SELF-EFFICACY AND GOAL ORIENTATION AS PREDICTORS OF PERSISTENCE IN WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING AMONG BUSINESS EDUCATION STUDENTS

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Abstract
The rapidly evolving nature of the global labour market has intensified expectations for higher education institutions to adopt Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) to bridge academic learning and workplace practice to prepare students for successful career transitions. However, many students struggle to persist through the demands of WIL. This prompted this study to identify some psychological factors (self – efficacy and goal – orientation) that may predict persistence. Three research questions guided the study. The study adopted a correlational survey research design. The study was carried out in Anambra State, Nigeria. The population of the study comprised 300 level undergraduate Business Education students in public universities in Anambra State who have gone through Work-Integrated Learning. Census Survey sampling technique was adopted. A structured questionnaire of 19 items was used for the study. The instrument was adapted from existing psychological scales including the General Self-Efficacy Scale, the Goal Orientation Scale**,** and the Work Persistence Measurement Framework. The questionnaire was validated by three experts. The questionnaire was subjected to trial testing to determine the internal consistency of the instrument. An overall co-efficient value of 0.70 was established using Cronbach Alpha Method. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMCC) was used to answer research questions 1 to 2 while Multiple Regression Analysis was used to answer research question 3. Simple Linear and multiple regression were used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance to ascertain the extent to which self-efficacy and goal orientation jointly and independently predicted students' persistence in Work-Integrated Learning. Findings revealed that while self-efficacy and goal orientation are independently strong predictors of persistence, their combined effect is even more powerful. Based on the findings, it was recommended among others that business education departments in universities should implement pre-placement training programs that aim to boost students' self-efficacy through confidence-building exercises, simulations, and real-world case studies.
Keywords: Self-efficacy, Goal Orientation, Persistence, Work-Integrated Learning

Introduction

The rapidly evolving nature of the global labour market has intensified expectations for higher education institutions to produce graduates who possess not only technical knowledge but also the psychological and professional competencies necessary to succeed in increasingly dynamic workplaces. Advances in digital technologies, automation, globalization and changing

organization practices have transformed the competencies employers seek, placing greater emphasis on adaptability, resilience, self-directed learning, collaboration and problem-solving abilities (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development OECD), 2023; World Economic Forum (WEF), 2025). Consequently, universities are increasingly adopting pedagogical approaches that bridge academic learning and workplace practice to prepare students for successful career transitions.

One of such approach is Work-Integrated Learning (WIL), which intentionally combines academic learning with structured workplace experiences to enable students to apply theoretical knowledge in authentic professional environments (Billett, 2011). WIL encompasses internships, industrial attachment, teaching practice, cooperative education and practicum experiences that facilitate the acquisition of technical competence, professional identity and employability skills. Beyond enhancing occupational competence, WIL provides opportunities for students to develop communication, teamwork, critical thinking and decision-making skills while navigating the complexities of real organizational settings (Jackson, 2015). In Nigeria, Work-Integrated Learning is implemented primarily through the Students Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES), which aims to strengthen the practical competencies of students before graduation, bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, and also allowing students to develop skills and confidence (Omodero & Adetula, 2021).

Despite its recognized benefits, participation in WIL presents numerous academic, psychological, and organizational challenges. Students are often required to adapt to unfamiliar workplace cultures, perform complex tasks, interact with professionals, meet organizational expectations, and cope with performance pressures. These experiences demand more than disciplinary knowledge; they require sustained motivation, confidence and the ability to persevere in the face of difficulties. Consequently, students vary considerably in their ability to remain committed and engaged throughout workplace learning experiences. While some students actively seek learning opportunities and successfully complete challenging tasks, others become discouraged, withdraw from meaningful participation or demonstrate minimal engagement. Such differences suggest that psychological characteristics may play an important role in determining students' persistence during WIL.

Persistence in educational settings refers to students' sustained effort and commitment toward achieving learning goals despite obstacles, setbacks or difficulties encountered during the

learning process (Tinto, 2017). Within the context of WIL, persistence reflects students' willingness to continue participating actively in workplace activities, complete assigned responsibilities, seek feedback and overcome workplace challenges until learning objectives are achieved. Persistent students are more likely to acquire practical competencies, strengthen professional confidence, and improve their employability outcomes than students who disengage prematurely. Given the experiential nature of WIL, understanding the factors that foster persistence has become increasingly important for educators, employers and policymakers seeking to improve graduate preparedness for the labour market.

Among the psychological factors that may explain persistence, self-efficacy has received considerable scholarly attention. According to Bandura's (1997) Social Cognitive Theory, self-efficacy refers to individuals' beliefs in their capabilities to organize and execute the actions required to accomplish specific tasks. Individuals with high self-efficacy are generally more willing to undertake challenging activities, exert greater effort, recover from setbacks, and persist until desired outcomes are achieved. In higher education, self-efficacy has consistently been associated with academic engagement, self-regulated learning, resilience and academic achievement (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). During workplace learning, students who possess strong efficacy beliefs are expected to approach unfamiliar work tasks with confidence, demonstrate greater initiative, and remain committed despite initial challenges.

