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# Understanding Freshmen's Persistence in A Chinese Private Higher Education

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** The purpose of this study was to examine self-efficacy, goal-setting and belongingness impact freshmen's persistence in Heilongjiang International University, one of Chinese private universities. **Research design, data and methodology:** The research objectives are to investigate the significant impact of self-efficacy, goal-setting and belongingness on freshmen's persistence. Based on the preliminary assessment of freshmen's current challenges and situations, questionnaire, interview and participatory observation were used in quantitative research. Item-Objective Congruence was adopted before questionnaire implement to test the content validity; Cronbach's Alpha reliability was examined by using a pilot test of 30 students to determine the reliability of each item in the construct. Meanwhile, the questionnaire conducted to 200 students, data was analyzed by using descriptive statistics and Multiple Linear Regression to test the impact related on independent variables to dependent variable. **Result:** The study found that self-efficacy, goal-setting and belongingness have significant impact on freshmen's persistence, additionally, goal-setting has most influential ability. **Conclusions:** Self-efficacy, goal-setting and belongingness enhance freshmen's persistence, thus, the First Year Experience practitioners were recommended to succeed freshmen in the aspects of those factors, which the suggestions are develop employing more peers, creating model students, setting SMART goals and closing the relationship between staff and freshman students.

**Keywords:** Persistence, Self-efficacy, Goal-setting, Belongingness, China

**JEL Classification Code:** A22, M12, L30

## 1. Introduction

Higher education helps students gain knowledge and skills to prepare themselves for the future career and create opportunities for better employment. It opens up the minds of students to new ways of thinking and gather new perspectives. This can develop student to be an individual, therefore, the changing also poses great challenges to persist and achieve success. Many students cannot complete their

course, they leave without a degree and have accumulated debt. Higher retention benefits students, institutions and society (Tinto, 1993). Motivating students both in academic and social systems helps them making a successful adaptation and improves persistence (Astin, 1993; Tinto, 1993). Lynn (2008) stated that the success of freshmen most of it depends on the connections between individuals and resources at the higher education, particularly during the first several weeks on campus. Therefore, higher education institutions have focused on offering intervention programs

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and services to support students' persistence and academic success, particularly during the crucial first college year (Tinto, 1993).

## 1.1 Current situation

### Global Context

According to UNESCO, the first region achieved mass higher education is North America, with the highest tertiary enrolment rate at 86% in 2018, followed by 70% in Europe and Central Asia, and 62% in Central Europe and the Baltics. In Latin America and the Caribbeans, the gross enrolment ratio was 52%, followed by 46% in East Asia and the Pacific, 42% in North Africa and the Middle East, 24% in South Asia, and 9% in Sub-Saharan Africa. Meanwhile, only two in three students get to continue study in second year in USA. In recent years, despite high tuition fees and spiraling student debt, the priority of higher education and policy debates in the USA is now retention and success rates as well as graduate employment. Notably in Australia, after realizing that a third of total students did not complete their study within six years of enrolling, the federal government unprecedentedly began naming poorly performing institutions.

Research showed that transitioning from high school to university is an overwhelming global concern. According to the 2015 European Commission report of Drop-out and Completion in Higher Education, the most vital moves to the Europe 2020 goal of having at least 40% of population between the age of 30 and 34 with completed higher education were to reduce drop-out and increase completion rates. A comparative study conducted in 35 European countries found that approximately 75% of total study subjects considered success in study as important, and almost 50% rated its importance "high" or "very high" on the agenda of policies. It is clear from the report that there is variance around the globe with the definition of and approaches to study success that affects policy-making.

Drop-out rates are high across Africa, because of the dramatic increase of student numbers against the decline in funding per student, overcrowding facilities, and inadequate resources. In most African countries, access is still the most prominent issue: evidence of improvement in public investment in higher education is scarce, but in countries such as Ghana there has been observable moves to improve quality. Each country has a different monitoring indicator and definition, based on their orientation and policy focus.

Since the 1990s, First Year Experiencing (FYE) programs have been set up as the primary policy used by universities to help freshmen for the demands, expectations, and stressors of college (Upcraft et al., 2004). Most of American universities established FYE office and set up a set of programs to serve new students, which the programs are personalized and curriculum focused. The successful

FYE program followed by more than 30 countries, including Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Japan, and the United Arab Emirates etc. (Liu, 2013).

To sum it up, according to the development process of freshman education in the United States, goals of FYE are constantly being adjusted, its content is constantly being improved, and its main body and operating mechanism are gradually becoming specialized.

### Asian Context

Asia, the continent with almost 60% of the world's total population, is significantly diversified among countries in almost all aspects, for instance geographic, socio-economics, cultures, politics and development (Victor & Rupert, 2000). Over the last two decades, access to higher education has risen dramatically across Asia, from 3% of the tertiary education age group enrolling in 1970 to 39% in 2014 in East Asia and the Pacific, and from 4% to 21% in South Asia. A standing out example is South Korea, who has the highest participation rate in the world at over 90%, according to UNESCO data (Ludeman & Schreiber, 2020). Therefore, there are huge differences in enrolment correlate highly with national income levels.

