

Elevating Education: Investigating High-Quality ILP Implementation in Nevada Schools

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Abstract: *This qualitative research study examined the implementation of high-quality Individualized Learning Plans (ILPs) in Nevada high schools. Data from participating schools were analyzed using content analysis to assess the ILP documents and implementation processes. Findings revealed a significant lack of quality ILP features, with schools struggling to meet established standards. Limited resources, including funding, personnel, and time, were key barriers to effective ILP implementation. Furthermore, the study highlighted the absence of culturally relevant experiences within the ILP process. The results underscored the need for standardized ILP frameworks, resource allocation, and the integration of equity-focused strategies to improve ILP quality. Policymakers, educators, and stakeholders can utilize these findings to enhance ILP implementation and support student success in college and career readiness.*

Keywords: Individual Learning Plans, ILP, College and Career Ready

Historically, significant events that impacted economic stability led to the reevaluation of education and labor policies at the federal and state levels, affecting educational resource allocation and the development of new strategies and initiatives. The need to create Individual Learning Plans (ILP) arose when educators and policymakers realized that students in the United States dropped out of school at an alarming rate, consistently scored low on tests, and lacked the basic skills to meet the requirements of a 21st-century workforce successfully (Kena et al., 2015). In response, educators and policymakers turned to ILPs to provide students with a customized and effective process of documenting their progress and aligning their goals (Phelps et al., 2011). More recently, the global pandemic and the aftermath of COVID-19 led to significant learning loss, increased educational inequality, and raised dropout rates (Moscoviz & Evans, 2022). Once again, preparing students for life beyond high school has become a significant challenge in education, driven by accelerated changes in the job market and the higher demand for skilled workers (Lund et al., 2021). ILPs are a promising strategy to address these challenges.

ILPs are defined as either a process that plans for student college and career success or a document that records and guides student progress toward college and career goals (Solberg et al., 2012, 2013, 2014, 2018; Britton & Spencer, 2020). The primary importance of an ILP is to act as (1) a motivational tool, (2) a planning and resource management device, (3) a way to connect courses to goals, and (4) a form of open communication. Specifically, ILPs provide an opportunity to keep students on track for graduation by offering a roadmap to help bridge the gap between their coursework and their college and career goals (Phelps et al., 2011; Solberg et al., 2012, 2013, 2014, 2018; Britton & Spencer, 2020). ILPs represent a dynamic, student-centric approach that positively impacts college and career readiness (Solberg et al., 2012). The ILP is designed as a written document that outlines postsecondary educational and career objectives and acts as a process that defines the necessary academic, personal, and social skills needed to achieve these goals (Solberg et al., 2018). This approach has seen widespread adoption across the United States, with 38 states implementing ILPs by 2014 and 21 states mandating their use for all middle and high school students (Solberg et al., 2014). ILPs have gathered extensive attention from educators and policymakers to deliver a personalized education that bridges the gap between students' goals and their level of preparedness for a college or career (Phelps et al., 2011). They were confident that a more personalized approach would increase institutional outcomes such as student retention and graduation, college and career readiness, and other variables that directly impacted a student's success (i.e., school, student, and family relationships) (Solberg et al., 2012).

Conley (2012) defined college and career readiness as students with the knowledge, skills, and abilities to succeed in postsecondary level credit-bearing courses and workforce training programs. According to educators and policymakers, the main objective of the ILP was to help students align courses with their college and career goals so they can draw meaningful connections between the classes they take throughout their academics and how those classes impact their future ambitions (Solberg et al., 2012). They accomplished these objectives through activities that promote self-discovery, career discovery, and career and planning management (Solberg et al., 2012, 2013, 2014, 2018). Self-Discovery is the foundational step that engages students in a comprehensive exploration of their interests, values, and goals to understand their strengths and weaknesses, as well as identify their aspirations for their future (Solberg et al., 2012). These insights would allow students to pair their academic and social prowess with future college majors and occupations. Career Discovery builds on the exploration and planning of self-discovery to allow students to uncover career paths that best align with their goals (Solberg et al., 2012). For example, if students discover that they are interested in how cars are made but do not quite understand what kind of career would allow them to make cars, they could read literature and watch shows about cars or find an afterschool car club to join. This exploration could lead a student to discover that they enjoy designing cars so that they would take graphic design, sketching, or engineering courses and, ultimately, a career in automotive engineering. Finally, Planning Management organizes the paths that were identified during Career Discovery and creates a comprehensive roadmap that helps students progress toward their goals with confidence.

Researchers have identified common elements to guide ILP implementation, such as collaboration, individual assessment, goal setting, and progress monitoring (Skaff et al., 2016). The specific elements may vary depending on the context and requirements of the ILP. Collaboration among and incorporation of students, parents, and school personnel have been highlighted as critical to ILP success (NCWD, 2014; Skaff et al., 2012; Solberg et al., 2012). However, not all ILPs include these activities, despite their positive impacts. ILP implementation also varies across states and districts. Some focus on student and school-level goals, while others

incorporate various assessment tools and regular reviews (NCWD, 2013). Differences may also include the use of portfolios to document student progress and the inclusion of specific college and career guidance (Williamson et al., 2013). Work-based learning opportunities and leadership team activities may be emphasized in some states but not in others (NCWD, 2013; Solberg et al., 2018). These diverse approaches create implementation challenges, particularly when attempting to replicate an ILP without customization (Hackmann et al., 2019).