Another motivational construct that may influence students' persistence is goal orientation, which describes the reasons individuals pursue achievement-related activities. Achievement Goal Theory distinguishes between mastery goal orientation, characterized by a desire to develop competence and acquire new knowledge and performance goal orientation, which emphasizes demonstrating competence relative to others (Elliot & Murayama, 2008). Students with mastery-oriented goals are generally more likely to embrace challenging learning opportunities, utilize effective learning strategies and maintain effort following setbacks than those whose motivation is primarily performance-oriented. Since workplace learning environments frequently require continuous adaptation, independent learning and problem-solving, students' goal orientations may substantially influence how they respond to workplace challenges and sustenance of their academic engagement.

Although previous studies have established relationship between self-efficacy, goal orientation, academic engagement and educational achievement (Honicke & Broadbent, 2016; Schunk &

DiBenedetto, 2020), empirical evidence regarding their influence on persistence in Work-integrated Learning, particularly among business education students in developing countries, remains limited. Existing research has predominantly focused on classroom learning, academic performance, and general student motivation, with comparatively little attention devoted to psychological determinants of persistence during workplace learning experiences. Moreover, the contextual realities of Nigeria higher education and workplace environments including resource limitations, inconsistent workplace supervision and varying organizational support may shape students' motivational experiences differently from those reported in developed economies. These contextual differences highlight the need for context-specific evidence to guide curriculum improvement and student support interventions.

Business education students constitute a particularly relevant population for such investigation because their programmes emphasize the integration of theoretical instruction with practical workplace competence. Success in accounting, marketing, entrepreneurship, office technology and management and related disciplines depends substantially on students' ability to apply classroom knowledge effectively within organizational contexts. Identifying the psychological factors that promote persistence during WIL will therefore contribute to improving students; workplace readiness and employability while providing evidence for the design of interventions that strengthen students' confidence and achievement motivation before industrial attachment and internship placements.

Against this background, this study sought to examine self-efficacy and goal orientation as predictors of persistence in Work-Integrated Learning among business education students. Specifically, the study sought to determine whether students' beliefs in their capabilities and their achievement goal orientations significantly predict their persistence during workplace learning. The findings are expected to contribute to the literature on Work-Integrated Learning and educational psychology while providing practical implications for business educators, university administrators, workplace supervisors and policymakers seeking to enhance the effectiveness of workplace learning programmes.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the relationship between self-efficacy and students' persistence in Work-Integrated Learning among business education students in universities in Anambra State?

2. What is the relationship between goal orientation and students' persistence in Work-Integrated Learning among business education students in universities in Anambra State?
3. What is the relationship among self-efficacy, goal orientation and students' persistence in Work-Integrated Learning among business education students in universities in Anambra State?

Hypotheses

The following hypothesis were tested at 0.05 level of significance

1. Self-efficacy does not significantly predict students' persistence in Work-Integrated Learning.
2. Goal orientation does not significantly predict students' persistence in Work-Integrated Learning.
3. Self-efficacy and goal orientation do not significantly predict students' persistence in Work-Integrated Learning.

Methodology

The study adopted a correlational survey research design. The study was carried out in Anambra State, Nigeria. The population of the study comprised 300 level undergraduate Business Education students in public universities in Anambra State who have gone through Work-Integrated Learning. Public universities in the state known to offer Business Education programmes include Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka and Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam. Census Survey sampling technique was adopted, therefore the entire population was studied. A structured questionnaire of 19 items was used for the study. Items of the instrument were adapted from existing validated instruments such as the General Self-Efficacy Scale (Schwarzer& Jerusalem, 1995**)**, the Goal Orientation Scale (Elliot & McGregor, 2001)**,** and the Work Persistence Measurement Framework. The questionnaire was validated by three experts and was subjected to trial testing to determine the internal consistency of the instrument. An overall co-efficient value of 0.70 was obtained using Cronbach Alpha method. The data for the study were collected by the researchers with the help of two research assistants. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMCC) was used to answer research questions 1 to 2, which seek to determine the relationships between self-efficacy, goal orientation, and students' persistence in Work-Integrated Learning. Multiple Regression Analysis was used to

answer research question 3, which seeks to examine the extent to which self-efficacy and goal orientation jointly and independently predict students' persistence in Work-Integrated Learning.

Results of the Findings

Research Question One: What is the relationship between self-efficacy and students' persistence in Work-Integrated Learning?