However, as population growth slows down in several Asian countries including China, and enrolment rates rise, universities are most likely to face an accompanying decline in success rates. While student retention and success are to some extent still a focus for institutions and national governments, the foreseeable decline in success rates is an issue for many countries that constantly create financial burdens for students, parents and governments in wasted resources and time. It is considered a major loss for students and their families to not being able to graduate. In many countries, especially those with high enrolment rates, attention is focused strongly on student retention and graduation (success).

### National Context

China has surpassed the United States in higher education enrollments became of the largest higher education systems in the world. However, it is difficult for most Chinese university freshmen to adapt to university has become a common problem. The Education Ministry of China released data in 2019 that nearly 0.16 million students at Chinese universities were unable to graduate properly, accounting for less than 1% of all graduates (Wang & Jiang, 2021). This figure is certainly not a shock to everyone, after all, the proportion is negligible. But Boya's data, which tallied the number of students who couldn't graduate regularly at some of China's top schools in 2017, counted the proportion of students who couldn't graduate properly at 16 of the country's top universities, averaging 5.33 %, that's well above the average level issued by the Ministry of Education in 2011 (Boya Data, 2017).

## 1.2 Focal Organization

Heilongjiang International University (HIU) (2022) is the one and only Bachelor's Degree education provider in Heilongjiang Province that specializes in foreign languages studies. Established in 1993, HIU is located in the City of Harbin, famous as a cradle for its ice culture. HIU can be the representative for the type of "language-oriented, application-oriented, internationalization focused" higher education institutions in China.

By September 2021, HIU has 10,136 full-time students and 562 full time teachers among more than 600 faculty members. HIU offers course programs in its 13 faculties, 25 undergraduate courses in Business English, English, Japanese, French etc. HIU has 13 course programs running in cooperation with over 40 overseas partner schools and organizations. HIU also introduced prestigious international exams, such as TestDaf, Advanced Placement (AP) etc. (HIU web, 2022)

The vision of HIU is that apply theories into practice and become well versed in both western and eastern learnings. The mission of the university is that build the university with unique local features, applicable skills, and internalization. Under the school core value of Integration, Competitiveness, Integrity and Harmony, in HIU pursuit of Western and Eastern studies to meet realistic needs, the school cultural atmosphere is multi-facet. "Giving students and society what is needed most" is HIU's Slogan since it established in 1993.

## 1.3 Needs for Action Research

### Preliminary Diagnosis

By combining SWOT and Force Field Analysis which the two methods can incorporate the benefits of these two tools, with clear recognition of the existing conditions.

To better understand what's needed for change in both corporate and personal environments, Kurt Lewin's Force Field Analysis is a powerful strategic tool that is widely used. Lewin (1939) proposes that whenever driving forces are stronger than restraining forces, the status quo or equilibrium will change.

One of the strengths of FYE in the need of students' intention to change, they are willing to embrace their bright future. Another internal factor is that become more competitiveness is one of HIU core value, the school are pushing all the HIUers go forward as well as more competitive students. Schein (1983) argued that the founder determines the organizational culture. The president of HIU who has been working with HIU since the university was founded in 1993, thus, there is a very strong and continuous organizational culture in HIU.

The fear of unknown is the fatal weaknesses of new students, they have uncertainties to unknown situation.

Additionally, the habit is another source of resistance to change, students are used to lean on parents and teachers before university life, this tendency to respond in their accustomed ways. In the organizational side, most of Chinese universities' FYE programs lack of long-term effectiveness as well as HIU.

There are many opportunities to improve FYE, the Chinese Ministry of Education requires colleges and universities to improve admission of new students, emphasis on freshman enrollment and education in 2006. Needs of students which are the external factors to enhance FYE program, new-generation students are more diversity and realistic, thus, a personalized and diversified FYE program is required to fulfill their needs.

One of the threatens is that Chinese birth rate was a new low in decades in 2020. (China Statistical Yearbook, 2021), obviously, there are less university students in the next decade, that is one of external backfire for all of high education institutes. Another threaten is the increasing competition, an increase of 141 colleges and universities compared within a decade in China. (NEEA, 2021) Rather than attempting to build a high-quality university, the costs will dramatically increase considering about high investment.

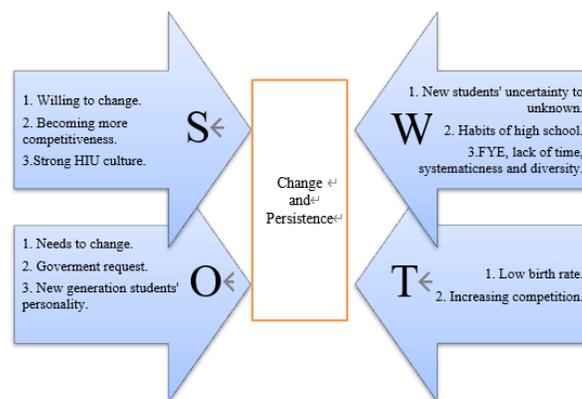


Figure 1: SWOT and Driving Force Diagnosis, source: researcher, 2021

### Need for Action research

Teaching affairs office and students' affairs office in HIU arrange a set of assessment s to investigate the current situation of students' engagement in middle semester every year, the assessment includes questionnaire and staff student forum. There are different emphasis points to different cohort of students, for freshmen group, the assessment just about ending of FYE program.

