

# Student Agency

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Student Agency

**Introduction:**

This study will examine student agency. Student agency is where students begin to take greater responsibility for their own learning. As part of the learning process, student agency gives students the opportunities to set their own goals, to communicate this intention with a plan of action and think about their achievements and challenges. This teaching style allows students to reflect, plan, act, assess, and revise in the process of learning and to contribute to their own learning. In addition, a student agency framework is to open student pathways and encourage student voice and choice in their education. Student agency is enabled by instructional environments that are competency-based and by using advanced technologies.

***Objectives of the study:***

To learn about student agency.

To support Saudi Arabian teachers to make learning more personal for their students.

To improve the student's involvement in their own learning.

***These aspects are important parts of student agency:***

- 21 century learning skills
- Productive learning, self-directed learning
- Engaged students
- Responsible communication
- College and career readiness
- Habits of mind: Pride, ownership, perseverance, collaboration, creativity and communication
- Team work, adaptability, changing action and attitudes based on new information and new circumstances

- Confidence, communication, sharing thoughts and feelings appropriately while listening and seeking to understand the thoughts and feeling of others
- Conflict management, perseverance, overcoming obstacles and setbacks to achieve goals, time management, planning and prioritizing task to get things done on time and as needed

***Problem:***

Saudi schools suffer from a teacher-centric instructional model of teaching. In Saudi it is the teacher who takes the responsibility for teaching and the students' learning. There is no responsibility taken by the students.

**The main question of the study is:**

**How can students take greater responsibility for their own learning now and in the future?**

***Study Questions:***

What is learner agency?

Why is learner agency important in student learning?

What does learner agency look like in the classroom?

What might the students be doing?

What might the teacher be doing?

**Methodology:**

- Literature review
- Survey
- ***Observations and school immersion***
- ***Visiting schools and interviews***

**Literature Review**

Internationally, assessment is characterized by formal examinations, national testing and comparison. Student and teacher views about quality learning is has not been considered. But, in the past 50 years there have been some changes. Educators are saying that we must link assessment and learning, so that we can assess and improve student learning. When assessment and learning are

considered together students understand themselves as learners. This helps them to construct new knowledge (Black et al, 2003). When there is student agency and assessment for learning students can make choices about their learning. It is through assessment for learning that students come to understand the learning context, the expected criteria and standards, and they have the opportunity to develop increasing agency over their own learning (Clarke, 2012; Smith et al, 2016). Even though we have studied that students should be at the center of their learning this does not always happen, although it is improving in Saudi Arabia.

Agency is understood as something that students do or achieve. Student agency allows for individual choice and control over their own learning. By giving students more choice and more control over learning this ultimately empowers them. They gain more responsibility over their learning, self-development and thus future life conditions. In many ways technology is seen to further enable student agency. Personal student efficacy for learning and self-development has expanded significantly with the Internet. The Internet provides vast opportunities for students “to control their own learning” unrestricted by time and space (Bandura, 2001). Blended learning is an enabler for high-quality learning experiences that allow a teacher to personalize learning and manage an optimized learning enterprise in the classroom. In blended learning environments, the technology optimizes the learning environment in a way that school leaders and instructors now know how and where to deploy their resources. In these “optimized environments,” instructional approaches to blended learning must take into account changing roles of educators. The research on blended learning describes the changing roles of educators as “facilitators of learning, monitors of progress and graduation coaches” (See Keane, Irvin, de la Varre, & Hannum, 2010; Pettyjohn, Kennedy, & LaFrance, 2012).

“Empowering students with voice and choice in their learning environments is an important step towards providing personalization. By creating personalized learning environments and pathways, schools become more flexible and adaptive in responding to the diverse needs and interests of students and thus more relevant in the lives of students. In competency-based models, learning is the constant and time is a variable. In personalized learning, each students’ needs and interests can be addressed through tailored instructional environments with some choice in the curriculum and approach to how they learn. We must expect every student to demonstrate the same high level of mastery, but allow

students to get there in different ways based on a student's own unique needs, goals and preferences. Personalized learning is not a trend — it is a process to leverage student voice and choice, which research ties to increased learning outcomes.” Dr. David Haglund, Assistant Superintendent, Instructional Support, Riverside Unified School District, cited in Biesta, 2008).

“Students who have agentic resources, such as well-developed dispositions of self-organization, self-regulation, self-reflection and proactivity, have greater student agency and success in their learning (Biesta, 2008).”

“Student agency is something that individual students or groups of students develop alone or when interacting with other people, materials and ideas within a particular socio-structural and relational context of action (Biesta, 2008).”

Teachers influence students' sense of what they want and can achieve. Students move, organize and evaluate their studies through multiple social relationships. There are three ways to practice student agency:

1. Personally
2. With another person
3. Collectively, students exercise when they cannot exercise influence or believe that others can do better (Bandura).