Table 1: Pearson correlation coefficient between self-efficacy and students' persistence in Work-Integrated Learning

Source of variation	N	SE	P	Remark
Self -Efficacy	105	1.00	0.723	Positive high relationship
Persistence	105	0.723	1.00	

As shown in Table 1, Pearson's Co-efficient, r = 0.723. This is an indication that a positive high correlation exists between self-efficacy and business education students' persistence in Work-Integrated Learning.

Hypothesis 1: Self-efficacy does not significantly predict students' persistence in Work-Integrated Learning.

Table 2: Coefficients of Simple Linear Regression for Self-Efficacy Predicting Students' Persistence in Work-Integrated Learning

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			
	B	SEB	Beta(β)	T	P	Decision
Constant	.934	.322		2.896	.005	Reject H_O
Self-efficacy	.766	.072	.723	10.628	.000	

R^2= .523, Adjusted R^2= .518, F (1,103) = 112.95

Data presented in Table 2 show the estimates of the coefficient of the relationship between self-efficacy and students' persistence in Work-Integrated Learning. The results of hypothesis 1 show a statistically significant model summary: F (1,103) = 112.95, β=.723, t= 10.628. p<0.05. Also, it shows that self-efficacy was significantly and positively related to students' persistence in Work-

Integrated Learning within the study population. In all, self-efficacy are found to significantly predict students' persistence in Work-Integrated Learning. Hence, Hypothesis 1 was rejected.

Research Question Two: What is the relationship between goal orientation and students' persistence in Work-Integrated Learning?

Table 3: Pearson correlation coefficient between goal orientation and students' persistence in Work-Integrated Learning.

Source of variation	**N**	**GO**	**P**	**Remark**
Goal Orientation	105	1.00	.731	Positive high relationship
Persistence	105	.731	1.00	

As shown in Table 3, Pearson's Co-efficient, r = 0.731. This is an indication that a positive high correlation exists between goal orientation and students' persistence in Work-Integrated Learning.

Hypothesis 2: Goal orientation does not significantly predict students' persistence in Work-Integrated Learning.

Table 4: Coefficients of Simple Linear Regression for goal orientation predicting students' persistence in Work-Integrated Learning.

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			
	B	SEB	Beta(β)	T	P	Decision
Constant	1.389	.274		5.066	.000	Reject H_O
Goal Orientation	.698	.064	.731	10.858	.000	

R^2= .534, Adjusted R^2= .529, F (1, 103) = 117.89

Data presented in Table 4 show the estimates of the coefficient of relationship between goal orientation and students' persistence in Work-Integrated Learning. The results of hypothesis 2 show a statistically significant model summary: F (1,103) = 117.89, β=.731, t= 10.858, p<0.05. Also, it shows that goal orientation was significantly and positively related to students' persistence in Work-Integrated Learning within the study population. In all, goal orientation are

found to significantly predict students' persistence in Work-Integrated Learning. Hence, Hypothesis 2 was rejected.

Research Question Three: What is the relationship among self-efficacy, goal orientation and students' persistence in Work-Integrated Learning?

Table 5: Pearson correlation coefficient among self-efficacy, goal orientation and students' persistence in Work-Integrated Learning

Source of variation	N	SE	GO	P	Remark
Self-efficacy	105	1	.654	0.723	Positive high relationship
Goal Orientation	105	0.654	1	.731	
Persistence	105	0.723	.731	1	

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 5 shows the result of the Pearson's correlation among self-efficacy, goal orientation and students' persistence in Work-Integrated Learning. The overall correlation between self-efficacy and students' persistence is positively high (r =.723). Also, the overall correlation between goal orientation and students' persistence is positively high (r = .731). In all, there is generally a positive correlation between self-efficacy and students' persistence among business education students. There is also a positive correlation between goal orientation and students' persistence among business education students in public universities in Anambra State, Nigeria.

Hypothesis 3: Self-efficacy and goal orientation do not significantly predict persistence in Work-Integrated Learning career certainty among business education students in Universities in Anambra State.

Table 6: Coefficients of Multiple Linear Regression for Aggregated self-efficacy, goal orientation and students' persistence in Work-Integrated Learning

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			
	B	SEB	Beta(β)	T	P	Decision
Constant	.503	.292		1.72		
Self-efficacy	.454	.083	.429	5.46	.000	Reject H_O
Goal orientation	.430	.075	.450	5.73	.000	Reject H_O

R_2= .639, Adjusted R^2= .632, F (2,102) = 90.317

Table 6 shows the discrete contributions of self-efficacy and goal orientation in the relationship with Business education students' persistence in Work-Integrated Learning. The results show that self-efficacy significantly contributed in the relationship with students' persistence in Work-Integrated Learning in the model (*β= 0.429,* t= 5.46, *p*= 0.000 < 0.05). Furthermore, the Table shows that goal orientation significantly contributed in the relationship with students' persistence in Work-Integrated Learning in the model (*β=0.450,* t= 5.73, *p*= 0.00<0.05). Hence, hypothesis 3 was rejected.

