

Effect of Goal Commitments and Institutional Experiences on Postgraduate Students' Persistence in Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi

Umar Inuwa¹

Department of Vocational and Technology Education,
Faculty of Technology Education
Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi
Bauchi, Nigeria

Saidu Mansur Adam²

Department of Vocational and Technology Education,
Faculty of Technology Education
Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi
Bauchi, Nigeria

Ibrahim Umar Aliyu³

Department of Vocational and Technology Education,
Faculty of Technology Education
Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi
Bauchi, Nigeria

Dahiru Usman Jibrin⁴

Department of Vocational and Technology Education,
Faculty of Technology Education
Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi
Bauchi, Nigeria

Abstract:- This study examined the effect of goal commitments and institutional experiences on postgraduate students' persistence at Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi, Nigeria. A survey design was adopted, where 266 postgraduate students of ATBU, Bauchi, participated in the study. The sample was statistically determined using *GPower*. A structured questionnaire was used as an instrument, and the data collected were statistically treated using PLS-SEM. The results indicated that goal commitment has a positive and significant effect on postgraduate students' persistence, whereas institutional experience has no significant effect on postgraduate students' persistence. The non-persistence of postgraduate students in ATBU Bauchi, where many students drop out before completing the program, is a significant concern for supervisors and stakeholders at ATBU. This issue could be ameliorated when postgraduate students are motivated to have personal goal striving. The study, therefore, recommends that the management of ATBU Bauchi should create a conducive environment that will enable postgraduate students to have personal goal striving in their academic attainment, as this would significantly improve their persistence in postgraduate studies.

Keywords:- Goal Commitments; Institutional Experiences; Persistence; Postgraduate Students; ATBU, Bauchi.

I. INTRODUCTION

The postgraduate is an educational programme designed to equip individuals with relevant skills and knowledge to meet contemporary challenges in life. Aithal and Kumar (2019) argued that people are prepared to stay on top of knowledge advancement and technological change in postgraduate studies. Postgraduate programmes produce innovators and leaders who have confidence, courage, and a strong belief in making appropriate decisions in all types of

situations using their critical thinking skills and knowledge for systematic analysis (Erwee, Harmes, Harmes, Danaher, & Padro, 2018). Hence, a postgraduate degree offers specializations in various courses that prepare students to confidently handle any task being offered to them. Even employers of labour today are looking for specialists for appropriate positions. Sometimes these positions are beyond the capacity of a first-degree holder because an ordinary graduate (i.e., a first-degree holder) is considered a beginner or inexperienced (Penkauskiene, Railiene, & Cruz, 2019). That is why most countries allocate more funds to postgraduate studies. Like other countries in the world, Nigeria, through the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFUND), devotes a lot of resources to the postgraduate programme, especially MSc. and PhD, because of the link that exists between research and economic development (Asiyai, 2017). Even though Gordon (2016) argued that all students admitted into postgraduate programmes in higher institutions of learning have an equal opportunity to succeed, it has become a serious concern and a subject of discourse among supervisors and stakeholders at ATBU that most postgraduate students do not persist to graduation. Many give up and leave the programme before completion. The records from ATBU's postgraduate school indicate that less than 10% of the students admitted to the postgraduate programme from 2017/2018 to the 2020/2021 academic sessions succeeded and completed their programme, while many dropped out. The level of dropouts from postgraduate programmes in ATBU is estimated at more than 50%, with more than 40% giving up at the thesis level. The situation is not only expensive and painful for students and their guardians but also highly discouraging for the faculties involved and detrimental to the reputation of the institution.

