Student and Teacher Perceptions of a Website for Choosing High School Classes

NDCPD
Minot State University Center of Excellence

Cathy M. Haarstad, MS., Evan D. Borisinkoff, PhD., Rhonda Weathers, MS., Minot State University, Minot, N.D.

Introduction

- Choice-making is an unforced selection of a preferred activity (Stancliff, 2000) and a component of decision-making (Wehmeyer, 2007.
- Student success in learning to make choices and decisions is reliant on opportunities (Wehmeyer et al., 2016).
- IDEA requires a transition plan for eligible students with disabilities to have a course of study to assist youth in reaching post-secondary goals.
- Unable to find any studies of student choice-making related to selecting courses.
- Limited opportunities for choice-making has been identified as a challenge within the service system (Werner, 2012).

Intervention

A website with simplified content (third-grade reading level), photos of class activities and bulleted lists of what students might learn (get information) and do (make sense of information) was created for the study.
http://pathfinder-nd.org/ddcouncil

Purpose of Study

To determine the perceptions of students and on using a website that presented information about potential high school classes in a simplified format

Research Design and Methods

The exploratory design used a descriptive qualitative approach where data were collected, analyzed and the results were examined:

- Demographic data collection
- Direct observations
- In-person interviews (oral)
- Written surveys
- Focus groups

Data Analysis Strategies

- Research questions were developed to match three over-arching constructs identified during a literature review.
- Data was reviewed, analyzed and organized under each construct using a constant comparison method.

Implications

- Students were provided with more information and choice-making options on the website than through traditional class selection methods.
- Parents, counselors and educators may unintentionally influence choice and decision-making for individuals who are able to make these decisions for themselves with the right support.
- Students were able to navigate the website without assistance after a brief tutorial.
- Recommendations to improve the site included using real photos, restructuring content by grade level, adding features to read content to students and adding all courses.
- Uniform course descriptions available at the state and federal level could expand access to this type of resource for many students if additional funding is available.
- Students with ID had no more difficulty in navigating the website than did students with other disabilities.

Research Participants

Study participants were 7 male and 8 female high school students with I/DD; six special education teachers and one guidance counselor in a rural central plains state.

Total # of Participants	15			
Male students	7			
Female students	8			
Ages	16	17	18	19	20
	1	4	5	4	1

Race & Ethnicity	Caucasian	Native	Hispanic
	14	0	1
	Black	Asian	Alaskan or Pacific
	0	0	0

Disability Label	SLD	OHI	ID
	4	5	3
	ASD		
	3		

Professionals	SpEd Teachers	Guidance Counselors
Total #	6	1
Mean Yrs. of Experience	15.6	20

Trustworthiness of Findings

- Conducted all interviews with joint researchers.
- Detailed examination of interview transcripts.
- Conclusions based on verbatim comments of students and teachers.
- Used assent protocols designed to protect students with I/DD.

Results

The results of this study seem to indicate that providing meaningful information (e.g. easy-to-read, easy-to-navigate content with visual supports in a familiar web-based format) is an important first step in engaging students in choosing classes.

Recommendations for Future Research

Robust use of the website by multiple students (> 100) at one time should be tested after recommended website modifications are made.

Parent perceptions on using the website for decision-making should be explored.

The impact of using the website on student participation in the IEP process and decision-making behavior should be further explored.

Limitations

Relatively small numbers of teachers and students participated.

Teachers were likely motivated and pre-disposed to being involved due to their interest in engaging students and parents.

References

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