Despite common elements, the lack of standardized procedures for ILP implementation leads to inconsistencies and hinders the ability to define a quality ILP. This leaves ILPs open to interpretation among educators and policymakers, negatively impacting students' college and career readiness. To ensure effective ILP implementation, it is essential to establish clear guidelines and provide support for personalization based on the unique needs of students, schools, and districts. By doing so, educational institutions can create meaningful quality ILPs that help students successfully navigate their educational journeys and become college and career ready.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The lack of standardized procedures for implementing ILPs leads to inconsistencies and difficulties in defining and implementing a high-quality ILP. The Fox (2014) and Solberg et al. (2018) frameworks promote a set of guidelines that benefits students by potentially enhancing their academic performance, improving decision-making skills, and building stronger teacher-student relationships. However, current frameworks run the risk of not being universally applicable nor integrating culturally relevant good practices (Fox, 2014; Solberg et al., 2018). To fill these gaps, this research study aims to build upon and add to the foundational work of Fox (2014) and Solberg et al. (2018) to understand the current implementation of ILPs, refine our comprehensive framework, and develop it to be a standardized checklist for evaluating quality ILP implementation. By integrating the critical elements from both frameworks and adding culturally relevant components, the new framework will include both personal and career development dimensions as well as equity and inclusion considerations. Furthermore, our study aimed to build upon the previous research conducted by Hackmann et al. (2019), which emphasized the importance of customizing ILPs to match the unique characteristics and makeup of individual schools. To explore these relationships further, we categorized the schools according to their geographic location, demographic composition, and socio-economic conditions. We hoped that these categorizations would enable us to capture a diverse range of contexts in which ILPs are implemented.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

RQ1: What do ILP documents and implementation processes look like across school districts in Nevada?

RQ2: Which school districts in Nevada promote high-quality ILPs?

RQ3: Which geographic characteristics of school districts affect the quality of ILP documents and implementation processes?

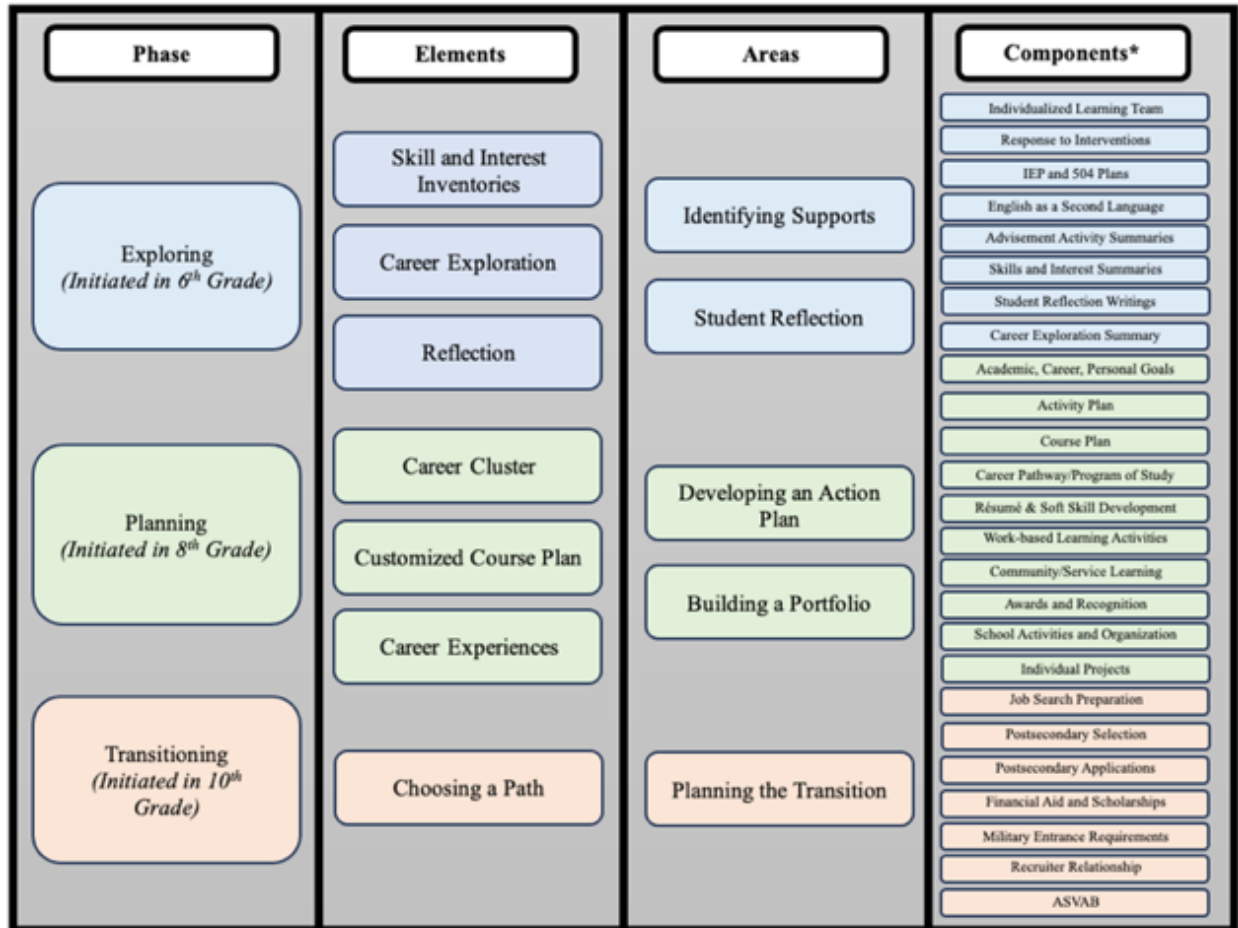
RQ4: How will culturally relevant experiences (CRE) be included in the ILP documents and implementation process?