Furthermore, Falconer and Adragna (2017) note that a high rate of postgraduate student attrition could lead to a shortage of manpower in the academic field, which in turn could devastate the link that exists between research and

economic development. Nevertheless, Geetha (2019) observed that institutions play a very important role in determining students' persistence. Additionally, Hadi and Muhammad (2019) emphasized that institutional factors are critical for postgraduate students' success and performance. Additionally, Loye et al. (2020) suggested the need for future studies on students' persistence to include institutional experiences. On the contrary, the Theory of Goal Setting proposed that when individuals are inspired to achieve their goals, the relationship between the goal and accomplishment is most effective (Locke & Latham, 2002). Equally important, goal commitment indicates the level of devotion and perseverance to a particular purpose and has a great impact on success (Klein et al., 2012). Several studies (see, for example, Burkley et al., 2013; Mann et al., 2013) stated that commitment to realizing a goal is what motivates a person towards the achievement of that goal. Likewise, Gabay-Mariani et al. (2023) called for future research on goal commitments and persistence. Although there are several studies on postgraduate students' persistence, most of these studies focused on distance learning and online learning programmes. Specifically, no published study was found to focus on goal commitments and institutional experiences. Hence, this study examined the effect of goal commitments and institutional experiences on postgraduate students' persistence at Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi, Nigeria.

The outcome of this study will be important to the postgraduate students of ATBU Bauchi in terms of identifying that their goal commitments are important determinants of their academic success and persistence to completion. It is also hoped that the level of dropout and non-persistence of postgraduate students in ATBU Bauchi towards the achievement of their academic goals can be minimized when students recognize that their goal commitments have an impact on their academic success and persistence.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Goal Commitment and Postgraduate Students' Persistence

Goal commitment refers to the degree of perseverance and strength of mind exhibited by individuals towards achieving their objectives. Rothwell and Smith (2022) emphasize that goal commitment is strongly related to the socioeconomic status of students and encompasses factors such as income, education level, ethnicity, and race. Similarly, Tinto emphasized the significance of individual goal commitments in influencing students' academic paths (Aina et al., 2022). That is why the relationship between goal commitment and students' persistence has always been a topic of interest among scholars, particularly in the field of education. Several studies have provided valuable insights into the nature and effects of goal pursuit in diverse contexts, including academic environments. However, no study has solely focused on the effect of goal commitments on postgraduate students' persistence at Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi, Nigeria. Therefore, it is hoped that this study can provide additional insights into the phenomenon. Most of the existing studies on goal

commitments did not focus on postgraduate students' persistence.

For instance, Senko et al. (2023) contributed to this field by developing a goal-complex measure that explores the reasons behind students' pursuit of performance goals. This measure provides researchers with the flexibility to examine either two aggregate factors or distinct goal complexes, enabling a comprehensive understanding of students' goal-pursuit experiences and facilitating improved support for academic success. Understanding students' goals and the effects of self-concordant goals on engagement and resilience has emerged as crucial in enhancing academic success, engagement, and resilience. The study proved that students who have a strong sense of why they are pursuing their goals are more likely to persist, even in the face of challenges. Equally important, Kwon and Erola (2023) focused on changes in goal-striving across different age groups and found a positive association between changes in goal-striving and socioeconomic status among young adults. Nevertheless, this association was not observed among middle-aged or older adults. This research highlights the importance of considering age-related differences in goal striving and its implications for social and economic outcomes. Likewise, Henry et al. (2023) emphasized the significance of idiographic methods in goal-focused research by demonstrating the positive effects of starting a language education program with self-concordant goals on engagement and resilience. These findings underscore the importance of individualized approaches to goal setting and the potential benefits of promoting students' engagement and resilience. Furthermore, Gabay-Mariani et al. (2023) addressed the research gap regarding long-term persistence among nascent entrepreneurs by utilizing a longitudinal study with an 18-month time lag. They identified affective commitment and continuance commitment as pathways explaining long-term persistence. This study contributes valuable insights into the conditions necessary for maintaining long-term persistence in entrepreneurial pursuits. Similarly, Fortes et al. (2022) examined the social determinants of education (SDE) model among a diverse group of nursing students and found that social determinants, emotional intelligence, and lifestyle significantly influenced academic integration and persistence. Their findings emphasize the importance of considering social factors and personal attributes when designing interventions to support students in their academic journey. Based on these findings, the following hypothesis was developed:

H₁: *Goal commitments have a positive and significant effect on postgraduate students' persistence.*

