

‘Becoming somebody in the future’: Exploring undergraduate Students’ Self-articulated Goals to develop a measure of Students’ Quality of Life in Port Harcourt, Nigeria

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Abstract

Quality of life (QoL) measures are useful in international development as they can be used to generate locally grounded and individualised understandings of people’s lives in contexts of social, economic and political uncertainty. Although the last decade has witnessed growth in research on urban youth goals and experiences in sub-Saharan Africa, studies which measure their QoL are surprisingly few despite suggestions from research in psychology that goal achievement contributes to QoL.

This thesis develops a contextually grounded measure of urban undergraduate students’ QoL, defined as the gap between important goals and satisfaction with achievement, in Port Harcourt, Nigeria. It draws on goals, satisfaction and weighted QoL (based on subtracting goal satisfaction from importance), which are operationalised using a goals-satisfaction framework. The study uses a mixed methods design with data collected through interviews, focus group discussions and a students’ QoL scale (SQOLS) instrument which taps into goals and satisfaction. The data was analysed using a partial grounded theory approach, and descriptive and inferential statistics.

The goals identified through the qualitative analysis were developed into four categories: becoming somebody, making it in life, having valuable relationships and having a voice. When operationalised as items, the goals were endorsed as important, while satisfaction with their achievement was lower. Principal components analysis found a three factor structure for goals. This factor structure had good fit in confirmatory factor analysis using both goals and QoL items. The QoL measure correlated negatively with a measure of life satisfaction, indicating that it captures the extent to which students’ lives fall short of their desired states.

The findings of the study suggest that items generated through qualitative work with educated urban youth can be used to develop a valid measure of their QoL while at the same time providing contextually grounded understandings of their lives.