LITERATURE REVIEW

CURRENT FRAMEWORKS OF QUALITY ILP IMPLEMENTATION

Figure 1

Individualized Learning Plans Phases, Elements, Areas, and Components



Note. Not every component listed is relevant to all students. Adapted from citation

Note. Content adapted from Fox (2014)

Currently, two frameworks attempt to guide quality ILP implementation. The first framework developed by Fox (2014) provides states and school districts with a comprehensive roadmap that outlines the necessary tools, templates, and resources for implementing an effective and high-quality ILP. They begin with introducing the key phases of exploring, planning, and transitioning, followed by key components such as identifying supports, time for student reflection, and building a portfolio that bolster the quality of the ILP. Fox (2014) also outlines commitment phases such as engagement, process implementation, and alignment to ensure a quality ILP. The researchers concluded with a myriad of templates and worksheets for each phase that can be used to ensure a quality approach to the ILP. In short, Fox (2014) promotes a systematic and structured approach using specific phases, areas, elements, and components that states and school districts could follow to implement a high-quality ILP process or focus their resources on enhancing the quality of their current ILP implementation (Fox, 2014).

Solberg et al. (2018) introduced guidelines aimed at promoting high-quality ILPs for elementary and secondary school students while emphasizing the need for ILPs to continue into postsecondary and non-school settings. Their framework builds on Fox (2014) and shifts the focus from process and components to the students themselves. The guidelines highlight the importance of aligning ILP resources and activities with individual students' self-exploration, career exploration, planning, and management processes. The guidelines also prioritize the student involvement and personal development with the ILP, making them an active participant in the process. They emphasize key questions such as "Who am I?", "What are my options?", and "How do I get there?" that represent the essential parts of their quality ILP. Furthermore, Solberg et al. (2018) provides examples of institutions that have successfully implemented high-quality ILPs and outlines their respective approaches. For example, Wisconsin employs an Academic and Career Planning (ACP) process that emphasizes student-driven engagement and integrates career development across the curriculum. Similarly, Arizona has developed an administrative toolkit for Education and Career Action Plans (ECAP), placing emphasis on fostering a cultural shift and securing buy-in from administrators. Nevertheless, these examples cannot be universally replicated as standardized protocols or procedures, which means each state, school, or school district must develop its own ILP framework, and thus, poses challenges due to potential resource limitations.

OUR FRAMEWORK THAT INCORPORATES CULTURALLY RELEVANT EXPERIENCES (CRE)

We created a framework based on Solberg et al.'s (2018) work, which identified four main categories: Self Exploration, Career Exploration, Planning, and the Individual Learning Plan (ILP) itself, and incorporated subsections introduced by Fox (2014) that outlined the specific elements required for a high-quality ILP. Additionally, we created components for the subcategories where applicable based on previous ILP research. For example, the self-exploration category encompasses the subcategory of reflection, which includes components such as knowledge, skill, ability, interest, personality, and career. Additionally, within the self-exploration category, the subcategory of supports comprises components such as advisor, family, students, and teachers.

Furthermore, we created a new category for Culturally Relevant Experience with subcategories of Classroom Interaction, Instruction, and Management (Talpade & Talpade, 2014). Culturally relevant experiences entail using cultural knowledge and perspectives that are meaningful to minority students, aiming to enhance the effectiveness and relevance of their learning (Garcia & Chun, 2016). These experiences involve incorporating strategies in classrooms that students can identify with, with a focus on fostering an inclusive environment for all students (Cammarota & Romero, 2009). For example, teachers could employ cultural awareness to inform their interaction, instruction, and management decisions, considering factors such as students' backgrounds, cultures, home lives, learning styles, and past experiences (Cholewa et al., 2012). This approach aims to create equal opportunities for success and learning for every student. By integrating these subcategories and components, we aimed to create a comprehensive framework that addresses the essential aspects of self-exploration, career exploration, planning, and the ILP itself, as identified in the relevant literature (see Figure 2).

Figure 2
Our Conceptual Framework.

ILP	Self-Exploration	Planning	Career Exploration
<u>Document</u>	<u>Reflection</u>	<u>Course Plan</u>	<u>Paths</u>
Official	Knowledge	Customized	Secondary
<u>Process</u>	Skills	<u>Establish Goals</u>	Career
Official	Ability	Specific	Military
<u>CRE</u>	Interest	Measurable	<u>Experiences</u>
Interaction	Personality	Attainable	Internship
Instruction	Career	Relevant	Apprenticeship
Management	<u>Supports</u>	Time-based	Work study
	Advisor	Feedback	
	Family	<u>Tools</u>	
	Students	Portfolio	
	Teachers	Electronic	
		Résumé	

Educational institutions that serve diverse communities must navigate a complex landscape of varying backgrounds, cultures, languages, and abilities. Neglecting to address equity and inclusion in educational research undermines the potential impact of the findings and overlooks the significance of creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment for all students. The quality ILP frameworks proposed by Fox (2014) and Solberg et al. (2018) failed to account for the student's and school district's culturally relevant characteristics that could significantly impact their experience with the ILP and its overall effectiveness. Challenges faced by schools with diverse student populations are often unique. The importance of infusing culture into pedagogy through meaningful and culturally relevant classroom experiences (i.e., instructions, interactions, and management) has been well-documented in previous research (Bondy et al., 2007; Brown, 2003; Cholewa et al., 2012; Weinstein et al., 2003) and linked to higher rates of academic achievement and engagement in the minority and underrepresented students (Cammarota & Romero, 2009; Foster et al., 2003, 2005; Hill, 2009; Pransky and Bailey, 2002; Savage et al., 2011).

METHOD

For this study, a conventional content analysis was used using qualitative deductive coding techniques with our conceptual framework. A conventional content analysis is a qualitative research method used to analyze textual data in order to identify patterns, themes, and meanings within the data (Berelson, 1952; Berg & Lune, 2001). It involves systematically categorizing and coding the content of the text to extract relevant information and draw conclusions (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Deductive coding techniques, on the other hand, involve the application of preexisting theories or predetermined categories to analyze the data. In deductive coding, a preconceived set of codes or categories are derived from existing theories, concepts, or prior research. These codes are then applied to the data to identify instances or examples that fit into these predefined categories (Azungah, 2018). The conventional content analysis provided a framework for organizing and interpreting the data, while the deductive coding techniques allowed for the application of preexisting categories to the data for analysis.

