ABSTRACT

Data Driven Decision Making in the Primary Schools of
Trinidad and Tobago: A Mixed Methods Study

Rhoda Mohammed

In keeping with education trends internationally, Trinidad and Tobago embarked on a data driven decision making (DDDM) plan. This plan encouraged the use of data from national and classroom assessments for site-based decisions focused on teaching and learning. This explanatory sequential mixed methods study sought to investigate six research questions related to the DDDM practices of primary school educators. A theoretical model of data use from the literature was used to guide data collection and analysis.

In the first phase of the study a survey designed by Kim Schildkamp was used to obtain statistical data on the purposes for which data were used and the constructs which were associated with data use. A factor analysis highlighted seven variables which were associated with data use and two main purposes for which data were used: (1) to set learning goals and (2) develop education plans for struggling students. A cluster and discriminant analysis revealed three distinct groups of schools based on variables at the individual and organizational levels. In the second phase data were collected from observations, interviews and a social network survey. The cases were selected from each of the three groups to examine the influence of contextual factors on data use. The three themes which emerged revealed that educators generally used data in legitimate ways but some unintended uses were also evident. Collaboration was found to be a critical facilitator of data use while individual beliefs limited practice.

The integrated findings from the two phases suggested that there was high quality data available within the system and educators were generally equipped with the skills and positive attitude to effectively engage in data use. However, a lack of structures which promoted collaborative behaviours and variability in leadership negatively impacted upon effective practice. These findings contribute to the field of data use by emphasizing the extent to which the policy context and interactions in small island states are associated with the practice of DDDM.

Keywords: Rhoda Mohammed; Data driven decision making; mixed methods; multi-site case study; social network analysis