B. Institutional Experiences and Postgraduate Students' Persistence

Osaikhiuwu (2014) considered institutional experiences as administrative style, facilities, academic support, and student support services put in place to achieve the overall academic objective. Institutional factors are factors that normally influence academic performance (Ajjawi et al., 2019). Existing research has provided insights into the difficulties students face during their academic journey. For instance, Gosai et al. (2023) conducted a mixed-method

study to explore the transition challenges faced by first-year students in the College of Business at Fiji National University. Their findings revealed that 30% of respondents experienced difficulties during this period, emphasizing the importance of adopting a student-centric model for successful integration into academic life. Similarly, Wu and Corpus (2023) utilized a mixed-methods approach to investigate the relationship between perceived cost and long-term academic outcomes among first-year college students. Their study demonstrated that perceived cost significantly impacts the collegiate experience and can either facilitate or hinder future academic success. In a different context, White and Ingram (2023) introduced a novel method to examine the postgraduate-taught student experience, revealing the intricate interplay between emotions, appraisal, motivation, and behaviour. These studies highlight the need to consider various factors such as a student-centric approach, perceived cost, and the complex emotional landscape to develop effective strategies for supporting student success in higher education.

Furthermore, Ropponen et al. (2023) explored the experiences of culturally and linguistically diverse nursing students in clinical practice and their career aspirations. Their study identified important factors including support during university studies and clinical practice, nursing competence development, successful workplace and social integration, as well as positive clinical practice experiences. Additionally, Aina et al. (2022) conducted a literature review examining the factors contributing to student attrition in tertiary education programs. Their findings underscored the significance of interventions targeting student integration and addressing informational gaps to enhance study success. They highlighted that student persistence or attrition depends on a combination of individual, institutional, and economic factors. Hamilton and O'Dwyer (2018) examined the learning approaches of mature learners and direct-entry students in an initial teacher education program. Their study revealed that prior educational experiences played a crucial role in shaping students' learning approaches. Collectively, these studies provide valuable insights into the factors influencing students' academic experiences and contribute to the ongoing efforts to enhance student success. They emphasize the importance of interventions that improve integration, address information gaps, and recognize the impact of institutional experiences. Based on these findings, the following hypothesis was developed:

H₂: *Institutional experiences have a positive and significant effect on postgraduate students' persistence.*

III. METHOD

This study employed a survey research design to investigate the effect of goal commitments and institutional experiences on postgraduate students' persistence in ATBU, Bauchi. A survey method is used when a researcher collects information about target respondents to describe and explain their attitudes, knowledge, and behaviour regarding a particular phenomenon (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The authors further argued that in this method, a researcher collects and analyzes quantitative data to establish the

relationship between the variables of interest. For this study, quantitative data on postgraduate students' persistence in the postgraduate programme at ATBU, Bauchi were collected and analyzed. Therefore, a survey method was considered appropriate for this study.

IV. POPULATION AND SAMPLE

The target population of this study is comprised of 5,088 students admitted to the postgraduate programme of ATBU, Bauchi from the 2017/2018 to 2020/2021 academic sessions. These academic sessions were considered in this study because the majority of the students admitted to these sessions are still pursuing their academic goals. Hence, they are in a better position to provide the information needed for this study. In this study, the sample was statistically determined using GPower, a statistical procedure used to determine the appropriate minimum sample size required for a study. Thus, to determine the minimum sample size required for this study, considering the number of predicting variables, an a priori power analysis was conducted using the G*Power 3.1.9.2. Following the suggestion of the American Statistical Association (2019), an a priori analysis was conducted based on these parameters: Power ($1-\beta$ err prob; 0.80), an alpha significance level (α err prob; 0.01), effect size f^2 (0.07), and the number of predictors (two based on the research framework). From the outcome of the analysis, a minimum of 203 samples is required for this study. The sample was increased to 280 to avoid non-response problems and sample size errors as suggested by Salkind (2018).