UNIT OF ANALYSIS

A total of seventy-six schools situated across 18 school districts in Nevada, representing a diverse range of geographic, demographic, and economic characteristics, were contacted for data collection in this study. Originally planned as in-person visits, the data collection had to be adapted to a virtual format due to the shutdowns, fluctuating waves of COVID-19, and overall social disruption between 2020 and 2022. The virtual contact involved a phone call to introduce the study, followed by an email requesting two things: (1) the ILP-like document they utilize and (2) a brief 10-minute conversation regarding the process. However, despite multiple attempts via phone and email, the responses were limited due to the impact of the pandemic, economic turmoil, and staff shortages.

The study focused on high schools within different districts and employed specific criteria for inclusion. These criteria included the consideration of geographic (Rural, City, Town), demographic (Low Minority Percentage, High Minority Percentage), and economic (Low Income, High Income) characteristics. While the primary emphasis was on geographic differences, demographic and economic data were also collected and utilized if deemed relevant. The categorization of geographic, demographic, and economic school characteristics in this study adhered to the definitions and terminology set forth by the US Department of Education, the Census Bureau, and The Common Core of Data (CCD). Geographically, a census-defined rural area was described as located 5-25 miles or more away from an urbanized area. A census-defined town referred to an area situated inside an urban cluster that was 10-35 miles or more distant from an urbanized area. Lastly, a census-defined city denoted an urbanized area with a population of 100,000-250,000 or more.

Demographically, the US Department of Education defined a minority as individuals belonging to American Indian, Alaskan Native, Black (not of Hispanic origin), Hispanic (including persons of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, and Central or South American origin), Pacific Islander, or other ethnic groups that were underrepresented in the school population. A high minority school was characterized as an institution of higher education where the enrollment of a single minority or a combination of minorities exceeded 50 percent of the total enrollment (Kena et al., 2015). Furthermore, the US Department of Education designated high-income higher education institutions as schools where 25% or less of students qualified for free or reduced-price lunches. Conversely, low-income higher education institutions were defined as schools where 50% or more of students qualified for free or reduced-price lunches.

CODING AND ANALYTICAL PROCEDURES

Our conceptual framework was used as the coding framework to analyze the ILP documents and implementation methods used by school districts in Nevada. This involved identifying themes and patterns, which were then categorized using steps outlined by Carley (1993). First, the level of analysis was determined to be the ILP and its various components within the context of the study. Second, the data was systematically coded using a predefined set of categories. Then, the concepts present in the content were coded to determine their inclusion in the coding framework. Each school received a code mark for each content item that aligned with the predefined categories in the framework. For instance, if a school had an ILP, it would receive a code mark. Similarly, if a school had an official ILP, it would also receive a code mark. This process enabled the identification and categorization of relevant content based on the coding framework.

Third, a logical categorization of concepts and themes was established to ensure consistent coding criteria. This categorization was based on the terminology and verbiage set by the frameworks developed by Fox (2014) and Solberg et al. (2018). For instance, within the ILP context, various supports were identified and categorized as Advisors, Family, Students, or Teachers. This approach provided clear and standardized criteria for categorizing concepts and themes. Then, the decision was made regarding the treatment of irrelevant information. Specifically, any information unrelated to the coding mechanism was excluded. Only the data that directly aligned with the coding framework and its corresponding categories were considered for inclusion. Next, it was decided to manually code the information from all data sources, reviewing the text and documents to apply the predetermined coding categories to the identified content. Finally, the results were analyzed to draw insights and conclusions from the coded data.

To evaluate the quality of a school's ILP, a straightforward 1-point scoring method was used to quantify the quality level. The maximum possible score was 33, with individual components being assigned as follows: 4 points for the ILP, 3 points for CRE, 10 points for Self-Exploration, 6 points for Career Exploration, and 10 points for Planning, with a higher score representing a higher level of ILP quality.

RESULTS/FINDINGS

According to the Department of Labor and Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) (Williamson et al., 2013). Nevada is one of the states that does not have a mandated ILP program, and the data collected supports this narrative. This explains the low participation rate of the study in addition to challenges due to covid. Of the 76 schools contacted, 12 responded, seven declined to participate, and five accepted to participate. Of the five accepted, only 4 shared their document and process, the fifth did not provide materials after numerous follow-ups. The responses from the seven schools that declined showed that schools were severely understaffed, coping with the pandemic, and not a good time to take on any requests. Therefore, the below results are based on schools A, B, C, and D that accepted to participate and provided materials.

RESEARCH QUESTION ONE

Interviews with principals and counselors of each educational institution revealed that although some schools use an ILP, they are not based on a standard or mandated framework. Most were created without a scientific foundation or framework and lacked the resources and considerations of a quality ILP.

RESEARCH QUESTION TWO

According to the conceptual coding framework, School A incorporated 13 out of 33 features of a quality Individualized Learning Plan (ILP). They had an ILP document, course plan, ILP advisor, provided explorative pathways for secondary school, careers, and the military, and used an online portal/folder system for tracking progress. However, they lacked a formal process and oversight for the ILP, as well as support from family members, students, and teachers. Culturally relevant experiences and reflections on various aspects were also absent, along with clear internship and resume-building opportunities. The lack of resources was attributed to “funding, personnel, time, faculty, and equipment constraints, not specific to the pandemic but exacerbated by it.”

Figure 3
School characteristics.

