

Applications Of Goal-Setting Theory On Students’ Take-Home Assignments Using Content Analysis Approach.

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ABSTRACT: *The Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and Social Media have kept most of the typical university students very busy, but not in aid to their academic exercises. Experiences in years of University teaching and observations showed that many of these students are unable to meet up with the stipulated time for take-home assignments. The attempt of this study is to use goal setting theory to develop a process by which an average University student will be equipped to complete and submit such assignments. The Directed Method of Content Analysis was adopted. It is a deductive process, which correlate theory with data. Qualitative codes were generated from selected articles using the Search Project dialogue box of ATLAS.ti, version 8. Themes such as learning orientation, performance orientation, goal-setting, learning, effectiveness, task complexity, feedback, action, motivation and result, were generated and grouped into five models. The c-coefficients for the five models were 0.002, 0.380, 0.006, 0.131 and 0.326, respectively, while their t-coefficients were 0.190, 0.710, 0.204, 0.289 and 0.204 for each model. The c- and t- coefficients of model 1 showed that combinations of learning orientation and performance were not strong. Model 2 revealed a very strong congruency between goal setting and performance. If the typical University student sets goals that are focused on a take-home assignment, this will direct energy on activities that will lead to the completion and submission of the assignments.*

KEY WORDS: *Goal-setting theory, performance, University students, Take-home assignments, Direct Method, Content Analysis, Deductive Process.*

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I. Introduction And Background Of The Study

This paper focuses on the exchange between Locke’s and Latham’s goal setting and the time of submitting a take-home assignment. The interpretation of Zainudin, Lee, Ng, Tan (2014:42), “the concept of Goal-Setting theory has been emphasized in educational fields to make enhancement on students’ performance in academics”. However, Turkay(2014) points out that “in spite of the benefits of goal setting, students may not be aware that goal setting can be an effective method for their learning” and evaluation. One of the evaluation processes at the University education is the take-home assignments. These assignments challenge the students’ ability to manage their own time among competing activities so as to turn in the assignments on the due date. As a result, experience has shown that only a few of the students succeed in submitting their take-home as at when due. The reasons for this calls to mind the paradigm shift of this century. The average University student of the twenty first century besides the take-home assignment, seem to have other factors competing for the academic time, such as friends, social media, films, football games, fashion, music, gist, the new and the starling. Depending on each student’s priority, take-home assignments may be considered as real disturbances, thus they may bring up the rear in the priority of what Ugboji (2017) refers to as the important or urgent. Take-home assignments may include, research papers, book/journal reviews, case studies, phenomenology, questions for review, reports of situational experiences etc. In some cases, it appears that the problem of the university students is that they do not plan their time in an efficient way, so as to achieve stated goals, such as take-home assignments in record time.

Interpreting from Yearata, Maitlisand and Briner (1995), goal setting is a mental arrangement of human needs, which may lead to required outcomes planned for and acted on. Further, Latham, and Locke (2007), looks at the goal-setting theory as a “...a positive linear relationship between a specific high goal and task performance”. In this research therefore, an attempt will be made to provide a platform to help the university students to complete their take-home assignments by setting goals and acting on them. Medlin and Green (2009) posit that in and of themselves, these goals mean little, without the attainment of higher performance. This

can be achieved by making the right choice, working on the goals with perseverance and ability, being committed to the set goals and developing a feedback process. Applying the assertion of the Academic Success Center (2017), such endeavor in a university environment will lead to higher success rates in specific courses and will increase the graduation number, or according to Van derHoek, Groeneveld and Kuipers (2016), it will increase the performance of the group, depending the conditions advanced by Shaiza and Giri (2016), that there are no conflicting goals and there is a commitment to achieve the goals.

This subject matter is an interesting, but technical one. Dealing with human choice, the achievement of this study, to have University students complete and submit their take-home assignments, will be attained through moral suasion that will elicit the cooperation of the students, such that they will take the right decisions to work on their assignment in a way that is based in consistency and resilience.