The researcher conducted preliminary diagnosis utilizing reports of Academic Year 2020. The results showed 14% of students "very home sick", 22.5% of students "difficulty to catch up with teacher", 27% of students "very dislike learning community", 11% of students "only talked with

teacher until to be called". Moreover, new students complain about "the course is too hard", "food tastes awful", "frustrate on goal". Then the researcher conducted semi-structured interview with 8 staff, who three of them are faculty directors, and 5 of them are instructors. All of the respondents thought FYE programs are very useful, more than 70% of the respondents thought "no enough time to get feedback at all", "No ideas about theoretical reason to talk", "Freshmen are fully motivated" Therefore, according to the report from HIU students psychological counselling center, many of the students who come to make an appointment for student counseling are freshman students, their difficulties mainly involve academic demotivated, low self-efficacy, interpersonal relationship problems, weariness problems. Qu and Jiang (2019) argued that low effectiveness of the entrance education for freshmen has been widely accepted as a fact, the FYE contents are limited to the school rules and discipline, lack of effective assessment and evaluation is one of crucial aspects. Thus, it is considered necessary to conduct a systematic inquiry through action research to address the identified problems.

Student persistence and success benefit to both students and higher educational institutions. Students can gain higher incomes and far better opportunities for their professional career path following the achievement of a degree. Institutions benefit directly from the tuition fees during students take in and the future possibility of alumni continuing to support the institution after getting their degree. FYE programs are an exact and sound example of intervention of how higher education has been attempting to deal with the challenge of increasing student persistence.

### Statement of the problems

Research suggests through organization development interventions (ODIs) in three factors which are self-efficacy, goal-setting and belongingness in the FYE program, the results of which provide greater clarity of understanding of what factors impact persistence. Despite the popular recognition of organization development (OD) as one of the core activities in human resource development and organization management, no consensus has been reached regarding what should be the expected outcomes of OD (Egan, 2001). Meanwhile, FYE programs had been utilized during the first year for freshmen, and have the functions of enhancing persistence through ODIs in self-efficacy, goal-setting and belongingness, the actual effectiveness of such efforts has not been fully examined at this major research institution.

### 1.4 Research Objectives

RO1: To investigate the significant impact of self-efficacy on freshmen's persistence.

RO2: To investigate the significant impact of goal-setting on freshmen's persistence.

RO3: To investigate the significant impact of belongingness on freshmen's persistence.

### 1.5 Research questions

RQ1: Is there a significant impact of self-efficacy on freshmen's persistence?

RQ2: Is there a significant impact of goal-setting on freshmen's persistence?

RQ3: Is there a significant impact of belongingness on freshmen's persistence ?

### 1.6 Research Hypotheses

The evaluations on the research hypotheses have been made as follows:

Ho1: Self-efficacy has no significant impact on freshmen's persistence.

Ha1: Self-efficacy has significant impact on freshmen's persistence.

Ho2: Goal-setting has no significant impact on freshmen's persistence

Ha2: Goal-setting has significant impact on freshmen's persistence.

Ho3: Belongingness has no significant impact on freshmen's persistence

Ha3: Belongingness has significant impact on freshmen's persistence.

### 1.7 Scope and Limitations of the Study

#### Scope of the action research

The action research takes place at a regional private university in China, as the introduction of the university, it is admitted that HIU can be the representative for the type of "language-oriented, application-oriented, internationalization focused" higher education institutions in China. Business English Department is one of the most historical academic faculties in HIU, the cohort of students has obvious advantage in English and business which has the potential ability to further the research. One of the reasons is that the business English course is developed on the basis of needs analysis, with the aim of explaining in as much detail as possible what students should do through the English medium. Later, with the development of learner-centered teaching methods, it was introduced into special-purpose English teaching to understand students' needs and discover problems in language teaching.

### Limitations of the research

Limitations to this study include a limited sample of students available to provide enough information for other universities utilize as a framework for developing similar schools to support their needs. Considering the research population, this action research mainly works on the students majored in Business English, it did fill the research gap due to the existing research mainly focus on students majored in English, which the major setting is much longer than that of Business English major.

Considering the variables, in most instances, there is unbalance of gender in HIU students, there are nearly more than 80% female students in the language focused school, that means gender may be a sensitive factor to persist. Another limitation to this study was the location of HIU freshmen, over 70% students enrolled in Heilongjiang province which is a developing area located on far northeast of China, thus, the economic factor maybe could not provide a bird view of freshmen.

Additionally, as for the scope of methodology, the purposive sampling can be considered as one research limitation. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the adjustment of personnel in student's affair department, and the continuity of policies for the entrance education of new students have all contributed to the objective factors that affect the limited nature of research.