	School A	School B	School C	School D
Geographic	Town	Town	Rural	City
Demographic	Low Minority	Low Minority	Low Minority	High Minority
Economic	High Income	Low Income	High Income	Low Income
Quality ILP Score	13/33	4/33	0/33	0/33

In contrast, School B lacked a formal ILP process and an official or unofficial ILP document. It also lacked culturally relevant experiences, explorative pathways, internships, apprenticeships, and work-study opportunities. However, they had a course plan, an ILP advisor, and an online portal for tracking course plan completion. School B incorporated only 4 out of 33 ILP features. Similar to School A, resource constraints were cited as the reason for not implementing other features, with no specific association with the pandemic. “Our counselor and counseling appointments already support students with what they need.”

Schools C and D did not incorporate any of the 33 ILP features. They demonstrated a lack of understanding of ILPs, confusing them with IEPs. “We have an IEP in place, that’s what you’re talking about, right, with the ILP.” Both schools relied on counseling appointments and open hours for addressing student concerns. Overall, the findings highlight variations in ILP implementation across the schools, with resource constraints posing a significant challenge in incorporating essential ILP features.

RESEARCH QUESTION THREE:

School A was located in a town with a low minority demographic and a high-income socio-economic status. It had a quality ILP score of 13 out of 33. School B, was also situated in a town, had a similar low minority demographic but a low-income socio-economic status. It also had a lower ILP score of 4 out of 33 compared to School A. School C was located in a rural area with a low minority demographic and a high-income socio-economic status. However, it had the lowest ILP score of 0 out of 33 among the mentioned schools. School D was situated in a city and served a high minority demographic, with low-income socio-economic status. Like School C, it also had an ILP score of 0 out of 33. A closer analysis of the data did not show specific demographic, economic, or geographic characteristics of school districts that affected the quality of ILP documents and implementation processes since all four schools had poor quality ILP strategies in

place. However, this data does provide an understanding of the diversity of each school and the need for a core standard ILP that could be personalized to each school district.

Figure 4
High-quality ILP Features by School

	School A	School B	School C	School D
ILP				
Document	X			
Official				
<u>Process</u>				
Official				
<u>CRE</u>				
Interaction				
Instruction				
Management				
Self-Exploration				
<u>Reflection</u>				
Knowledge				
Skills				
Ability				
Interest				
Personality				
Career				
<u>Supports</u>				
Advisor	X	X		
Family				
Students				
Teachers				
Planning				
<u>Course Plan</u>				
Customized	X	X		
<u>Establish Goals</u>				
Specific	X			
Measurable	X			
Attainable	X			
Relevant	X			
Time-based	X			
Feedback				
<u>Tools</u>				
Portfolio	X	X		
Electronic	X	X		
Résumé				
Career Exploration				
<u>Paths</u>				
Secondary	X			
Career	X			
Military	X			
<u>Experiences</u>				
Internship				
Apprenticeship				
Work study				

RESEARCH QUESTION FOUR:

Culturally Relevant Experiences acknowledge and address students' diverse cultural backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives in the educational setting. A review of the Individual Learning Plan (ILP) process and interviews conducted with advisors/principals from each participating school revealed a lack of focus on CRE practices. Critical parts such as interactions, instructions, and management pertaining to CRE were not included or considered for inclusion in

the ILP document or the implementation process. One of the key reasons cited for the lack of attention to CRE practices was the lack of resources. Advisors and principals expressed that “they are already burdened with a substantial workload, leaving them with little time to integrate additional culturally relevant experiences into the ILP process.” Furthermore, the issue is compounded by insufficient resources, making it “challenging to cater to the unique cultural needs of each student.” Without adequate resources and support, educators find it difficult to implement meaningful CRE practices that would foster a more inclusive and equitable learning environment for all students. This lack of attention to CRE practices poses a significant gap in the overall effectiveness of the ILP framework and its ability to address comprehensive culturally relevant experiences for diverse student populations.

DISCUSSION

The introduction of ILPs in response to the growing demand for skilled workers and the need to prepare students for life beyond high school has been widely adopted across the United States (Lund et al., 2021; Solberg et al., 2012). ILPs aim to provide a customized and effective process for students to document their progress, align their goals, and become college and career ready. Conley (2012) defined college and career readiness as a student “...who qualifies for and succeeds in entry-level, credit-bearing college courses leading to a baccalaureate or certificate, or career pathway-oriented training programs without the need for remedial or developmental coursework”. The ILP process facilitates self-discovery, career exploration, and planning management, allowing students to understand their strengths, interests, and goals to make informed decisions about their educational and career paths.

This study aimed to discover the ILP implementation methods that schools used in the Nevada, a state that does not mandate the ILP. When a state does not mandate ILPs, it means that the state's education system does not legally require or enforce the use of ILPs for students. In such states, schools may still choose to use ILPs voluntarily or for certain student populations, but there is no statewide mandate for their universal implementation. On the other hand, in states that do mandate ILPs, schools are required to develop and implement ILPs for students as part of their educational support system. This means that all students must have an ILP created for them. Such mandates ensure that students receive the necessary individual attention and support to thrive academically. The key difference lies in the level of obligation placed on schools and educational institutions. In states without a mandate, the use of ILPs is often more discretionary and based on individual school policies or educator decisions. In contrast, states with a mandate have a formal requirement in place, making ILPs an integral part of the educational process.

Our findings reveal a significant lack of high-quality ILP features and highlight the difficulties schools encounter when striving to meet established standards. While ILPs have been implemented in various states, the lack of standardized procedures for implementation has resulted in inconsistencies and hindered the establishment of quality ILPs (Solberg et al., 2012, 2013, 2014, 2018). This study addresses the need to establish clear guidelines and support personalized approaches based on the unique needs of students, schools, and districts. The frameworks developed by Fox (2014) and Solberg et al. (2018) provide comprehensive roadmaps for ILP implementation, focusing on key phases, elements, and components. However, these frameworks may not be universally applicable and may require customization based on the specific context. To enhance the implementation of ILPs, this study investigated the incorporation of culturally relevant experiences into the ILP process. However, the findings indicated a notable absence of

these practices within the ILP document and implementation process. Culturally relevant experiences have shown positive impacts on academic achievement and engagement, particularly among minority and underrepresented students (Cammarota & Romero, 2009).