II. Goal-Setting In Education And Learning

In a laboratory experiment for telemarketing, Frink and Ferris (1998) found that university students who had set goals responded to tasks and activities with more diligence and accountability. This is so conclusive that Nebel, Schneider, and Schlediewski (2016), found that students with set-goals playing educational video games, had more fun than those who did not have any set goals. This explains that even in leisure and entertainment, goal-setting increases the participant's gains and experiences, according to Koda-Dallow and Hobbs (2005) even in the learning of foreign languages, where language mastery was promoted by the goal-setting aptitude in some students. This gives credibility to the analysis of Lunenburg (2011: 04) that "a person with a learning goal orientation wants to develop competence by mastering challenging situations", it will lead to higher performance. In the case of University students, they have paradoxical goals, they want to attain education, but they are also attracted to extracurricular aims and objectives. Thus, Cunha, Giustiniano, Rego, and Clegg (2017) advise that the student should be prepared for the tensions and contradictions created by conflicting goals-settings which will be difficult to be performed efficiently and effectively. In the view of Mogaji (n. d.), the basis for this is from the fact that the typical University student operates in complex multidimensional sphere, which affects their goal-settings, performance and learning curve. Thus, Locke and Latham (2006) mentioned the importance of goal choice and the functions of learning goals as new directions in goals-setting, to provide concentration and focus on what is relevant. The university student will be better off with such focus because, in the synthesis of CIPD (2016), the academic project is in the interest of the student.

III. Theoretical Framework

Motivational theories help to direct effort and performance toward outcome and reward. Chand (2017). In the academic setting, Nielsen (2015) points out that when motivation sets in, achievement increases in cases of goal setting, feedback process and real evidence of progress. This will according to Bonneville-Roussy and Evans (2015), increase students wellbeing, reduce anxiety and equip the student to a life of progressive career in any field of interest. In addition to theories of motivation is Performance Management, which aids firms to attain their goals and objectives and also estimate the firm's level of performance. Agarwal (2011), defends the emergence of Performance Management on account of the increasing dynamism of business functions. To further conceptualize the subject in 1965, Victor Vroom proposed the Expectancy Theory. He taught that behavior is motivated by the expected outcome from it. Bhattacharya (2015) further explains that "the motivation that influences individuals to behave in a particular manner over other forms of behavior is their expectancy", which Burgoon (2016:06) found "have persistent effects on interactions." This process produces three properties. Expectancy, instrumentality and valence are the three main properties of Expectancy Theory. Expectancy is derived from a person's belief that performance of a specific manner will surely lead to the desired goal. So, the attainment of the goal is encouragement to the performance, because according to Latham (2016), effort will focus on the relevant goals. The way a desired performance outcome is rewarded is referred to as instrumentality, which according to De Simone (2015) ranges from 0 – 1. When instrumentality is 0, it implies that there no relationship between performance and outcome. But when it is 1, it means that there is a high relationship between performance and outcome. The importance of the reward that an individual gets due to the performance engaged in is referred to as valence. Porfeli, Ferrari, and Nota (2012) show that Valence empowers a person's preference for a specific reward, because according to De Simone (2015), it relates to the individual's needs. In all, depending on an individual's expectation from a performance and the process of attaining that outcome, such an outcome may or may not be important to the individual. Thus, De Simone (2015) and Chand (2017) advise that expectancy, instrumentality and valence should be all together high for there to be a high motivational achievement.

Deriving from the above frame work, this study will be guided by the following model.

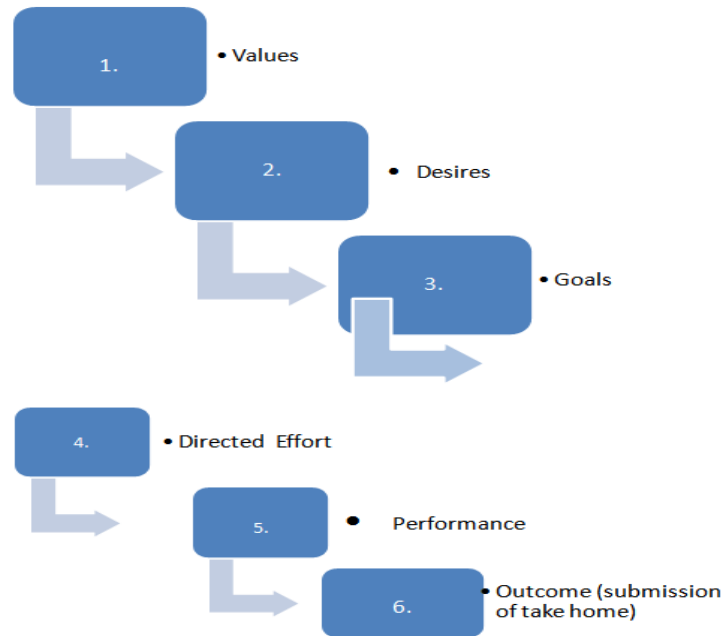


Figure 1. General Model of Goal-Setting Theory. (adapted from Zainudin, Lee, Ng, and Tan (2014).

