

Empowering Middle School Students Through Digital Goal-Setting: An Action Research Plan

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As a middle school educator, I have seen firsthand how many students struggle with setting and achieving goals. They often lack the structure, motivation, or tools to follow through, which can negatively impact their academic performance and self-confidence. I created a digital goal-setting app to help students take ownership of their learning by setting clear, achievable goals and tracking their progress. This study is my way of exploring whether this tool can truly make a difference in student motivation, engagement, and academic success. I want to understand how technology can support students in becoming more intentional and reflective learners.

Fundamental Research Question

How does the use of a digital goal-setting app impact middle school students' motivation, engagement, and academic performance?

Summary of the Literature Review

The literature consistently supports the idea that goal-setting enhances student motivation and academic outcomes, especially when goals are specific, measurable, and student-driven.

Research also shows that digital tools can increase student engagement by providing immediate feedback and personalized learning experiences. Studies on self-regulated learning and growth mindset further reinforce the value of helping students reflect on their progress and adjust their strategies. However, there is limited research on how digital goal-setting tools specifically affect middle school students, which is why this study is both timely and necessary.

Study Information

Research Design

I am using a mixed-methods design for this study because I want to capture both the measurable outcomes and the personal experiences of students using the app. The quantitative component will include pre- and post-surveys on motivation, academic performance data, and app usage analytics. The qualitative component will involve student reflections, teacher interviews, and open-ended survey responses. This approach allows me to gather rich, meaningful data that tells the full story of how the app is being used and what impact it's having.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection will take place over a six-week period. In Week 1, I will administer a baseline motivation survey and collect academic performance data. Students will begin using the app in Week 2, setting weekly goals and tracking their progress. Throughout the study, I will collect app usage data and weekly reflections. In Week 6, I will re-administer the motivation survey and gather updated academic data. I will also conduct interviews with a sample of students and teachers. Quantitative data will be analyzed using descriptive statistics and comparison of pre- and post-intervention scores. Qualitative data will be coded for themes related to motivation, engagement, and goal-setting behavior. Appendix A: Student Goal-Setting and Motivation Survey and Appendix B: Weekly Student Reflection Prompt

Sharing and Communicating Results

I plan to share my results in multiple ways to reach a broad audience. First, I will write a summary report for my school leadership team and colleagues, highlighting key findings and

recommendations. I will also present the results at a district professional development session to encourage other educators to explore digital goal-setting. Additionally, I will dedicate an episode of my *Total Quality Teacher Podcast* to discussing the study, sharing student voices, and offering practical tips for implementation. These audiences were chosen because they're directly involved in supporting student learning and innovation in the classroom.

Final Reflection

Once the study is complete, I will take time to reflect on the entire research process—from the initial idea to the final analysis. I will consider what worked well, what challenges I faced, and how the findings can inform my teaching practice moving forward. I also want to reflect on how this experience has shaped my understanding of action research and its power to drive meaningful change in education. Most importantly, I will think about how I can continue to improve the app and expand its impact beyond my classroom.

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References

- Grenny, J., Patterson, K., Maxfield, D., McMillan, R., & Switzler, A. (2013). *Influencer: The new science of leading change* (2nd ed.). McGraw-Hill Education.
- McChesney, C., Covey, S., & Huling, J. (2012). *The 4 disciplines of execution: Achieving your wildly important goals*. Free Press.
- Mertler, C. A. (2019). *Action research: Improving schools and empowering educators* (6th ed.). SAGE Publications, Inc.

Appendices

Appendix A: Student Goal-Setting and Motivation Survey

Instructions: Please read each statement and circle the number that best describes how true it is for you.

Scale:

1 – Strongly Disagree

2 – Disagree

3 – Neutral

4 – Agree

5 – Strongly Agree

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
I understand how to set goals that are specific and achievable.					
I feel more motivated to complete my schoolwork when I set goals.					
The goal-setting app helps me stay focused on what I need to accomplish.					
I check my progress toward my goals regularly.					
I feel proud when I complete a goal I set for myself.					
Using the app makes goal-setting easier for me.					
I feel more in control of my learning when I use the app.					
I would recommend this app to other students.					

Appendix B: Weekly Student Reflection Prompt

Directions: At the end of each week, please respond to the following questions in 3–5 sentences.

1. What goal did you set this week?
2. Did you meet your goal? Why or why not?
3. What helped you stay on track?
4. What challenges did you face?
5. What will you do differently next week?