### Significance of the Study

The significance of this research can be developed from the following points:

Firstly, the results benefit stakeholders across higher education. with the implementation of the mass higher education in China, the ensuing problem is an increase in the drop-out rate, which seriously affects the success of college students, affects the reputation of the university, even brings social problems. Therefore, to improve students' persistence, help them successfully pass the transition period of freshmen, and help them successfully graduate to avoid the occurrence of the above problems.

Secondly, the results benefit shareholders for private universities. Tuition income is the crucial resource to ensure the smooth operation of universities, and reducing student withdrawals can ensure the continuous stability of tuition income, thereby ensuring the sustainable development of private universities.

Thirdly, the results benefit the HEIs' staff and students. During the FYE period, both administrative and academic staff spend time on it, failure result will frustrate staff and demotivate them. Thus, through the scientific nature of the intervention of this research organization, it is possible to make the teachers and administrators of the school's freshman education more confident in their work. Additionally, the results of this study may potentially benefit university students. Successful FYE program motivate

students persist and overpassing the first tough year and succeed students' academic achievement. A positive university experience will encourage student's lifetime earnings and continuous improvement.

## 2. Literature Review

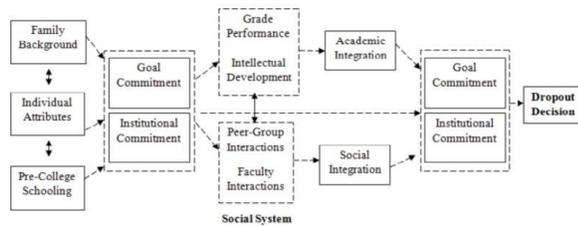
### 2.1 Persistence for freshmen's success

Clark (2005) illustrated that university present challenges that prompt student to strategize: it offers opportunities, poses obstacles, and introduces changes. The adaptation requires that students face challenges and influences in their lives outside of college. In order to succeed students in school, we need appreciate the complexity of their lives, understand the dynamics, both positive and negative, and look for ways to foster and promote effective strategies among them. Hailikari et al., (2016) found that freshmen's' interest, ambitious, and the enjoyment of learning have been dealing with increased levels of academic motivation. In order to understand the practice, motivation is the key issue.

There are many factors cause a student leave college. About 80% students (Tinto, 1988), leave due to academic failure, some of them leave for financial reasons, while others shortage of well preparation or become disappointed with the academic environment (Braxton, 2000; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Social integration into the campus community is another critical factor (Braxton, 2000; Swail, 2004; Tinto, 1993).

Durkheim's theory of suicide (1951) viewed the university as a social system, the model explained the factors that contribute to student leave from college with the goal of aiding educators in understanding rather than predicting the attrition phenomenon.

Tinto (1975) argues that students must be academically and socially integrated into the college community in order to persist to the next semester or year. Additionally, individual characteristics, such as pre-entry attributes such as student intellectual and social skills, dispositions and level of motivation and achievements impact students' persistence. This theory also includes parental economic status, educational level, financial resources, race, and gender. These pre-entry attributes influence expectations, commitment to institution, and commitment to academic goal. The degree to integrate into the campus community impacts both goal and institutional commitment, which are the most influential factors impacting student persistence. The stronger commitment to the academic goal will bring more positive academic achievements (Bean, 1983). Tinto (2016) illustrated that when viewed from the students' perspective, persistence is one form of motivation. Higher education institutions should enhance student motivation to persist and complete their programs of study.



**Figure 2:** Original Tinto Model Diagram of Student Departure  
**Source:** Tinto, 1975

The Input-Environment-Outcome model of student retention can help to understanding student persistence. The theory explained how the college environment can affect student outcomes. It used data to identify what factors impact student withdrawal in order to predict why students drop out of college (Astin, 1975), this research helps universities for supporting students and improving retention. The input-environment-outcome model describes how the existing characteristics a student brings with them to college coupled with the experiences the student has at the institution impact student outcomes. Astin (1975) argued that students enter college with a set of input characteristics, such as previous academic experience and achievement, perceptions of reason of college, why should go to college, and personal and parental characteristics. especially, students from a suburban area with uneducated parents, a low academic record in high school, low aspirations for college, and weak study habits are more easily dropping out of college. The environmental factors and experiences a student have while at college impact dropout or persistence. In the model, known as the environment, this includes institutional factors, policies and programs as well as the interactions among students, faculty members and peers, as well as educational experiences (Astin, 1993). Astin argued that the amount of physical and psychosocial energy invested into the academic experience, influences retention. This theory helps universities to understand that student behaviors are positively related to persistence, higher levels of persistence are made by increased student involvement. Furthermore, diversity of coursework and extracurricular increase student involvement and enhance the persistence.

All in all, studies explained that student characteristics and the dispositions that students bring with them to college influence the student decision to remain in college. Moreover, the factors such as policies, programs, and interactions in the collegiate environment impact student integration, commitment, satisfaction, and academic performance, these factors enhance the persistence that make students remain in university.