The values of a University student will guide the setting of goals and the performance that may follow. If the value is positive and standardized, the desires of the student will be patterned in line with the values. Thus the set of goals that will be listed will reflect a value-based desire to attain a higher performance. If the student directs performance effort towards the set goals, the outcome will be attained. This model is very simplistic in theory, but very difficult in practice. This is because sometimes, there is no linear relationship running from the University student’s values to his or her outcomes of completing and submitting a take-home assignment. Some of the relationships are curvy-linear, while others are stochastic.

IV. Research Method

Data Collection and Analysis

Content analysis has three major approaches in its study. Hsieh and Shannon (2005) listed them as the Conventional, the Directed and the Summative. The Conventional content analysis starts with observation of a phenomenon. The data of the phenomenon are coded in the course of data analysis. The Direct type of content analysis is based on existing theory, which provides the codes. The codes are defined without and within the data analysis. Finally, the summative depends on keywords of empirical review of literature, which are identified before and during the analysis of data.

The Conventional method will not fit into this paper because the goal-setting theory has been researched into widely and there is an available theory. The summative method begins with description and quantifying of certain words, so as to explain their contextual usage. The quantification of the words is to understand how consistent and regular their usages are. The Directed method which has been adopted for this study is a deductive process (Armbrorst (2017), which seeks to match theory with data. Hsieh and Shannon (2005:1281) explain that “the goal of a directed approach to content analysis is to validate or extend conceptually a...theory”. It has the requirement of an existing theory and there are also available empirical works that have been concluded in the area of education and learning.

The existing basis for this work is the goal-setting theory, on which the coding was based to collate secondary text data from ten empirical articles. The codes were applied directly into the data, which Armbrorst (2017), refers to as thematic coding, from which the data will be analyzed. Due to relevance to study area, the following themes were identified, by using the ‘Search Project’ dialogue box of ATLAS.ti 8.0 program, with their number of occurrences in bracket: performance (638), achievement (31), commitment (40), feedback (67), challenge (17), complexity (80), task (175), task complexity (10), purpose (23), action (175), result (105), assessment (12), satisfaction (26), positive (97), profit (04), encouragement (0), clarity (01), supervision (0), motivation (123), goal-setting (1787), quality (15), learning (84), education (20), learning orientation (31), performance orientation (48), student (22), assignment (04), effectiveness (62), and goal difficulty (274). These terms are relevant in the study of university students and will aid them to meet up with deadlines on the submission of take-home assignments. To investigate the relationship between goal-setting theory and take-home assignment, inferential statistics will satisfy this quest, by providing the method for estimating the correlation coefficients to test the hypotheses of the identified relationships. Inferential statistics investigate

phenomena that are inherent in data. Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (2008:355), report that inferential statistics can be used “to determine whether an expected pattern designated by the theory and hypotheses is actually found in the observations.” To be able to calculate the correlation coefficient, the analytical process was decided based on the following:

- Internal homogeneity was established, to attain cohesive validity, thus themes such as learning orientation relate to performance orientation, goal-setting relate to effectiveness, task complexity relate to result etc.
- External heterogeneity was established with different units having discriminant validity. In this sense, learning orientation is different from task complexity, effectiveness is different from motivation etc. and
- There were code overlaps in which sparseness was possible as at when relevant. Here, overlap though scattered and necessary can be traced in homogeneity and heterogeneity situations.

In this effort, the investigation is to determine if the direct correlation between identified goals and performance (the action or process of performing a task) implied in goal-setting theory is true for university students in the submission (proxy for performance) of their take-home assignments. Thus the correlation analyses will be between the following data: learning orientation, goal-setting, learning, effectiveness, task complexity, feedback, action, motivation and result.

The coded segments will be used to estimate the c-coefficients of the code co-occurrence, which are similar to the usual correlation coefficients of any data set. The c-coefficient is given by: $c = \frac{n_{12}}{(n_1+n_2)-n_{12}}$, where n_1 = number of occurrence of code 1, n_2 = number of occurrence of code 2 and n_{12} = number of co-occurrence of code 1 and code 2. The c-coefficient has the first limitation of measuring high word frequencies with low coefficient and the second of being unstandardized, and at such, it is difficult to compare c-coefficient from different research analyses. To address these deficiencies, the theme-coefficient or t-coefficient will be estimated, using: $t = \frac{1}{2} \left(\frac{n_{12}}{n_1} + \frac{n_{12}}{n_2} \right)$. It shows that the extent of information or content of information or the content which two thematic units share. When the value of $t = 0$, it means that the text segments are mutually exclusive. The $t = 1$, means that the text segments are congruent with each other. The c-coefficient and the t-coefficient will aid us to establish a potential scheme that can lead to a meta-analysis.

