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ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION: THE ROLE OF SELF-EFFICACY, GOAL SETTING AND BLENDED LEARNING

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Abstract: *Past studies have acknowledged that individual students' psychological factors significantly influence academic performance positively, thus making more supportive attitudes and behaviours of the students. Despite a wide range of research on self-efficacy, goal setting, and performance in education, only limited attention has been given to explore the mechanisms that underlie these relationships. To fill this loophole, the present research connects the existing studies by showing the academic performance as a result of psychological and contextual factors and conceptually discusses the potential moderating variable of blended learning. Hence, the current paper is designed with a primary goal of putting forward propositions regarding the moderating effect of blended learning on the relationships between self-efficacy, goal-setting and academic performance. The Social Cognitive Theory is adopted as the theoretical foundation for discussing the relationships among the variables.*

Keywords: *Self-efficacy, Goal Setting, Blended Learning, Academic Performance*

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Introduction

Earlier studies have shown students' academic performance has been linked to the presence of individual and institutional factors. In recent years, the emphasis has shifted to focus more on how the digital revolution shapes the way students learn and transforms the face of education (Qureshi et al., 2021). Traditional classroom method no longer provides an engaging and immediate learning environment. With smartphones and other technological devices becoming widespread among the general public including students, educational institutions can make efficient use of them by integrating the technology into the classroom (Haleem et al., 2022). As such, technological integration is seen as one part of the whole psychological and behavioural factors that need to be considered for academic success. Thus, focusing solely on students' psychological and behavioural factors is insufficient as effective technological integration is also necessary in ensuring good academic performance.

Self-efficacy and goal setting have been acknowledged as important factors affecting academic success. Students with high self-efficacy show greater persistence and resilience and make better use of effective learning strategies. On the other hand, goal setting helps students in various ways such as directing their effort, controlling their behaviour, and monitoring their progress. However, the learning environment may influence the magnitude of these individual factors' consequences on academic performance. One of the more recent approaches to education is blended learning. Blended learning improves learning effectiveness by allowing learners to study at their own pace, offering the most current information, and facilitating immediate discussions over the network (Al-Shunnaq and Bani Domi, 2010; Tabassum et al., 2024). The impact of blended learning on the relationship between self-efficacy, goal setting, and academic performance could be positive depending on how it would affect the students' learning experiences and self-regulation opportunities (Warren et al., 2021, Abdissa et al., 2025).

Overall, this study demonstrates its value by positioning blended learning as an active factor influencing the relationship between self-efficacy and goal setting on academic performance. The propose framework integrates motivational theories with learning environments to provide better understanding of students' academic performance. It offers theoretical value by extending existing models to include situated learning conditions. The findings are expected to guide educators in designing blended learning environments that enhance student confidence, goal clarity and academic performance.

Problem Statement

Self-efficacy and goal setting have been thoroughly researched as independent predictors of academic performance in previous studies. However, the majority of these studies tend to overlook the role of learning environments as contextual factors that determine the extent to which psychological attributes affect the learning outcomes. Despite the growing adoption of blended learning in higher education, empirical understanding of how this method interacts with students' psychological traits to influence academic results remains limited. Therefore, this study proposes blended learning as an essential contextual factor that enhances student performance through improved self-efficacy and goal-setting behaviour.

However, prior studies have reported inconsistent findings regarding the influence of self-efficacy on academic performance (Honicke et al., 2023). Although a substantial body of

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research supports the effect of self-efficacy on academic performance, other studies indicate that academic performance has stronger effect on self-efficacy. This reciprocal relationship that exists between the two concepts suggests that self-efficacy alone may be insufficient to sustain academic success. Supportive and conducive educational environments such as blended learning are required to help students to translate their beliefs into good performance.

Meanwhile, according to Alessandri et al. (2020), establishing goals helps students achieve good academic outcomes as it motivates them to attain their desired results. Despite past studies finding a positive effect of goal setting on academic performance, its effectiveness may depend on the educational setting in which goals are pursued (Langat et al., 2024). Blended learning environments provide students with three essential components which include flexible pacing and continuous feedback as well as structured online activities to help them create specific challenging and actionable goals. Yet, empirical work rarely investigate how blended learning may strengthen the relationship between students' goal setting behaviour and their academic success. The absence of structured and supportive learning context such as blended learning may lead to poor goals, thereby weakening their potential to enhance academic performance.