### 2.1.1 Kurt Lewin's Field Theory

Lewin (1947) developed the force field analysis model which describes the current equilibrium exists because the balance of two forces: the force of changing and the force of restraining changing. The driving forces usually are positive, reasonable, logical, conscious and economic. The restraining forces usually are negative, emotional, illogical, unconscious and social/psychological. Lewin argued that the change could be easier and longer lasting if the restraining changing forces were reduced. Additionally, Lewin suggested that maintain the status quo may be easier than increasing the forces for change. Lewin's force field is therefore dynamic, vulnerable to change with any shift in the distribution. Burnes and Cooke (2013) stated that Lewin's force field is the groundwork for building an understanding of Lewin's three-step model of planned change.

### 2.2 Self-efficacy as a factor to persist

Bandura (1977) argued that self-efficacy affects choice of activities, effort, persistence, and achievement. Bandura (1988) defined self-efficacy as a "measure [of] people's beliefs in their capabilities to fulfill different levels of task demands". As a social cognitive construct can be described as the mind's "symbolic representation" of the cognitive product of behavioral and environmental factors (Bandura, 1986). The relevance of self-efficacy to persistence lies in its strength as a predictor of achievement in an academic setting. According to Bandura (1986), enactive mastery, vicarious modeling, verbal persuasion, and arousal are four main sources of self-efficacy.

Researchers agree that self-efficacy influences action, effort, and the ability to cope with demands that yield resilience and persistence (Bandura, 1977; Diseth, 2011). Self-efficacy directly shapes the lives of individuals through action and effort such as decision making to meet future goals (Bandura, 1988; Schunk et al., 2008).

Self-efficacy influences set up goals, complete tasks, and face challenges, strong sense of self-efficacy promotes goal achieving. Thus, people with high self-efficacy will engage more readily in task, spent more time, and persist longer in its completion even when they meet difficulties (Chemers, et al., 2001). Thus, a person with low self-efficacy will tend to discouraged and give up when encountering difficulties (Vuong et al., 2010). As a result, self-efficacy is the key factor which student success in university. Students should believe they can succeed in their universities. Otherwise, there is little reason to continue to try them best to do so.

Self-efficacy is learned, but not born. While students got progress at beginning of their first year of study, they would believe in their capacity to succeed as it is that they believe they can as the result their early experiences (Gore et al., 2006). It should be pointed out that students' belief in their ability to succeed is not just an academic problem. It can

also reflect their views on their ability to manage the larger task of the University, while trying to manage other responsibilities. This is just one of the reasons why first generation and low-income college students and those who have responsibilities outside the campus are on average more likely to complete than full-time non-first-generation students.

When people involved in activities, they are influenced by personal factors such as goal setting and information processing, as well as situational factors. From these factors, people can find out how they perform. Motivation and self-efficacy increase when people think they are skilled or more capable. Lack of success or slow progress does not necessarily reduce self-efficacy and motivation if individuals think they can perform better by adjusting their methods (Schunk, 1989).

A student's level of self-efficacy, which is largely determined by prior experience, can also support, predict, or determine his level of motivation along the indices of active choice and effort (Tzeng, 2009). The impact of efficacious beliefs is evident in the types of academic tasks set by students, according to Tzeng (2009) those with higher self-efficacy usually undertake more challenging tasks, which increase motivation and commitment toward the accomplishment of them. In essence, self-efficacy molds subsequent behaviors and beliefs. Self-efficacy has also been shown to predict the level of persistence and the degree of success within an academic major at the undergraduate level (Wang & Newlin, 2000).

### 2.3 Goal Setting as a factor to persist

Goal setting is an important factor affecting achievement results: self-efficacy, motivation and performance (Bandura, 1988; Locke & Latham, 1990). According to Locke and Latham, goals indirectly affect behavior through their impact on cognitive and motivational mechanisms. First, goals motivate people to make efforts to complete tasks and stick to them over time. Greater effort and perseverance will get good performance. Second, goals direct personal attention to related tasks, behaviors to be performed and potential results, and can also affect the processing of information. Goals can give people focus, let them continue to complete tasks, choose appropriate strategies, and determine the effectiveness of methods, all of which may improve performance.

Goal setting have a beneficial impact on self-efficacy (Bandura, 1988; Schunk, 1989). People with clear goals will experience the self-efficacy of achieving goals and actively engage in activities they think will lead to goal achievement. Self-efficacy is confirmed because people know the progress of goals and prove that they are becoming proficient (Elliott & Dweck, 1988). The progress of goals will also feedback self-efficacy, and improved self-efficacy

can maintain motivation and promote effect (Schunk, 1989).

Carver and Scheier (1990) described how the progress of goals influence affects. When progress is considered to occur faster than the specified goal, the feeling is fully positive, while when progress is considered to occur slower than the standard, the feeling is negative. The benefits of goals mainly come from the goal attributes of proximity, specificity and difficulty (Bandura, 1988; Locke & Latham, 1990).

Students' goals for university may also be different. Some students may be concerned about the internal benefits of university learning (such as learning, development, autonomy), others are more interested in the external benefits of university learning (such as income, career, continuing education). But not all students know their goals for college. Unclear reasons will undermine academic persistence (Diesche, 2009). Others may be only a slight commitment to achieving their goals. Even a small thing will shake their motivation to persist.