V. Data Outlay And Estimation

The table that follows is a presentation of the text data, showing their number of occurrences in the bracket. The rows show that correlation intended in model 1- 5. The models here indicate the combination of the occurrences of code 1 and 2, including the co-occurrence of the themes. These have been identified by n_1, n_2 and n_{12} , respectively.

Table 1: Coded Data Collated from the Textual Descriptions of the Reviewed Articles, with their Frequencies in Bracket:

n_1	n_2	n_{12}	Comments
Learning orientation (31)	Goal Setting (1787)	Co-occurrence (12)	Model 1
Goal Setting (1787)	Performance (638)	Co-occurrence (676)	Model 2
Task Complexity (10)	Performance (638)	Co-occurrence (04)	Model 3
Feedback (67)	Action (175)	Co-occurrence (28)	Model 4
Motivation (123)	Result (105)	Co-occurrence (58)	Model 5

The estimation of the formula for c-coefficient and t-coefficient will lead to the derivation of the output table for the five models.

Table 2: Theme Relations Showing C-coefficients and T- coefficients of the Coded Contents for the Five Models:

Statistics	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
c-coefficients	0.002	0.380	0.006	0.131	0.326
t-coefficients	0.190	0.710	0.204	0.289	0.204

VI. Findings

The c-coefficient for model 1 is 0.002. This means that learning orientation and goal setting do not always combine. Learning orientation occurs 2% of its occurrences with goal setting. The t-coefficient of 19% shows that learning orientation and goal setting co-occur to that extent. Teo and Low (2016), emphasized that goals must be translated into strategies, so as to guide performance. Their c-coefficient of 0.380 implies that goal setting and performance often combine with each other and that 38% properties of goal setting can be found in performance. With the t-coefficient of the model 2, 71% congruency is possible between goal setting and performance. Hence, the two themes co-occur 71 times out of a 100 rounds of occurrences. When tasks are complex in the estimation, the sharing with performance is 0.006, which is 6% fusion between the two themes.

Therefore, the occurrence together of the themes is below 10%, thus, they are not similar. For the t-coefficient, there is a little overlap between the themes of 20.4% only, thus the co-occurrence between them is not complete. Feedback occurs on an index of 0.131 with the action theme. This implies that a 13% of Feedback can combine with Action. This percentage also defines their level of congruency. In model 5, motivation occurs 32.6% of its occurrences with the Result theme. Thus, if motivation occurs 100 times, 32.6 of them will involve the Result content. The t-coefficient of 0.204 shows that the two themes are not totally mutually exclusive, but rather overlap about a 5th of the times of the total occurrences.

VII. Synthesis Of The Findings

The following synthesis should be taken with the consideration of the limitations to this study. There are limited literature evidences in regards to goal setting and content analysis methodology. This is a limitation in the sense that this study does not have adequate examples to adapt from. However, the study provides a good example in the filling of a knowledge gap in this methodological approach. Further, the content analysis does not include the collection of data from University students. Rather, the study provides a tool kit with which every typical University student will be able to adapt a process that will enable the student to complete and submit take-home assignments as at when due. The qualitative data that were used in this study were not randomly derived. So it is possible to conveniently leave out an important article from the data source. However, the data that has been analyzed is enough to help any diligent University student to successfully set goals and perform on any take-home assignment. A University student who leans towards a learning orientation will tend to set more goals for himself or herself, such students according to CIPD (2016) will perform better in assigned tasks. Such students focus on improving the relevant skills and abilities, thus they perform better than other students in the preparation and submission of take-home assignments. This assertion is very correct particularly in consideration of co-occurrence of the two themes. With the engagement of learning orientation, then the setting of goals will typically lead to a higher performance. Goal setting will direct the effort of the University student towards the relevant activities that will aid in their achievement. This is because CIPD (2016), found that goals are directive and energizing, they lead to persistence and affect actions that increase the chances of success. The combination of goal setting and performance is beyond the one quarter range, with their congruency as high as more than half of a hundred percent. So a student who set goals will perform efficiently well in the submission of a take-home assignment. This is as a result of the high synergy between goal setting and performance in this study. Hence, Turkay (2014), suggests that teachers can help students to set goals, which will help their learning process. In the same light, Medlin and Green (2009), assert that goal setting affects optimism for the task in a positive way. Thus the performance of the goals according to Thompson, et al, (2007), will be easy and quick. This is because Wieland and Burnham (2016), posit that goal setting and self-control are directly correlated, which in the study of Khan (2014), increases curiosity and interest in the task and Ferris and Frink (1998) maintain that goal setting attracts accountability and responsibility to action and performances. On the other hand, assignments that are complex will attract higher performance. Complexity of take-home assignment will usually require high goal setting to perform them. This done, Redmond and Janicek (2016), claim that it will demand from the students their best efforts and energy in their performance of take-home assignments. Latham and Locke (2007), look at the student's best effort as a positive effect of goal setting on cognitive ability, particularly in cases of complex academic goals. Further, Lunenburg (2011) and Yearta, Maitlis and Briner (1995), agree that given the requisite skills and abilities, individuals who are assigned specific, difficult but attainable goals, perform better than those who undertake easy and nonspecific or no goals at all. The relevance of Feedback on the Action theme is that it encourages activity in the right direction. Feedback thus evaluates the process of performance and instructs on correct improvement towards a desired action which in our case is the submission of the take-home assignment. Feedback helps students to conduct their take-home assignments in an informed way, making useful decisions in the course of performance. Thus, without feedback, efforts and energy might be wasted without realizing the set goals. Zainudin, Lee, Ng and Tan (2014) and Redmond and Janicek (2016), conclude that students whose teachers give feedback on their assignments, develop better strategies and motivation, which improve their performance. Motivation will direct toward action and will lead to result. Turkay (2014), confirms that setting goals increases motivation and achievement. So in regards to take-home assignments, if a typical university student gets goal setting right, the student's performance will increase and the assignment will be submitted within the due date.