Convenience sampling was used to select 280 postgraduate students who are currently at the thesis/dissertation stage. This category was selected because it is a level where most of the students give up and leave the program before completion (Hadi & Muhammad, 2019; Ivankova & Stick, 2007). Convenience sampling is a technique for gathering information from a sample unit who are conveniently available to provide the information (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). In this study, the researchers visited the postgraduate seminar venues of all the faculties offering the postgraduate program in ATBU, Bauchi, to meet the postgraduate students available at the time of the visit and who reached the thesis/dissertation level to complete the structured questionnaire. The researchers repeated the process until the required number of 280 postgraduate students was obtained from various faculties. Out of 280 questionnaires distributed, 266 were retrieved, representing a 95% response rate. The response rate is quite acceptable (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The treatment of missing data was conducted as suggested by Hair, Hult, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2013). No outlier cases were detected, and the final data for analysis consisted of 266 cases.

V. MEASUREMENT

The instrument, comprising three constructs adapted from prior studies, was used in this study. For instance, postgraduate students' persistence was measured with 23 items adapted from Thalib, Hanafi, Aufar, Irbah, and Eduardus (2019). Goal Commitments consisted of 20 items

adapted from Human-Vogel and Rabe (2015). The items of institutional experiences were adapted from Hadi and Muhammad (2019). In this study, the Likert scale was adopted for all the items, and respondents were asked to indicate their responses to each item on a five-point scale. Krosnick and Fabrigar (1997) opine that a scale between five and seven points is more reliable than higher or lower scales, and a scale with no midpoint may increase measurement error. Similarly, Dawes (2008) states that a five or seven-point scale is likely to produce better results.

VI. ANALYSIS

Due to the small sample size of the study, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) through Partial Least Squares (Smart PLS 3.3.3.) was used to analyze the collected data, as suggested by Hair, Black, Babin, and Anderson (2017).

VII. RESULTS

A. Goodness of measurements

The construct validity of this study was established using the two-step approach recommended by Hair et al. (2017). Firstly, the study assessed convergent validity, followed by the assessment of discriminant validity. Loadings, average variance extracted (AVE), and reliability were used to assess convergent validity, while Fornell-Larcker was used to assess discriminant validity (see Table 1 and 2). The construct validity is established if the loadings are above 0.5, the average variance extracted is above 0.5, and composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach's alpha are above 0.7 (Hair et al., 2017).

TABLE I. RESULT OF CFA FOR THE MEASUREMENT MODEL

Constructs	Items	Loading s	Alph a	CR	AVE
PGSP	PGSP6	0.653	0.925	0.936	0.530
	PGSP9	0.699			
	PGSP10	0.789			
	PGSP11	0.631			
	PGSP12	0.809			
	PGSP13	0.796			
	PGSP14	0.735			
	PGSP16	0.655			
	PGSP19	0.718			
	PGSP20	0.747			
	PGSP21	0.812			
	PGSP22	0.721			
	PGSP2	0.663			

Constructs	Items	Loading s	Alph a	CR	AVE
	3				
GC	GC1	0.769	0.966	0.969	0.650
	GC2	0.836			
	GC3	0.840			
	GC4	0.821			
	GC5	0.818			
	GC6	0.816			
	GC7	0.802			
	GC8	0.814			
	GC9	0.781			
	GC10	0.803			
	GC14	0.706			
	GC15	0.826			
	GC16	0.872			
	GC17	0.819			
	GC18	0.806			
	GC19	0.756			
	GC20	0.806			
IE	EI1	0.602	0.872	0.898	0.527
	EI2	0.690			
	EI4	0.684			
	EI5	0.701			
	EI6	0.853			
	EI7	0.835			
	EI8	0.774			
	EI9	0.631			

NOTE: 1: PGSP (POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS' PERSISTENCE); GC (GOAL COMMITMENTS); IE (INSTITUTIONAL EXPERIENCES)

2: The loadings of PGSP1, PGSP2, PGSP3, PGSP4, PGSP5, PGSP7, PGSP8, PGSP15, PGSP17, PGSP18, GC11, GC12, GC13, EI3 and EI10 are less than 0.50 and they were deleted (Hair et al., 2013).