Different character, intensity and clarity of student goals because students with different motivations and goals to college and university seem be differentially affected by their experiences of studies (Guiffrida et al., 2013). That means it may be a functional way to enhance persistence by find out the clear goal-setting and perceptions of the value or worth of their studies.

### 2.4 Belongingness as a factor to persist

The need to belong has been found to be a fundamental human motivation because it causes goal-oriented behavior (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Belongingness is an internalized construct that is largely dependent on internal perceptions of external, environmental forces, such as group influences upon individuals and a purveying sense of community in group interactions (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Ryan and Deci (2000) used the term "relatedness" to describe student sense of belonging, and similar with the argument set by Maslow (1954) that belongingness is a basic human need that must be actualized in order fulfill higher level needs.

Baumeister and Leary (1995) argued that there were two essential characteristics of belongingness: the relatedness (internalized feelings of group affiliation) and interaction (regular interactions with peers). The problem of Freshmen's sense of belonging is that the unfamiliar environment at the time of enrollment leads them to worry that they have no sense of belonging. It is most directly affected by the campus climate and the daily interaction between students and other students, teaching staff and managers on campus. For this reason, contact with others on campus is important. But what is important is not the participation itself, but because students gain the academic

and social views of the university through this participation, they gain a sense of belongings (Strayhorn, 2012).

A study conducted by Hoyle and Crawford (1994) found that student sense of belonging to a given university setting was strongly connected to social involvement in university activities. Baumeister and Leary (1995) illustrated that regular interaction was a necessary component to feelings of belonging. Tinto (2016), suggested that freshmen should developing a sense of academic and social belonging during the first year in order to facilitate other forms of engagement that enhance student learning and completion.

### 2.5 Theoretical Framework

Based on the literature review above, the theoretical framework of the study focuses on the following models.

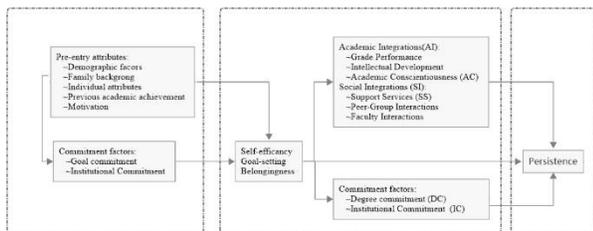


Figure 3: Theoretical Framework  
Source: Researcher, 2021

### 2.6 Conceptual Framework

Previous researches expressed the correlation of freshmen’s persistence, which means through the improving of self-efficacy, goal-setting and belongingness, the persistence can be enhanced. In this research persistence is dependent variables, and self-efficacy, goal-setting and belongingness is the independent variable.

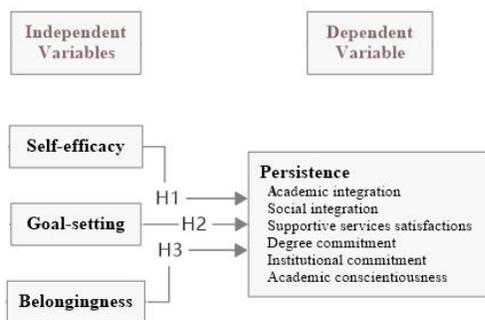


Figure 4: Conceptual Framework  
Source: Researcher, 2021

## 3. Research Methodology

### 3.1 Research design

A two-phase sequential quantitative research method was used in this research. The survey data was collected at first, then the second phase to be initiated to collected and analyzed interview data to expand upon the first phase responses. The survey data gave a general understanding of the factors affecting persistence at HIU, the interview data enhanced the survey data by providing further illustrations to questions. Questionnaire was developed in three parts which are 1) Demographic of participators including age, gender, grade, family child status, generation of family education, top-up students or general students. 2) Five-point Likert’s scale questions to gauge respondents’ attitude on commitment, social and academic integration etc. which will determine the persistence variable factors. 3) Five-point Likert’s scale questions to collect the respondents’ attitude on goal-setting, self-efficacy and belongingness.

The action research utilized quantitative analysis of students’ persistence, feedback from a Likert scaled questionnaire, and overall self-efficacy, goal-setting and belongingness factors attending the university tracking those who do participate in the FYE program in HIU. The implementation of quantitative method is made up by several parts, this can be illustrated by focusing on the first aspect of the survey, which includes the Likert scale question and several open-ended responses that collect initial data. An in-depth analysis of key topics was combined with a series of follow-up interviews that included a subset of the target population. By comparing the results of quantitative data, the researchers were able to summarize the relative validity of the program and correlate it with insights.