Although blended learning is increasingly being used in higher education, the research has been limited to examining its role as a contextual factor that moderates the influence of students' psychological attributes on academic outcomes rather than something central or active component. Therefore, this conceptual paper intends to fill this gap by proposing blended learning as a moderating variable in the relationships between self-efficacy, goal setting, and academic performance. In this framework, blended learning is treated as an active moderator that shapes the strength between self-efficacy, goal setting and academic performance. Unravelling the moderating mechanism is important for educators and institutions to design effective learning environments. Hence, this paper proposes a theoretically grounded framework to better understanding the interaction of blended learning with self-efficacy and goal setting leading in influencing academic performance which remains underexplored.

Literature Review

Academic Performance

Academic performance describes the level of students' success in achieving their educational objectives and is often quantified by grades, test results, cumulative grade point average (CGPA), course completions, or learning outcomes. It is an important factor used to measure the quality of education and student success at any level of education (Anthonysamy et al., 2020; Langat et al., 2024). While earlier perspectives primarily emphasized on cognitive outcomes, recent research (i.e; Palos et al., 2011; Hussaini and Hussain, 2023) recognizes academic performance as a more complicated construct in which it is affected by various factors such as motivational, cognitive and contextual factors. In addition, different types of environmental factors may directly and indirectly be involved in students' future academic performance (Hussaini and Hussain, 2023). In other words, students' psychological attributes such as self-efficacy and goal setting behaviour play a critical role in determining their academic results. However, the magnitude to which these attributes affect performance varies depending on the surrounding learning environment. Therefore, this study suggests that both individual and contextual factors play integral roles in determining academic performance of students.

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Self-Efficacy

Bandura (2002) defines self-efficacy as an individual's belief in his or her own capabilities to successfully manage or perform specific tasks or achieve particular goals. Past studies consistently demonstrates that students with high self-efficacy is likely to show greater persistence and effort especially when facing challenging learning situations (Warren et al., 2021; Artino, 2012). In addition, Escobar et al., (2022) and Meng and Zhang (2023) found that academic self-efficacy, which is the confidence of students in their abilities to carry out the learning tasks successfully, has been a consistent factor in forecasting academic achievement, effort, and persistence. This contends self-efficacy as a critical predictor to academic performance and may outweighing many other psychosocial variables (Meng and Zhang, 2023; Alzabidi et al., 2024; Robbins et al., 2004). However, this study suggests self-efficacy does not operate in isolation. This is because, from the understanding of Social Cognitive Theory by Bandura (2002), learning outcomes are determined by the interaction of personal, behavioural and environmental factors. Therefore, the effectiveness of self-efficacy is shaped through learning environment, in which students need suitable conditions to manifest their confidence into academic outcomes. That is, the dynamics of blended learning environments that are difference in structure, interaction and flexibility may influence how self-efficacy is translated in good academic performance.

Goal-Setting

Goal setting refers to the process of defining desired outcomes by individuals and regulate their actions accordingly (Alessandri et al., 2020). The concept is mainly described through Goal Setting Theory (Locke and Latham, 2002) which asserts specific and challenging goals are found to enhance focus, effort and persistence thus leading to better performance compared to vague or easy goals (Alessandri, 2020). In educational institutions, this proposed that students with clear academic goals are more likely to engage in self-regulated learning behaviours such as planning their learning activities, monitoring and reflecting on their progress (Dekker et al., 2023). However, the effectiveness of goal setting in not consistent across situations. Evidence stated that goal setting strategies together with structured conditions will lead to stronger outcomes especially through feedback and reflection (Panadero et al., 2023). In particular, this study argues that goal-setting alone may fall short in manifesting excellent academic performance as it impacts may be influenced by the learning environment. This implies blended learning may play a critical role in strengthening the influence of goal-setting behaviours on students' academic performance.

Blended Learning

According to Daskan and Yildiz (2020), blended learning is an instructional method that has been commonly defined as one that intentionally combines traditional classroom teaching with online learning activities to improve learning outcomes. The main goal of blended learning is not just to use technology but also to combine the advantages of both physical and digital learning environments. Blended learning lies in the middle of the spectrum between traditional face-to-face and total online instructions, with the amount of each component changing based on learning goals, types of students, and school situation. Because of its adaptability, blended learning is a popular choice in higher education nowadays (Mohammadi et al., 2025). Therefore, this study argues the functions of blended learning as a condition, rather than a driver. In other words, blended learning alone does not guarantee performance as students in blended learning setting still can poorly performed. Rather than directly influence students'

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academic performance, blended learning affects how strongly self-efficacy and goal setting behaviours can be effectively manifested into good academic performance. Prior studies (i.e., Gibbons and Raker, 2018; Schober et al., 2018; Urgo and Arguello, 2024) found that self-efficacy and goal setting do not operate in isolation in influencing performance but are contextual-dependent, realizing the important of learning environment. In this regard, blended learning provides interactive conditions that facilitate the translation of students' self-efficacy and goal setting onto their academic performance, suggesting the moderating effect of blended learning.