In this study, discriminant validity was established using the square root of the AVE (Average Variance Extracted) of each latent construct (Hair et al., 2017). Therefore, discriminant validity in this study was assessed by comparing the square root of the AVE for each construct with the correlations presented in the correlation matrix. Table 2 shows the results of the Fornell-Larcker assessment with the square root of the AVE for each construct. The square root of the AVE in bold is greater than its correlation with any other constructs. Hence, it can be concluded that the discriminant validity of the constructs has been established (Hair et al., 2017).

TABLE II. DISCRIMINANT VALIDITY OF THE CONSTRUCTS

	PGSP	GC	IE
PGSP	0.806		
GC	0.457	0.726	
IE	0.78	0.379	0.728

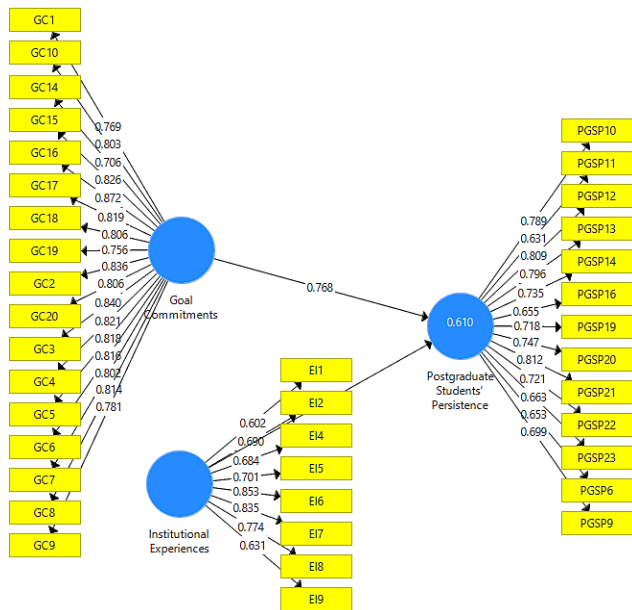


Fig. I: Measurement Model

Table 3 and Figure 2 document the results generated with the help of Smart PLS 3.3.3. The results indicate the p-value, t-value, and coefficient beta value. The hypothesis decision has been made based on the p-value and t-value. The result was obtained from the bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 sampling iterations for 266 cases, as recommended by Hair et al. (2017). The statistical evidence documented in Table 3 reveals that goal commitments have a positive and significant effect on postgraduate students' persistence in ATBU Bauchi ($\beta = 0.768, t = 16.224, p < 0.05$). This suggests that the hypothesized relationship between the two constructs was supported. On the other hand, the effect of institutional experiences on postgraduate students' persistence in ATBU Bauchi was not significant ($\beta = 0.028, t = 0.470, p > 0.05$). Hypothesis 2 was not supported. The results imply that institutional experience is not a significant predictor of postgraduate students' persistence in ATBU Bauchi.

TABLE III. HYPOTHESIS TESTING

Hypotheses	Std. Beta	T value	P value	Decision
GC->PGSP	0.768	16.224	0.000	Supported
IE-> PGSP	0.028	0.470	0.639	Not Supported