### 3.2 Sample population and sampling procedure

The population for this study includes all 2021 first-year students enrolled at Business English Department in HIU. The specific sample of participants was acquired through convenience, in that they are in the general natural class the fall of 2021. The staff of students’ affairs act as OD practitioner of FYE seminars arranged for access and connection with a set of these courses that were compatible with the researcher’s time for potential visits. The total freshmen student’s population enrolled in the Business Department in HIU is 212 during the Fall of 2021. The sample stemmed from FYE courses in their first semester. The typical class size for these seminars is 25-32 students, these students can be seen as the research population of this research. Hair et al., (2009) defined the research population as the target group of people who share the same elements, for example, can provide needed information and are relevant to the research project. The research population can

be seen as a cluster of people that has shared characteristics (Zikmund et al., 2013). And it can be considered as an overall collection of respondents that belong to the chosen group (Burns & Grove, 1997).

### 3.3 Instrumentation and Research Instruments, Tools

#### Instrumentation – Design of Questionnaire

A questionnaire is modified based on previous research on freshmen's self-efficacy, goal-setting, belongingness and persistence, and then used the index of item-objective congruence (IOC) to verify all used questions. The questionnaire was divided into two sections. The first section included demographic questions on age, gender, grade, family child status, generation of family education, top-up students or general students. The second section are focus on freshman's self-efficacy, goal-setting, belongingness and persistence which includes questions about the following variables:

A 7-item modified General Self-Efficacy Exam is utilized, this survey was original designed by Croasmun and Ostrom (2011), responses will be along a 5-point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The Goal Orientation Scale is utilized to measure students' learning goal orientations before and after of FYE programs which are 5 questions along a 5-point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The Belongingness Survey is modified from the Confirmatory Four-Factor Model, developed by Summers et al., (2005). The scale that is modified from Lee and Robbins' (1995) Social Connectedness Scale to reflect the sense of belonging felt by students in a college setting. The College Persistence Questionnaire is modified from studies on the Likert scale, that was created by Davidson et al., (2009).

#### Instrumentation – Validity Analysis

In quantitative research, the reliability and validity of research methods and measurements must be considered. Validity is the instrument's degree. It is a term that refers to the degree to which measuring tools or means are capable of accurately measuring the objects being measured. The more consistent the measured results are with the content under investigation, the greater the validity; on the other hand, the lower the validity.

The term "content validity" refers to the process of determining if a test is reflective of the entire construct. To generate accurate results, a test, survey, or measuring method's content must encompass all important aspects of the issue being measured. Validity is undermined when some components of the measurement are omitted (or when irrelevant aspects are included). To ensure the content validity of research tools, this study used an index of item-objective congruence (IOC). The IOC approach is

appropriate for this study since it allows for the validation of content by comparing items to objectives.

Prior to being utilized as the final instruments, all questions must be examined, scored, and subjected to the appropriate statistical process (Zikmund, 2000). Two experts from Assumption University Thailand who are outstanding scholars in OD field, and two from Heilongjiang International University China who are PhDs in the field of education, the fifth expert for Heilongjiang University who is professor in Business English, they evaluated the questionnaire's content validity in this study.

Each item is scored by experts on a scale of -1 to +1; congruent items receive a score of +1, questionable items receive a score of 0, and incongruent items receive a score of -1. (Hambleton, 1978). The average IOC score for each item is calculated by multiplying the ratings of all experts by the number of experts. A value of IOC greater than or equal to 0.75 is acceptable (Turner & Carlson, 2003). As a result, values having a score of less than 0.75 must be reassessed. The 40 items in this study had a score greater than 0.75, indicating that they were interpreted appropriately. Finally, this measure encompasses four dimensions: persistence (23 items) includes academic integration (4 items), institutional commitment (4 items), supportive services satisfactions (4 items), social integration (4 items), degree commitment (4 items), and academic conscientiousness (3 items), the independent variables: self-efficacy (7 items), goal-setting (5 items), Belongingness (5 items) and the questionnaire has total of 40 questions.

#### Instrumentation – Reliability Analysis Data Collection

Reliability is critical while developing an ideal questionnaire. Cronbach's Alpha (CA) reliability was examined in this study using a cohort of 200 students to determine the reliability of each item in the construct; Suggested that CA is the most appropriate method for examining the reliability of this study measurement prior to issuing the questionnaire to the target group because it used five-point Likert scales to denote reliability. Each construct's alpha coefficient should be equal to or greater than 0.60, which is considered an acceptable number (Sekaran, 1992).

The reliability test was conducted on 200 first-year students who major in international marketing from Economic and Finance Department. Cronbach's Alpha was calculated to determine the questionnaire's internal consistency. Cronbach's Alpha values for the independent variables, including persistence, self-efficacy, goal-setting, and belongingness are 0.918, 0.602, 0.759 and 0.786. As indicated in the Table 1, the instrument's overall Cronbach Alpha value is greater than 0.60, scales with a ta coefficient alpha of between 0.75 and 0.9 are considered to have strong reliability. L. J. Cronbach (1951). Due to the internal

consistency of the constructs, the questionnaire is reliable for future use.

**Table 1:** Caption Questionnaire Reliability Testing of Each Construct (n=200)

Variables	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha in pilot study (n=200)
Persistence	23	0.918
Self-efficacy	7	0.602
Goal-setting	5	0.759
Belongingness	5	0.786

Source: Created by researcher, 2021

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

All the research respondents are the fresh students in year 2021. All the basic information can be concluded in the following table 2.