Discussion of Findings

The study revealed a high positive and statistically significant relationship between self-efficacy and students' persistence in Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) among business education students. The findings from Research question one revealed that students who possess stronger beliefs in their capabilities to successfully execute workplace-related tasks are more likely to remain committed, exert sustained effort and persevere despite the challenges encountered during workplace learning experiences. Furthermore, the corresponding hypothesis supported this finding, indicating that self-efficacy alone has substantial predictive power over how persistent a student is in executing assigned tasks during workplace learning experiences. This finding is consistent with Bandura's (1997) Social Cognitive Theory, which posits that individuals with high self-efficacy are more likely to persevere when faced with challenging tasks. The finding is consistent with Honicke, Broadbent and Fuller-Tyszkiewicz (2019), who reported that self-efficacy enhances students' persistence and academic success and Schunk and DiBenedetto (2020), who found that students with high self-efficacy exhibits greater resilience and sustained engagement in learning activities. However, the finding differs from Lent and Brown (2019), who argued that persistence is influenced not only by self-efficacy but also by contextual factors such as supervisory support and the learning environment. The positive relationship observed in this study may reflect the students' confidence in applying their classroom knowledge during workplace learning, thereby enabling them to remain committed despite workplace challenges.

The findings from Research question two revealed a high positive and statistically significant relationship between goal orientation and students' persistence in Work-Integrated Learning among business education students. This finding suggest that students who are strongly motivated to achieve learning goals are more likely to remain committed, exert sustained effort

and persevere in workplace learning activities despite challenges. Furthermore, this finding was reinforced by the corresponding hypothesis which showed that goal orientation significantly predicted persistence. The finding support Achievement Goal Theory (Dweck, 1986), which posits that individuals with strong learning and achievement goals are more likely to embrace challenges, persist in the face of setbacks and maintain engagement in learning tasks. The finding is consistent with Kifle and Melese (2017), who found that goal orientation positively influences students' motivation, engagement and persistence in learning activities. Similarly, Vogel and Human-Fogel (2018) reported that students with mastery-oriented goals demonstrate greater perseverance and commitment to academic tasks than their counterparts with weaker goal orientations. The present finding extends these conclusions to Work-Integrated Learning indicating that goal-oriented students are more likely to sustain participation and successfully navigate workplace learning experiences. However, the finding differs from the view of Senko and Dawson (2017) who argued that the effects of goal orientation can vary depending on contextual factors such as feedback, evaluation practices and perceived support. Nevertheless, the positive relationship observed in this study suggests that goal orientation remains an important motivational factor that enhances students' persistence during Work-Integrated Learning.

Findings from Research question three revealed a high positive and statistically significant combined influence of self-efficacy and goal orientation on students' persistence in Work-Integrated Learning among business education students. This implies that students who possess strong confidence in their abilities and are driven by meaningful learning goals are more likely to remain committed and resilient when faced with challenges during workplace learning. This supports the notion that cognitive-motivational factors do not operate in isolation. In essence, students who both believe they can succeed and have clear reasons to do so are more likely to maintain effort and engagement, even when confronted with real-world obstacles in work placement environments. This findings was further reinforced by the corresponding hypothesis which demonstrated that both self-efficacy and goal orientation significantly contributed to the prediction of students' persistence in Work-Integrated Learnings. This finding indicates that while self-efficacy and goal orientation are independently strong predictors of persistence, their combined effect is even more powerful (Alhadabi & Karpinski, 2020). This dual predictive influence underscores the need for educational programs to foster both belief in ability (self-

efficacy) and direction through goal setting (goal orientation) among students. This finding agrees with Saks (2024) who reported in their met-analysis that self-efficacy and motivational factors are among the strongest psychological predictors of students' academic outcomes.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that self-efficacy and goal orientation plays a significant role in predicting students' ability to persist in Work-Integrated Learnings. Students who believe in their ability to complete assigned tasks are more likely to remain engaged, overcome challenges, and complete their placements successfully. Furthermore, students who are goal-oriented, whether through mastery or performance goals, are intrinsically motivated to perform well, making them more persistent in achieving work placement objectives.

In addition, the study concludes that the combination of self-efficacy and goal orientation strongly predicts students' persistence in work placement tasks. These cognitive-motivational factors work together to shape students' attitudes, engagement levels, and resilience in real-world learning environments

Recommendations

Based on the study findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. Business Education departments in universities should implement pre-placement training programs that aim to boost students' self-efficacy through confidence-building exercises, simulations, and real-world case studies.
2. Goal-setting workshops should be introduced to help students identify, structure, and monitor personal and career-related goals that align with their internship experiences.

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