The study used a conventional content analysis method and qualitative deductive coding techniques to analyze ILP documents and implementation methods. Despite limited participation from schools in Nevada, the data analysis provided insights into the current state of ILP implementation. It is important to note that the low response rate may be attributed to the impact of the pandemic, economic challenges, and staff shortages experienced by schools during the data collection period. The findings for Research Question One indicated that while some schools in Nevada use ILPs, they lack a standardized framework and the necessary resources for quality ILP implementation. In fact, there is no universal state-guided framework for implementing ILPs at all. The responses from participating schools revealed that ILPs were created without a scientific foundation or framework, limiting their effectiveness. Limited resources, including funding, personnel, time, faculty, and equipment, were cited as significant challenges to ILP implementation, highlighting the need for adequate resource allocation.

ILPs were designed to create a tailored educational experience to meet the unique needs of each student (Solberg et al., 2012, 2013). They encompass a variety of activities, such as collaboration between students, educators, and sometimes parents; individual assessment of each student's needs and capabilities; goal setting to guide the learning process; and progress monitoring to evaluate and adjust the plan as needed (Herr, 2001; Skaff et al., 2016). Yet, as this study shows, the effectiveness and successful implementation of ILPs can significantly depend on the availability of sufficient resources in schools. Although past research has cited that access and availability to resources have been the number one factor in delivering quality ILPs (Hulleman & Harackiewicz, 2009; Phelps et al., 2011), they may have underestimated the extent to which a lack of these resources could impact the quality of ILPs. Schools may lack the finances to hire enough qualified educators, invest in professional development for existing staff, or purchase necessary materials. They may also struggle with time constraints, as crafting and implementing effective ILPs can be a time-intensive process. So, while the theoretical benefits of ILPs are considerable, the practical reality of implementing them in resource-constrained environments can pose significant challenges, potentially hindering their effectiveness. Therefore, it's critical for researchers and policymakers to consider resource availability when evaluating the feasibility and effectiveness of ILPs in different educational settings.

Research Question Two explored the promotion of high-quality ILPs in participating schools. The results indicated variations in the incorporation of ILP components among the schools. While some schools had an ILP document, course plans, and ILP advisors, others lacked these elements. The absence of official ILP documents and culturally relevant experiences, such as interactions, instructions, and management, was notable. The lack of internship, apprenticeship, and work-study opportunities and limited focus on resume building were also identified as areas that were lacking. The overall quality of ILPs varied among the participating schools, with schools A and B incorporating a few features of quality ILPs, while schools C, and D had minimal to no quality ILP components. According to Hulleman and Harackiewicz (2009) and Phelps et al. (2011), the scarcity of resources has consistently been cited as a significant challenge in delivering effective ILPs. This study has discovered the same issues during the data collection process. In this case, the lack of resources manifested as limited time for ILP implementation, insufficient administrative support, inadequate partnerships with external organizations, and inadequate funding.

Research Question Three examined the impact of geographic characteristics on ILP quality. Our research aimed to investigate how school characteristics impact the quality of ILPs. However, our study did not find any specific connections between these characteristics and the quality of ILP documentation and implementation processes. While our study did not find specific associations between the school characteristics and the quality of ILP documentation and implementation processes, it is important to note that this does not mean such associations do not exist. In fact, factors such as low school participation in the study and overall poor quality of ILPs in schools that did participate could be contributing to this lack of connection. This further emphasizes the significance of developing a standardized ILP framework that can be customized to address the specific requirements of each school.

Research Question Four explored the inclusion and application of Culturally Relevant Experiences (CRE) in ILPs and their implementation processes. This question emerged from the recognition of the shifting diversity in the student population and the crucial need for schools to address this change within the planning and execution of ILPs. However, this study found a significant discrepancy between the need and the existing practices. None of the participating schools had incorporated CRE practices into their ILPs, demonstrating a major gap in utilizing culturally inclusive pedagogical strategies. Past studies (Bondy et al., 2007; Brown, 2003; Cholewa et al., 2012; Weinstein et al., 2003) have highlighted the importance of integrating culture into pedagogy through meaningful interactions, classroom instructions, and class management - all of which can be classified as culturally relevant experiences. The impact of such practices in educational settings is substantial, lending credibility to the argument that integrating CRE into ILPs is a crucial step forward. A lack of attention to cultural diversity within ILPs underscores a missed opportunity to cultivate a more equitable and inclusive educational environment. Cultural relevance in educational practices has been well-documented in previous research as instrumental in improving academic achievement, particularly among minority and underrepresented students (Cammarota & Romero, 2009; Foster et al., 2003, 2005; Hill, 2009; Pransky & Bailey, 2002; Savage et al., 2011). Recognizing students' cultural backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives is integral to fostering a learning environment where all students feel valued and engaged.

Overall, the findings of this study reinforce the need for standardized ILP frameworks, adequate resource allocation, and the integration of culturally relevant experiences to improve the quality of ILPs. The lack of standardized procedures, limited resources, and the absence of CRE practices pose challenges to effective ILP implementation. Policymakers, educators, and stakeholders can utilize the insights from this study to enhance ILP implementation and support student success in college and career readiness. By establishing clear guidelines, allocating resources effectively, and incorporating equity-focused strategies, educational institutions can develop quality ILPs that cater to the diverse needs of students, foster their self-discovery and career exploration, and ultimately prepare them for success beyond high school.