**Table 2:** Demographic Frequency (n=200)

Demographic factors		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Gender	Male	28	14%	14%
	Female	172	86%	86%
Grade	Year 1	200	100%	100%
	Other	0	0%	0%
Age	18	6	3%	3%
	19	142	71%	71%
	20	44	22%	22%
	21	1	0.5%	0.5%
	22	7	3.5%	3.5%
Nationality	Han	180	90%	90%
	Minority	20	10%	10%
Type of Student	General 4-year student	200	100%	100%
	Top-up student	0	0%	0%
First Generation student	Yes	140	70%	70%
	No	60	30%	30%

Source: Created by researcher, 2021

This information above reveals the gender imbalance situation in language-oriented college, samples are all from 2021 Year 1 freshmen, the sample age is 18–22-year-old 2021 high school graduates and in terms of age distribution, they are all traditional-aged students. the 90% samples are Han and 10% Minority. 100% of samples are general 4-year undergraduate students. The 70% samples are First-Generation students and 30% are Non-First-Generation students. These factors above have been critical elements that have been addressed in designing, implementing, and expanding FYE seminar courses. Using purposive sampling was considered as one of the limitations of this research. This issue was considered as one limitation which might influence the research results.

### 4.2 Results of Multiple linear regression

Multiple linear regression has run three times to test the impact related on each independent variables to dependent variable.

Table 3 shows the relationship of independent variables which are self-efficacy, goal-setting and belongingness and dependent variable which is persistence. R square value is 0.551, which illustrates those independent variables account for 55.1% of dependent variables. In addition, the result of significant value ( $P < 0.05$ ) shows that all the independent variables have impact on the dependent variable, and goal-setting has more influential ability with 39.3% on persistence.

**Table 3:** The Multiple linear results of self-efficacy, goal-setting and belongingness on freshmen's persistence

Variables	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	p-value	R Square
Self-efficacy	.267	4.137	.000	.551
Goal-setting	.393	5.781	.000	
Belongingness	.203	3.367	.001	
Dependent variable: Persistence				

Source: Created by researcher, 2021

From the Multiple linear regression analyses, Null hypothesis Ho1, Ho2, and Ho3 were rejected, therefore, alternative hypothesis Ha1, Ha2, and Ha3 were accepted. As a result, the result demonstrated a significant impact of self-efficacy, goal-setting and belongingness on freshmen's persistence in experimental group.

Therefore,

Ha1: Self-efficacy has a significant impact on freshmen's persistence.

Ha2: Goal-setting has a significant impact on freshmen's persistence.

Ha3: Belongingness has a significant impact on freshmen's persistence.

The three Hypothesis are supported by the MLR results.

### 4.3 Discussion

From the study, it was found that self-efficacy, goal setting, and belongingness have a significant impact on the persistence of freshmen, but whether it is significant effected and enhanced after the FYE program? Will there be a significant change in these three factors after a period of time when new students are enrolled? As we know, Organization Development Intervention is a set of sequential and planned activities, in which groups or individuals aim to achieve organizational effectiveness or personal development, is that the ODI help FYE? What kind of ODIs will used to enhance the effectiveness of new student persistence?

To sum it up, there are two research questions need to be discovered in the further study: What are the appropriate Organization Development Interventions on self-efficacy, goal-setting and belongingness to improve freshmen's persistence? Are there any differences of self-efficacy, goal-setting, belongingness and freshmen's persistence between the pre- and post-ODI phases?

## 5. Conclusions

The empirical evidence suggests that self-efficacy, goal-setting and belongingness can be used to impact freshman students' persistence. In response to the need for this action research, the development of self-efficacy, goal-setting and belongingness skills was achieved in this study. This focus is important but insufficient, because practices good for FYE may not be beneficial for freshman students' persistence, for example, the practitioners are suggested to have other ways to motive low self-efficacy students. In designing FYE procedures, we need to ask how they might affect a broad range of outcomes including self-efficacy, goal-setting and belongingness. Additionally, this research has supported the focal organization in moving towards its vision and mission, and may step a positive footprint towards future growth.

## 6. Recommendations

Some potential recommendations of the theory and research results for freshmen's education are as follows:

Firstly, to assess how procedures affect self-efficacy. Model competence is critical which make excellent models for freshman students' skills and raising their self-efficacy.

Verbal persuasion works well for improving self-efficacy, tutors need talk with students confidently.

Secondly, a SMART goal should be set in the FYE program design. The long-range goals can mobilize efforts, for example to help student to earn a degree. The short-range goal improved students' confident to engage performance. Moreover, specific and measurable goals will have potential feedback for students striving work.

Finally, building up students' belongingness as soon as possible during the FYE stage. Practitioners are suggested to use of better strategies to close up the relationship between staff and freshmen, to help them know about school, to build up belongingness and make students ingroup members.

In addition, the results of impact on freshmen's persistence should be further studied by using quantitative data analysis to test the effect ODIs in FYE program. This would provide a stronger case to test the impact.

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