VIII. Conclusions And Recommendations

Goal setting has strong evidences in theoretical and practical applications in extant literature. Goal setting is relevant in all aspects of life. This effort is an application of the theory in the submission of University take-home assignments. This is significant because the typical university student has many other attractions that distract attention from the pursuit of a university education, of which the take-home assignment is a main part. Given some principles from goal setting, a desirous university student will be able to prepare and submit all

take-home assignments. This is a direct implication of the direct relationship between set goals and task performance. This correlation is possible based on the concept each student is operating from, which may or may not lead to an outcome. The methodology of the paper is based on Directed approach of content analysis. It was adopted based on the availability and the empirical application of the goal-setting. Out of the available literature, ten of them were coded to produce themes such as learning and performance orientation, goal setting, effectiveness, task complexity, feedback, action, motivation and result. These were used to construct five models and hence, to estimate c- and t- coefficients. The c-coefficients of model 2 and 5 are the highest of 0.38 and 0.32, respectively. At the level of t-coefficient, the model 2, 3, 4 and 5 are the highest. At the rate of 71%, goal setting and performance show the highest congruence. Hence, the university student's best strategy is to set goals on the completion of take-home assignments and to act on them. Other models, such as model 3 (task complexity), model 4 (feedback and Action), and model 5 (motivation and result) add up to this picture. So if the university student will combine these themes in the take-home assignments, and basing on the student's values, emotional stability, the set goals, and the latency of effort put into the performance, there will be an outcome, which in this study, is the submission of the take-home assignments.

IX. Recommendations

Take-home assignments are often assigned to a group of students in a class. This is done with the expectation that each of them will exert energy to perform the assignment. Such assignments are often without consideration of the different strengths and weaknesses of the each individual that make up the class group. This paper recognizes this situation. Thus, if students are learning oriented, they will tend to set more goals and thus be able to perform better in the completion and submission of take-homes. This is because, when students set goals, they will be guided to direct energy towards a specified objective, which will lead to higher performance.

At higher levels of University education, the take-home will get more complex. This requires a higher goal setting skill, which will lead to a coordinated performance process that will require a time-plan to complete the take-home assignments. Though goals setting and performance correlate directly, but the reality is that university students may set goals which will end up as notes and not action plans to be acted on. So the requirement here is that set goals should be scheduled into activities which will become action plans that will end up in efficient performance.

The take-home assignments that do not task the student will not motivate toward hard work. Thus, there will not be any appreciable progress. As a result, take-homes should be complex enough to motivate the University student towards action, so that goals can be set and the assignment will be completed. But if take-home assignment do not task the diligence of the university student, there will be no concentrated effort towards success, thus, there will be little or no result, because performance will be lacking. The tracking of the students' performance may sometimes require feedback using an electronic schedule from the teacher, so as to digitally evaluate progress until completion is attained.

Goals may be set, but achievement requires action that will yield a result. So that the over-arching suggestion that will guide energy at the level of task complexity and performance is planned execution of action. This will require a constant diligence and resilience until the set goals are achieved, the assignments completed and submitted.

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