Social Cognitive Theory

The current research is based on Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986), which asserts that the outcomes of learning are determined by the interplay of personal factors, behavioural processes, and environmental effects. This study proposes that self-efficacy is the most significant personal factor that affects motivation and persistence, and goal setting is a self-regulation behavioural process through which students channel their efforts and keep track of their progress. Blended learning, on the other hand, is the environmental component that offers instructional structure, feedback, and opportunities for interaction.

Blended learning in this study proposed to act as the factor that determines the degree to which self-efficacy and goal-setting behaviours are manifested in academic performance. This study believes that a well-structured blended learning environment can confound the students' confidence positively by providing them with mastery experiences, peer interaction, and quick feedback, thereby reinforcing self-efficacy. Then, higher self-efficacy will, in a way, play the role of the protective structure for the creation of easier and more challenging academic goals. Eventually, these phenomena are believed to lead to the enhancement of academic performance. Social Cognitive Theory serves as the foundation for this study that asserts self-efficacy and goal-setting are linked positively and directly to academic performance. High self-efficacy students shall yield better academic results owing to their motivation, persistence, and effective learning strategies. In the same vein, students who set precise and demanding academic goals are likely to monitor their effort and reach the level of performance higher than they did before.

Proposition Development

As suggested by Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986), high self-efficacy and effective goal-setting shall yield better academic results as the results of students' motivation, persistence, and effective learning strategies. Blended learning is proposed as a contextual moderator that influences the strength of these relationships. A blended learning environment may magnify the effects of self-efficacy and goal setting on academic success as long as it supports feedback and interaction as well as autonomy to the users. Meanwhile, poorly designed blended learning environments may weaken these relationships, thereby hampering academic performance. Consequently, the following propositions are proposed for further study.

Proposition 1: Self-efficacy is positively related to academic performance.
Proposition 2: Goal setting is positively related to academic performance.
Proposition 3: Blended learning moderates the relationship between self-efficacy and academic performance.

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Proposition 4: Blended learning moderates the relationship between goal-setting and academic performance.

Figure 1 illustrates the proposed conceptual framework, highlighting the direct effects of self-efficacy and goal setting on academic performance and the moderating role of blended learning.

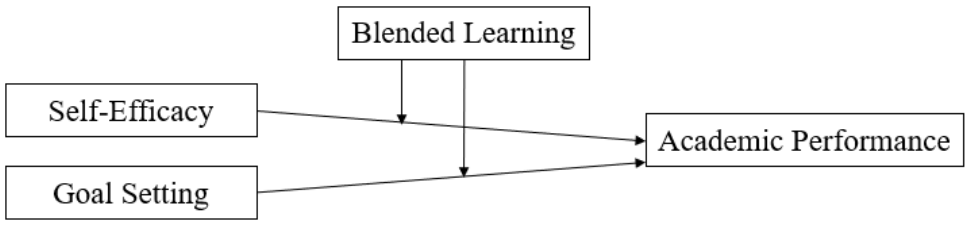

Figure 1: Proposed Relationship Between Self-Efficacy, Goal Setting, Blended Learning and Academic Performance

Source: Developed by the Researchers based on Relevant Theories and Empirical Studies

Discussion and Conclusion

Blended learning is viewed as a contextual moderator that can impact the strength of the proposed relationships. Blended learning environments in which autonomy, feedback, and interaction are prevalent are believed to boost the influences of self-efficacy and setting of goals on academic performance. Theoretical exploration of this paper leads to recognizing academic performance in terms of the integration of self-efficacy, goal setting, and blended learning through the lens of Social Cognitive Theory. In keeping with the concept of reciprocal determinism, the suggested conceptual framework views academic performance as a result of the interaction between personal beliefs, self-regulatory behaviours, and environmental factors.

In the proposed framework, self-efficacy is considered as primary motivator for human behaviour while goal setting is treated as a non-cognitive mechanism through which students convert their motivation into productive educational activities. The major significance of this study is treating blended learning as both learning environment and moderating variable that affect the psychological traits-academic performance relationships. In which, blended learning is seen as an environment that foster the impact of students' motivational behaviours (self-efficacy and goal setting) on their academic success. This framework is aligned with modern learning environment that integrate technology into the classroom.

As the conclusion, social cognitive theory explains how self-efficacy and goal setting interact with blended learning to produce academic outcomes. This study not only widens the scope of existing theoretical applications but also gives important implications to the theory and practical aspects. The findings can help educational institutions to establish high-quality blended learning environments that support the development of students' self-efficacy and goal setting skills. The propositions are expected to serve as a basis for future empirical studies which will take place through longitudinal or experimental studies across different educational settings.

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