

An Action Research Approach to Developing a Grounded Theory for Combating Subjective Alienation: Cultivating Internality and Student Agency through Strategic Goal Setting in the University Context

Zuwena Williams-Paul

*Uwi School Of Business & Applied Studies Ltd. (Uwi
Roytec), Trinidad And Tobago*

Abstract

This study employed a qualitative action research approach to explore the development of personal agency among Caribbean university students. Further to an in-depth, inductive analysis of data collected through interviews, observations, student journals, and self-reported goal-setting activities, key themes emerged: self-organisation, commitment, optimism, time management, and delayed gratification. This longitudinal, panel study involved an “intervention”, which was the teaching of internality/goal setting/personal agency to a sample of university students who were pre-tested on first entry to the university at the start of Semester 1 and found to be externals (having an external Locus of control – eLoC orientation and suffering subjective alienation) and post-tested at the end of the semester, after instruction, and were found to have significantly developed personal agency behaviours and exhibited internality characteristics. The content of the internality instruction comprised goal-setting and personal-agency strategies and was termed the SIMPLE strategy. This personal achievement strategy encompassed five key steps/actions, and, through rigorous analysis, valuable insights into the factors that contribute to the successful cultivation of personal agency and internality within a university setting were unearthed, and a theory grounded in action research strategies was developed. The findings demonstrated that the intervention program, designed to shift students' locus of control (LoC) from external to internal, thereby cultivating personal agency, was effective in fostering a shift from externality (eLoc) and subjective alienation to both a more internal locus of control (iLoC) and the development of effective SMART goal-setting behaviours among participating students. Furthermore, the grounded theory formulated through this action research endeavour provides a valuable framework



International Conference on Research in EDUCATION, TEACHING and LEARNING

for future interventions to cultivate personal agency, autonomy, and internality among university students.

Keywords: Action Research, Subjective Alienation, Personal Agency, Goal Setting, Caribbean University Students, Grounded Theory, Locus of Control, Student Support