

Academic Goal Setting Practices of University Students in Lagos State, Nigeria: Implications for Counselling

Authors : Asikhia Olubusayo Aduke

Abstract : Students' inability to set data-based (specific, measurable, attainable, reliable, and time-bound) personal improvement goals threatens their academic success. Hence, the study aimed to investigate year-one students' academic goal-setting practices at Lagos State University of Education, Nigeria. Descriptive survey research was used in carrying out this study. The study population consisted of 3,101 year-one students of the University. A sample size of five hundred (501) participants was selected through a proportional and simple random sampling technique. The Formative Goal Setting Questionnaire (FGSQ) developed by Research Collaboration (2015) was adapted and used as an instrument for the study. Two main research questions were answered, while two null hypotheses were formulated and tested for the study. The study revealed higher data-based goals for all students than personal improvement goals. Nevertheless, data-based and personal improvement goal-setting for female students was higher than for male students. One sample test statistic and Anova used to analyse data for the two hypotheses also revealed that the mean difference between male and female year one students' data-based and personal improvement goal-setting formation was statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). This means year one students' data-based and personal improvement goals showed significant gender differences. Based on the findings of this study, it was recommended, among others, that therapeutic techniques that can help to change students' faulty thinking and challenge their lack of desire for personal improvement should be sought to treat students who have problems with setting high personal improvement goals. Counsellors also need to advocate continued research into how to increase the goal-setting ability of male students and should focus more on counselling male students' goal-setting ability. The main contributions of the study are higher institutions must prioritize early intervention in first-year students' academic goal setting. Researching gender differences in this practice reveals a crucial insight: male students often lag behind in setting meaningful goals, impacting their motivation and performance. Focusing on this demographic with data-driven personal improvement goals can be transformative. By promoting goal setting that is specific, measurable, and focused on self-growth (rather than competition), male students can unlock their full potential. Researchers and counselors play a vital role in detecting and supporting students with lower goal-setting tendencies. By prioritizing this intervention, we can empower all students to set ambitious, personalized goals that ignite their passion for learning and pave the way for academic success.

Keywords : academic goal setting, counselling, practice, university, year one students

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