LIMITATIONS

The present study had several limitations that should be taken into consideration. Firstly, the study encountered challenges regarding limited participation from schools in Nevada. This low participation rate could be attributed to various factors, such as the impact of the pandemic, economic difficulties, and staff shortages. Consequently, the small sample size of participating schools may limit the generalizability of the findings and restrict the representativeness of ILP implementation in Nevada as a whole. Secondly, the absence of standardized ILPs in schools

within Nevada created challenges when it came to analyzing the implementation of ILPs. The differences in ILP documents and processes made it difficult to understand the quality of ILPs, which negatively impacted the ability to compare and draw broad conclusions across various educational institutions.

Furthermore, resource limitations emerged as a significant barrier to effective ILP implementation. The study identified limited resources, including funding, personnel, time, faculty, and equipment, as significant factors influencing ILP quality in participating schools. The scarcity of resources may have affected the extent to which schools could fully implement the recommended ILP components, thereby potentially impacting the overall quality of ILPs. In addition, it is essential to note that the data collected for this study was obtained through self-reported ILP documents and information provided by school representatives. This reliance on self-reported data introduces the possibility of subjective interpretation and reporting bias in how ILPs were presented and described. The accuracy and consistency of the ILP documents and implementation processes reported by schools may vary, leading to potential limitations in the reliability of the data.

Moreover, due to the limited participation, the study's findings may provide only a partial understanding of ILP implementation in Nevada. Non-participating schools were not included in the study, and therefore, their experiences and practices were not captured. As a result, the findings should be interpreted within the context of the schools that participated, recognizing that they may not fully represent the entire ILP landscape in Nevada. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that this study focused solely on analyzing ILP documents and implementation processes at a specific point in time. Consequently, the study did not include a comprehensive assessment of the long-term impact of ILPs on student outcomes, college and career readiness, and academic achievement. Future research employing longitudinal studies to track student progress and outcomes over time would be necessary to provide a more thorough evaluation of ILP effectiveness. Lastly, the generalizability of the study's findings beyond Nevada may be limited. The specific characteristics, policies, and educational landscape of Nevada may influence ILP implementation and outcomes differently than in other states or countries. Therefore, caution should be exercised when attempting to apply these findings to other educational settings, as contextual differences may exist.

Despite these limitations, this study offers valuable insights into the current state of ILP implementation in Nevada schools. The findings highlight the need for standardized frameworks, resource allocation, and the integration of culturally relevant experiences to enhance ILP quality and support student success. Further research with larger sample sizes and broader geographical representation would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of quality ILP implementation and its impact on students' college and career readiness.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study discussed the various aspects of ILP implementation and improvement, which opened up several avenues for future research in this field. In order to further enhance our understanding of ILPs and their impact on student outcomes, several potential areas of investigation can be pursued. Firstly, conducting longitudinal studies would provide valuable insights into the long-term effectiveness of ILPs in promoting college and career readiness. By tracking the impact of ILPs and their components over an extended period, researchers can examine how these programs contribute to student retention, graduation rates, postsecondary

enrollment, and career success. Such studies would offer a comprehensive understanding of the sustained benefits and potential limitations of ILPs. Moreover, comparative analysis across different states or regions can identify best practices and variations in ILP implementation. Comparing the outcomes and experiences of students in schools with well-implemented ILPs to those with limited implementation would help identify factors contributing to successful ILP programs. Likewise, to ensure equity and inclusion, further research is necessary to explore how ILPs can be tailored to address the specific needs of diverse student populations. Investigating the impact of culturally relevant experiences and inclusive practices within ILPs can help ensure equitable access and outcomes for students from marginalized backgrounds, English language learners, students with disabilities, and those from low-income communities. This research would contribute to designing ILPs that meet the unique needs of all students. These analyses would be instrumental in informing policymakers and educators about effective strategies for implementing ILPs.

Building on this study, comprehensive assessment and evaluation frameworks are crucial to measure the quality and effectiveness of ILPs. Research should focus on identifying appropriate metrics, indicators, and tools to assess ILP implementation and outcomes. By utilizing data-driven decision-making and continuous improvement based on rigorous evaluation, educators and policymakers can make informed choices to enhance the effectiveness of the ILP. Furthermore, exploring the role of policy in ILP implementation and its impact on schools, educators, and students is another vital area for investigation. Research can delve into the influence of state-level policies and funding allocations on the adoption, quality, and sustainability of ILPs. Understanding policy barriers and facilitators will inform recommendations for policy enhancements, thereby supporting successful ILP implementation. Other areas for future research could focus on the training and professional development needs of educators and counselors involved in ILP implementation. Equipping educators with the necessary skills allows for the implementation of quality ILPs, ultimately benefiting students. Additionally, incorporating student perspectives through qualitative studies is essential to gain a comprehensive understanding of ILPs. By exploring students' perceptions, engagement, and experiences with ILPs, valuable insights can be gained regarding program effectiveness, impact on student motivation and goal attainment, and ways to improve relevance.

By addressing all these areas, educational institutions, policymakers, and stakeholders can gain a deeper understanding of ILP implementation and make informed decisions to support student success in college and career readiness. Continued research in these areas will contribute to the ongoing improvement and refinement of ILPs, ultimately benefiting students and their future endeavors. The possibilities for future research are vast, and each study adds to our knowledge base, paving the way for continued progress in supporting student success.