### **Results:**

When asked about importance of student agency the teachers answered as follows:

- The learner is able to focus on their needs and they develop the understanding of their own learning.
- Student engagement and interest increases when student feel that they've made decisions about their learning.
- Promotes students reflective thinking, forward thinking and planning, empowers students increases engagement. Students engage, so therefore take more on board.
- It is important because it involves you not only in the process of learning (i.e. how to learn). But, also makes you feel that you are the driver. It is

not someone else 'doing something to you' - you are finding the learning for yourself.

- It teaches them to be reflective about what they know and what they need to know. It teaches self-management skills. It allows for students to learn in ways that best suit them, whether it be the way they learn or the context that they are really interested in to learn through. Having choices increases engagement, but also puts the responsibility for getting the work done on them.
- Children have more of an interest in their learning as they are the ones driving it. New information learned has a better chance of being retained as opposed to information told by the teacher.
- It allows students to take ownership of their learning and to be more interested in their learning.
- It gives them a choice. They learn about making the right choices and responsibility.
- It teaches students to take responsibility and they start to understand that it's up to them to make things happen.
- It is important to increase motivation for students. If they feel they have a say then they take more ownership and are more accountable.
- Learners take responsibility and ownership. Rather than seeing teaching as something done to them, they see learning as something under their control
- A motivator to engage students in their learning. It helps them develop important life-skills such as initiative, time management and choice.
- It helps the learner to develop independence and to be able to reflect and monitor their own learning.
- Students are more likely to be successful if they take responsibility for their own learning.
- Student engagement is the most powerful way to promote learning. If the kids are engaged they will learn faster.

**When asked about learner agency looks like in the classroom, the teachers said:**

- They are active participants in their learning. They seek feedback from the teacher and their peers and they give it to others.
- Students may appear to be working on different things, in groups, collaborating or individually. Students are busy and focused.
- Students knowing goals and next steps and why, students responding to feedback, students engaged and active in learning journey.
- It looks like students being responsible for their actions, learning and time.
- Having a variety of choices visible around the classroom. Showing the students what good learning looks like with examples of what the teacher wants you to achieve around the room, and having examples of the learning demonstrating where the student is at to the teacher or others or in his book.
- Having clear expectations about outcomes - but providing choices about how this may be done. Rewriting about how we communicated in our production - students get to choose the aspect such as how props, or drama, or mime, or music, or lights, communicated message.
- Teacher is only a facilitator, children are driving their own inquiries. Giving children a choice in the activities they can do. Things like Daily 5 and Daily 3 suit this.
- Children engaged in their learning, researching, asking questions.
- Students collaborate with each other. They enjoy what they learn because they chose it. Students look at what they need to learn and help themselves.
- It is very different throughout the year levels. In my year 0-1 classroom it looks like students making their own choices. E.g. Multiple activity options, daily 5 options.
- Students choosing how they want to work. Daily 5 is a good example. Inquiry projects are another good example.



- Self-assessment opportunities, critical use of exemplars, peer assessment, making choices about contexts for learning, giving feedback to teachers on what helps them learn.

**Learner agency is evident in a variety of ways in the classroom. Examples include:**

- Teachers responding to student interest by planning topics with student input, students researching topics of their own choice and in a variety of ways, setting their own timetables for working, choosing where in the classroom they can work.
- Negotiated choice, independent choice, student led activities, teacher as support not running the lessons, workshops based on goals that children can join depending on their own needs.
- Learning intentions, success criteria, goal setting, self and peer assessment, following up on feedback, students making choice about what and how they learn. It is different for every learner.
- Choice, wide range of experiences to use. Students input before topics set and during planning.

**As for the role of the student in classroom the teachers said:**

- They seek opportunities to extend their learning by taking on challenges, completing quality work, thinking creatively, supporting others and working as a team. They could be working in any curriculum subject.
- Students will be working in groups or independently. There will be opportunities for workshops as students need them. Students are giving feedback and sharing their work to get feedback to improve what they're learning.
- A range of tasks - too numerous to name.
- They might be working independently or in groups; not always under teacher supervision.
- Assessing their own or others' work, looking at examples of work that demonstrate what the teacher wants you to learn, student choosing their

own activities and setting their own pace and checking in with the teacher from time to time, even in junior classrooms.

- They will be working on a similar context - but doing this in different ways, sharing their findings through dance with an explanation rather than a PowerPoint.
- Following their own personal inquiries, researching, working with buddies to achieve personal learning goals. Students are aware of individual learning goals and next steps to achieve them.
- Researching, producing a presentation, working in groups or alone.
- Asking questions, working together, making their own decisions
- Choosing the order that they do their literacy tasks. Completing an inquiry project. Organizing their one note. Choosing what math's activity they want to do. Writing and making props for their school productions.
- Using a writing exemplar to assess their own writing, listening to a peer present their work and giving feedback.
- Students will be working on a variety of work throughout the day, rather than all students doing the same thing at the same time.
- Joining workshops with a teacher based on a goal they need to learn, working in different spaces independently, not all working on the same activity
- Working through tasks independently. Giving and receiving feedback. Using exemplars or models. Making choices about the order in which they do things.
- Students are working in physical location that suits them, either using a device or paper depending on what they like, working with a group or solitary.
- Student knows what they need to progress to the next level and are choosing from range of activities. Giving input to next area of study. Researching topics that are of interest and therefore practicing certain skills needing to develop.

