, and with efficacy to enable the support of student progress and growth. Understanding the barriers to complete implementation of a new curriculum could provide education administrators with tools to address teacher concerns and could provide vital training for successful implementation.

Definition of the Problem

Teachers have cited the lack of fidelity in curricular implementation as a contributing factor to the students' unpreparedness for the next grade levels, because the curriculum is no longer vertically aligned. Vertical alignment has to do with similarities in instructional practices and the fidelity of curriculum use and implementation between previous and following grade levels. With teachers not faithfully implementing the curriculum, it is difficult to determine which objectives are taught before students enter the next grade. A need exists to understand the reasons that either support or prevent teachers' faithful implementation of a new curriculum.

To ensure that curricular innovations are implemented with fidelity, instructional practices should be aligned to the specific learning goals provided in the curriculum. Curricular implementation encompasses different components, including the delivery of the curriculum through resources and instructional practices. To implement curricula with fidelity, instructional practices must align with the curriculum as well as support the individual needs of the students. In addition, teacher preparedness for curriculum implementation plays a vital role.

Curricular Implementation

Curriculum implementation refers to how teachers deliver instruction and assessment through the use of specified resources provided in a curriculum. Curriculum designs generally provide instructional suggestions, scripts, lesson plans, and assessment options related to a set of objectives. Such designs focus on consistency to help teachers successfully implement and maintain the curricular structure in order to meet various objectives. Having curriculum alignment between the same grades and the preceding and following grades levels offers consistency in supporting learning objectives and expectations designed to promote student preparedness and growth. Understanding the beliefs and concerns of teachers can provide insights into whether curriculum implementation will meet with success or failure. The need for teacher understanding and efficacy when implementing a new curriculum is apparent, especially considering the impact of these factors on student learning. To ensure that curricular innovations are implemented with fidelity, instructional practices should be aligned to the specific learning goals provided in the curriculum. Curricular implementation encompasses different components, including the delivery of the curriculum through resources and instructional practices. To implement curricula with fidelity, instructional practices must align with the curriculum as well as support the individual needs of the students. In addition, teacher preparedness for curriculum implementation plays a vital role.

Curricular Alignment

Having curricular and instructional alignment between grade levels is necessary to support

student achievement and to meet learning objectives; in turn, alignment is supported when teachers choose to implement the curriculum with fidelity. Curriculum alignment has proven to be important for student success based on the values and needs expressed by students. The authors discovered that even though collaborative opportunities existed, skills for negotiating challenges or conflicts proved difficult for the participants. These findings provide two important points: (a) the concerns of teachers require evaluation before beginning collaborative co-teaching groups, and (b) this unpreparedness hinders alignment because of conflicting roles in student support. The need for self-reflection determines what aspects of a literacy curriculum (for example) align accordingly in order to prepare teachers with the tools necessary for preparing students. Causarano (2015) highlighted the need for alignment as well as increased understanding into the requirements for teachers to effectively implement curricula and align instructional practices. This result created questions about how to effectively measure these categories and whether or not instructional alignment between standards and delivery of the curriculum are connected to pedagogical quality. Because no evidence supports a connection, the question also arises about how to effectively measure alignment as it is connected to the role of the teacher.

Teacher Roles

The roles of teachers remain instrumental in the success or failure of a curriculum. In many cases, researchers have supported the need to thoroughly understand teachers' roles and concerns during the implementation of a new curriculum. The focus of training and professional development requires an emphasis on teaching how best to interpret the curriculum so that students' needs will be aligned with appropriate instructional practices. One way to support this situation includes allowing teachers primary involvement in curriculum development and the process of alignment as it pertains to knowing student needs, and then instructing accordingly. The authors found that understanding how teachers perceive their roles in curriculum development and implementation provides insight into teachers' concerns about implementing a new curriculum.

Curriculum Fidelity

When considering the roles that teachers take on in the execution of an innovation, it is necessary to fully understand teachers' concerns within specific areas of change. One of the leading roles of the teacher includes delivering a curriculum with fidelity, which means implementing the curriculum faithfully and keeping in step with its purpose and design. Some curricula remove the opportunities for decision-making in teacher instruction, which ignores or minimizes teachers' skills, strengths, and experience. Considering the vital role teachers play, determining what exactly has caused a lack of fidelity could help in determining if the curriculum itself is the problem. Teachers may be more effective if they are given the freedom

to adapt and modify a curriculum when warranted, yet the instructional support a given curriculum offers often supports student engagement within the specific curricular tasks the curriculum outlines. When a curriculum is implemented with fidelity, researchers can achieve accurate insights into whether the curriculum has met its intended objectives, which can then provide a better measure of student performance. Fidelity is multidimensional because a curriculum generally consists of many components necessary for full implementation; teachers often choose specific aspects of a curriculum to implement while disregarding others based on personal variables such as beliefs, concerns, or contradictions in philosophy Teachers who strayed from the curriculum claimed to have done so to meet the academic needs of their students. In this instance, fidelity to the reading curriculum created a lack of challenge and rigor for the more advanced students; this situation then created a learning plateau for those students.

Teacher Concerns

Teacher concerns play a part in the implementation of new curricula, because their concerns sometimes direct the choices teachers make when choosing to add or omit items from the curriculum. The emerging themes for potential barriers showed that:

1. some teachers adapted better than others for student-centered curricula,
2. teachers liked to have content available but were unable to finish the curriculum within a school year,
3. teachers required resources and tools to be successful,
4. teachers showed concern about collaboration and professional development opportunities, and
5. the implementation process helped teachers to refocus.

Administrative and Professional Support

Researchers have identified administrative and professional support as being necessary for teacher success and the implementation of new initiatives. Areas of support fall into different categories, but administrative influence, related administrative roles, and professional development opportunities are prioritized within the literature, thus supporting the need to highlight these areas for the successful implementation of a new curriculum. A principal's positive influence and support of teachers' intellectual growth stood out as key areas in support of teacher efficacy. Self-efficacy is important for principals to positively influence and encourage teachers while the teachers are experiencing changes that require action.

Recommendations

Some of the different ways to address the problem of the study could include conducting further research to determine how best to solve the site's problem of not knowing the teachers' concerns and fidelity issues related to the phonics program. A program evaluation could be another effective way to determine the effectiveness of the curriculum as well as teacher preparedness. Whereas professional development supports teachers' growth and learning, a program evaluation might determine if the program itself has effectively addressed objectives. Program evaluations require the collection of data on the program to identify the strengths, weaknesses, and overall effectiveness of a program. Teacher concerns were identified, but assessing whether or not the teachers had opted for or explored the curriculum prior to its adoption remains unclear.

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