Fig. II: Structural Model

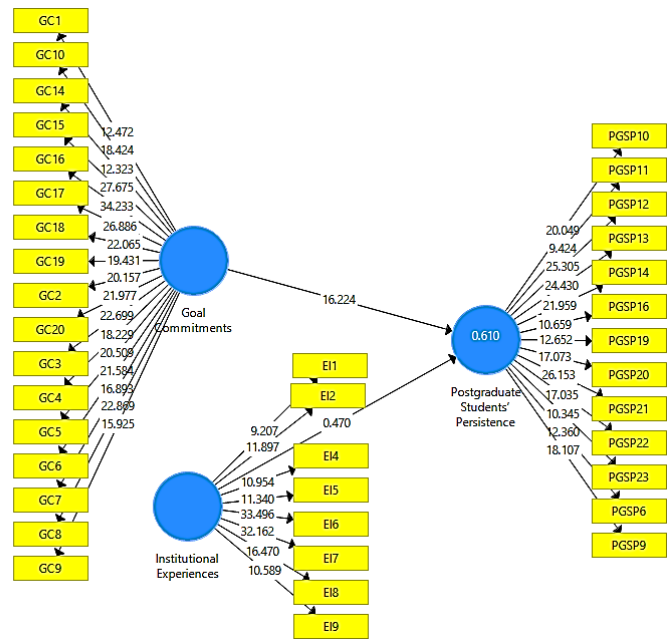


Fig. II: Structural Model

VIII. DISCUSSION

The findings of this research suggest that goal commitment has a positive and significant effect on postgraduate students' persistence in ATBU, Bauchi. The finding implies that postgraduate students with personal goal striving are more likely to persist to graduation because goal commitments indicate the level of devotion and perseverance of an individual towards a particular purpose. The finding agrees with that of Senko et al. (2023), who contributed to this field by developing a goal-complex measure that explores the reasons behind students' pursuit of performance goals. Senko et al. found that students who have a strong sense of why they are pursuing their goals are more likely to persist, even in the face of challenges. This supports the report of Henry et al. (2023) that self-concordance influences engagement indirectly through goal effort and progress, while also having a direct effect on engagement because students who set self-concordant goals are more likely to be engaged and resilient in their studies. The finding is also consistent with the study of Gabay-Mariani et al. (2023) that affective commitment and continuance commitment are essential for long-term persistence. Similar findings were reported by Kwon and Erola (2023), Barreto and Gaynor (2023), and Fortes et al. (2022).

In contrast, the present study established that institutional experience has no significant effect on postgraduate students' persistence in ATBU, Bauchi. Despite the institution's efforts in providing adequate support to facilitate students' research activities, most of the postgraduate students do not persist to graduation, and some even give up and leave the program before completion. Nevertheless, the finding contradicts the findings of existing studies such as Ropponen et al. (2023), who found that support during university studies and clinical practice, perceived equality, nursing competence development, successful integration into the workplace and social life, and clinical practice experiences were key factors influencing the

students' intentions to stay in the nursing profession. Ropponen et al. concurred with Aina et al. (2022) that individual, institutional, and economic factors significantly contribute to students' attrition at the tertiary level of education. Consistent with the existing studies, Hamilton and O'Dwyer (2018) found that prior educational experiences are part of the key factors in the learning approach of students in an initial teacher education program. Even though the existing studies established a significant effect of institutional experience on students' academic success, none of these studies focused specifically on postgraduate students who require more independence and a higher level of understanding compared to those in undergraduate studies.

IX. CONCLUSION

This study examined the effect of goal commitments and institutional experiences on postgraduate students' persistence at Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi, Nigeria. A survey design was adopted, where a structured questionnaire was used as an instrument. 266 postgraduate students of ATBU, Bauchi, participated in the study. The findings suggest that goal commitment has a positive and significant effect on postgraduate students' persistence because goal commitments indicate the level of devotion and perseverance of an individual towards a particular purpose. In contrast, institutional experience has no significant effect on postgraduate students' persistence. Therefore, the issue of non-persistence among postgraduate students in ATBU Bauchi, where many students give up and leave the program before completion, becomes a matter of serious concern among supervisors and many stakeholders in ATBU. This issue could be ameliorated when postgraduate students are motivated to have personal goal striving. The study, therefore, recommends that the management of ATBU Bauchi should create a conducive environment that will encourage postgraduate students to have personal goal striving in their academic attainment as this would significantly improve their persistence in postgraduate studies. Nonetheless, this study only focused on postgraduate students of ATBU Bauchi, Nigeria. The findings may not be generalized to postgraduate students of other institutions. Future research of this kind could be conducted beyond one institution. Additionally, future research can extend the scope of this study by considering other factors such as supervisor support, students' educational outcomes, and pre-entry attributes.

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