**When we asked the study sample about what might the teacher be doing?**

**The focus of the responses was:**

- The teacher would be actively listening, observing and giving instant feedback to the learners. They could be engaged in group work, doing explicit teaching and extending the thinking skills of their learners.
- Offering workshops, going group to group to check in and see where the students are at. The teacher will follow up and assess students according to their learning intention and work out ways to support student success in collaboration with the student.
- Roving, engaging with students, focusing student discussions of goals, coaching, modelling, giving and simple statement to set students back into path, planning, assessing and sharing this with students The teacher would be working with some of the students and trusting the rest to be learners.
- Conferencing with children, explaining what she expects from the students and showing them examples of good work, showing all the steps on the way of how to get there, giving the children some say over what they learn and how, and teaching small groups.
- Working with small groups, checking in on specific students, checking that the learning objectives are clear and the students are applying these in their learning, redirecting students to be more successful, filling in gaps (scaffolding) so that they are successful. Searching with students for resources to meet their needs, modelling outcomes, facilitating sharing of progress between students so they can learn from each other and be exposed to excellent work .
- Facilitating the learning, asking probing questions without giving them the answers. Be there for support when certain skills need to be learned by students in order to access new learning (workshops).
- Walking around helping groups, bringing the children together for direction.
- The teacher will be guiding the students with their choices and facilitating their learning.
- Letting the students take more control, observing and supporting.

- Facilitating discussions, activating learning opportunities, taking workshops for focused groups of students.
- Teaching students how to give feedback against standards, asking questions about what learners want to try next, checking in with students that they have decided on their next steps.
- Teacher is a facilitator - they might be working with a small group, conferencing with individuals, or roaming and checking in with independent workers. The teacher might be giving suggestions or helping clarify information.
- Supporting the learners, taking workshops, answering any questions, observations, conferencing with individual students.
- Sharing learning intentions, success criteria, instructional teaching, using modelling books, marking feedback, conferencing with students. Identify the must do and can dos for students.
- Talking one on one, taking a small group, helping solve problems, taking whole class, working with struggling learners.
- Conferencing, workshoping, tracking, quick touching base to ensure students are on track.

**Analysis and Suggestions for Saudi Arabia:**

- Create a culture of inquiry and creativity.
- Flexible pacing, students move through the curriculum at a pace that fits their individual abilities and allows for mastery of learning rather than a time bound learning schedule. Teacher works as a coach.
- Opportunities for community partnerships.
- Anywhere anytime learning using technology
- Emphasize relevance over engagement (student interests). Choice and voice: students express their learning styles and preferences as learner in the lesson.
- Setting targets and goals with students. Co-planning their learning. Students, parents and community are involved in planning and the setting goals.

- The teacher and student sets the learning pace and mastery level for each task.
- Facilitate ongoing feedback for teachers and students.
- The students needs and interests drive the curriculum rather than the curriculum driving the students.
- Rigor and relevance, real-world contexts and standards, adult mentorship.
- Allow for reflection and publishing.
- Learning opportunities include: Exhibitions, presentations, peer review and student led conferences, student projects.
- Students should be able to determine the overall goals of their education.
- Students should have the freedom to choose their schedule and work well to achieve their learning goals.

**Describe the implementation process of the initiative:**

How can we apply these ideas schools in Saudi Arabia?

We will start with teachers and schools who wish to volunteer and then we will extend this school wide.

- 1) We can share the definition of student agency with society, the parents, the teacher and the students. This is so that they believe in the idea of a student agency and we will implement it when there is awareness of its importance. There will be challenges and obstacles from the timetable, curriculum and learning environment that they will need to work through.
- 2) Establishing and Implementation:
  - Use of social media to raise awareness of this new capability.
  - Read and discuss the work of published educational articles and research.
  - Workshops for teachers and students and their families.
  - A gradual and flexible realization of the idea based on faith in its importance, whatever the obstacles.

### 3) Evaluation

Setting short-term goals based upon achieving student agency. Between and raise them gradually and gradually, until we reach 10% and 20% the percentage required.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Create a culture of inquiry and creativity
- Emphasize relevance over engagement (student interests).
- Target shared learning.
- Facilitate ongoing feedback.
- Allow for reflection and publishing.
- Students determine the goals of their education.
- Students have the freedom to choose their schedule and work well to do it.

#### **:sReference**

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#### **Applications and tools:**

- Diagram, tables, forms
- Survey monkey
- Snapchat