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APPENDIX

Explanation of Categories for Universal Interpretation of High-Quality ILP Components

Individual Learning Plan (ILP)

- **Document:** The Individual Learning Plan is a personalized document that outlines the learning and development goals for an individual, typically a student. It serves as a roadmap to guide their educational journey and personal growth. The ILP document should be detailed and customized based on the individual's needs, interests, strengths, and weaknesses.
 - Official:** An "ILP Document Official" refers to an authorized and approved version of the Individual Learning Plan. It might be a finalized version that has been reviewed and endorsed by relevant educational or administrative authorities.
- **Process:** The "ILP Process" refers to the systematic steps or procedures followed to create, implement, and review the Individual Learning Plan. It involves gathering information about the individual, setting goals, identifying necessary resources and supports, and periodically evaluating progress.
 - Official:** An "ILP Process Official" indicates that the ILP process is conducted according to established guidelines and standards set by educational institutions, organizations, or governing bodies.
- **Culturally Relevant Experiences (CRE):** “Culturally Relevant Experience” refers to opportunities and activities that immerse individuals in diverse cultural contexts, fostering an understanding and appreciation of different cultural perspectives. These experiences are designed to promote cross-cultural interactions and sensitivity, contributing to the individual's overall personal growth and global awareness.
 - Interaction:** "Culturally Relevant Interaction" pertains to the way individuals from different cultures engage and communicate with each other in a manner that is respectful, inclusive, and sensitive to cultural differences.
 - Instruction:** "Culturally Relevant Instruction" refers to teaching approaches and methods that consider students' cultural backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives, aiming to make the learning process more relatable and meaningful to the learners.
 - Management:** "Culturally Relevant Management" involves creating an inclusive and culturally sensitive learning environment where all students feel valued, respected, and supported. It includes classroom management strategies that consider the diverse cultural backgrounds of the students.

Self-Exploration

- **Reflection:** "Reflection" refers to the process of introspection and understanding one's own thoughts, feelings, values, strengths, weaknesses, and personal preferences.
 - Knowledge:** In the context of an ILP, "Knowledge" refers to the understanding and awareness of various subjects, concepts, or skills that an individual has or aims to acquire or develop.
 - Skills:** "Skills" refer to the practical abilities and competencies that an individual has or seeks to gain or improve upon.
 - Ability:** "Ability" refers to the natural or acquired capacity to perform certain tasks or activities effectively.
 - Interest:** "Interest" indicates the areas or subjects that captivate an individual's curiosity or passion and which they desire to explore or engage with further.
 - Personality:** "Personality" encompasses an individual's characteristic patterns of behavior, emotions, and thoughts that influence how they interact with others and experience the world.
 - Career:** In the context of an ILP, "Career" refers to an individual's chosen occupation, profession, or vocation, as well as the path they plan to pursue to achieve their professional goals.
- **Supports:** "Supports" are the resources, individuals, or entities that provide assistance and guidance to the individual throughout their ILP journey.
 - Advisor:** "Advisor" refers to a mentor, counselor, or guide who offers personalized support and advice to the individual, particularly concerning their ILP and career choices.
 - Family:** "Family" includes the immediate or extended family members who play a role in supporting and influencing the individual's ILP decisions.
 - Students:** "Students" signifies peers or fellow learners who may collaborate, learn, or share experiences with the individual.
 - Teachers:** "Teachers" represent the educators or instructors who facilitate the learning process and play a significant role in shaping the individual's ILP.

Planning

- **Course Plan:** "Course Plan" is a strategic approach designed to achieve the goals outlined in the Individual Learning Plan (ILP). It involves setting targets and defining the necessary steps to reach those targets and entails the selection of specific academic courses or learning modules that align with the individual's ILP objectives.
 - Customized:** "Course Plan Customized" indicates that the chosen academic courses have been tailored or adapted to meet the unique needs and preferences of the individual.
- **Establish Goals:** "Establish Goals" involves setting clear and measurable objectives that the individual aims to achieve within a specific timeframe.
 - Specific:** "Specific" means that the goals stated in the ILP are well-defined, clear, and detailed.
 - Measurable:** "Measurable" means that the progress toward achieving the ILP goals can be quantified or objectively evaluated.
 - Attainable:** "Attainable" signifies that the goals set in the ILP are realistic and achievable, considering the individual's abilities and available resources.

Relevant: "Relevant" means that the ILP goals are aligned with the individual's interests, aspirations, and overall development plan.

Time-Based: "Time-Based" indicates that the ILP goals are associated with a specific timeline or deadline for completion.

Feedback: "Feedback" refers to the information and constructive input provided to the individual to help them improve and make adjustments to their ILP.

- **Tools:** "Tools" are the resources, aids, or materials that support the individual in documenting, tracking, and organizing their ILP-related information.

Portfolio: "Portfolio" is a collection of evidence, such as samples of work, achievements, and accomplishments, that showcases the individual's progress and growth throughout their ILP journey.

Electronic: "Electronic" implies that the ILP-related materials, documents, or tools are in digital or electronic format.

Resume: "Resume" is a summary of an individual's education, work experience, skills, and accomplishments, often used for job applications and career-related purposes.

Career Exploration

- **Paths:** "Paths" involves the process of researching and investigating various routes or directions an individual can take to pursue career options and make informed decisions about future career paths.

Secondary: "Secondary Education" encompasses further academic pursuits, such as graduate school or post-secondary studies, that individuals may consider to enhance their knowledge and skills beyond their primary education.

Career: "Career" indicates an individual's chosen occupation or profession that aligns with their skills, interests, and long-term goals.

Military: "Military" pertains to career options and opportunities within the armed forces or defense services.

- **Experiences:** "Experiences" denote practical and real-world activities that an individual engages in to gain hands-on knowledge and skills, contributing to their personal and professional development.

Internship:

"Internship" is a temporary and supervised work experience, often provided by organizations, to provide practical exposure and training to individuals.

Apprenticeship:

"Apprenticeship" involves learning a trade or skill through a combination of on-the-job training and classroom instruction, usually under the guidance of a skilled mentor.

Work Study:

"Work Study" refers to a program that enables students to work part-time, typically on campus, to earn money while pursuing their education.