

Abstract

Many studies have emphasized the importance of the development of personal and interpersonal skills within the Education System, with the understanding that students will require tools for coping with future changes. Furthermore, studies acknowledge that students' physical learning environment affects their learning. However, school staff and academic environment designers repeatedly exclude students from the decision-making process. The main objective of this study was to examine the effect of a customized learning environment designing intervention program on students' development of creativity, self-efficacy, determination and perseverance. The participants in the study were 65 seventh-grade secondary-school students aged 12 to 14. The intervention study group consisted of 41 students, who were tested using quantitative and qualitative research tools. These students went through a learning process that included 4 sessions, where they learned various cognitive skills that they could implement in order to design and transform their physical learning environment. Following these four sessions, two more sessions were held, where the students themselves literally reshaped their physical learning environment. All participants answered identical questionnaires at the commencement and completion of the study. Twenty-seven students from the intervention study group also answered a semi-structured in-depth interview, for the qualitative part of the study. The results of the quantitative study indicated that the intervention program contributed to students' development of perseverance of effort but not to creativity aspects (originality, fluency and flexibility), self-efficacy and consistency. The findings of the qualitative study showed that the intervention program contributed to the students' emotional, creative, and social skills. Similarly, the results of the qualitative study support the hypothesis that full and authentic inclusion of students in the physical transformation of their and their classmates' personal learning environment, facilitates a significant process that leaves its mark on each and every participant. The results of the current study can serve as a basis for the development of a learning process for teaching personal and interpersonal skills. Based on the understanding that the full and authentic inclusion of students in the transformation of their learning environment enables them to undergo a significant learning process, a brand new and easy-to-implement program in the Education System could focus on combining the learning of cognitive skills with the physical activity of actually changing the learning environment.