PERSONALIZED LEARNING AND EDUCATORS’ PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENT AGENCY AND EMPOWERMENT: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract

This qualitative research study will focus on personalized learning as an instructional model and its influence on educators’ perceptions of student agency and empowerment in the school setting. The purpose of this study is to better understand the ways personalized learning takes place in schools and how this relates to student agency and student empowerment. This study will be conducted in an overall affluent school district that has a socioeconomically diverse student population that is known to support the concept of personalized learning for students. Participants will be drawn at random from educators in this district, who express an interest in participating in the study. The qualitative data collection will be based on semi-structured interviews, followed by a coding analysis of the transcribed interviews using open/axial coding strategies, which will be expanded for the development of theme creation. This will support an emergence of new knowledge and understanding between the concepts of personalized learning, student agency, and student empowerment.

Theoretical Framework

Personalized learning tailors the learning experience to the preferences, interests, and aspirations of the individual student. The instructional model creates a learning environment where students are enrolled and engaged (Murphy, 2016). “By intentionally building students’ personal competencies and learning habits, teachers contribute to the students’ ability to learn. The personal competencies are multifold, and they are enhanced most effectively when given focus in the curriculum, school culture, and instructional practices.” (Redding, 2014, p.5). When achieving mastery in instructional learning framework, students employ cognitive, metacognitive, motivational, and social/ emotional competencies to challenge themselves and persist until an identified goal is achieved.

Methodology

The primary focus of this qualitative study is to understand the ways in which personalized learning experiences in schools are provided to students and what educators believe these experiences bring to the students.

- Of particular interest is the way that personalized learning connects to student agency and empowerment. As such, case study design will be used to better understand how this phenomenon is addressed in one high school in the North East.

- While the case is the high school, a large range of voices and perspectives will be sought to increase the validity of this study.

Methodology: Participants

- Teachers (n = 7)
- Customized School District High School

Given the expectation of personalized learning in the Customized School District the ability to participate in the study requires that one be a teacher in the high school and volunteer to participate in the study.

Research Questions

To fully understand the ways in which personalized learning impacts student agency and empowerment, the following research questions will be utilized:

- In what ways is student agency implemented in schools?
- What are educators’ perceptions of the role and agency in supporting a personalized learning environment for students?
- In what ways does the implementation of a personalized learning environment support student agency?
- In what ways does the implementation of a personalized learning environment support student empowerment?

Research Design

The primary focus of this qualitative study is to understand the ways in which personalized learning experiences in schools are provided to students and what educators believe these experiences bring to the students. “We conduct qualitative research when we want to empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and examine the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants in a study.” (Creswell, 2013, p. 68). Of particular interest is the way that personalized learning connects to student agency and empowerment. As such, case study design will be used to better understand how this phenomenon is addressed in one high school in the North East. As Yin points out, case study is appropriate to learn about “a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.” (Yin, 2009, p. 18).

Limitations

A limitation of this study is that participants are all practicing certified educators at one high school in Connecticut.

- This study takes place during the Covid-19 Pandemic and participation may be limited
- That the study will take place virtually, as opposed to in-person could create some unforeseen limitations
- The nature of teaching during a time of collective trauma with the pandemic may alter the ways that teachers understand the topic under study.

Benefits of Research

The researcher will use the data to develop an emergence of new knowledge and understanding between the concepts of personalized learning, student agency, and student empowerment. The results of this study will help add to the literature and build further understanding of the impacts of personalized learning, student agency, and student empowerment.