Trifecta of Motivation on Work Interest at STIE Ciputra Makassar

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Abstract

While Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is widely used to explain academic motivation, its integration with McClelland's learned needs—particularly in the context of emerging economies' business education—remains underexplored. This study aims to examine the influence of intrinsic motivation, self-competence, and affiliation on work interest among students at a University in Makassar, an entrepreneurship-focused institution. Specifically, it seeks to identify how the tension between collectivist social needs (affiliation) and meritocratic professional demands (competence) shapes career readiness. A quantitative approach was employed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) via WarpPLS. Data were collected from 180 students using proportionate stratified random sampling. The model integrates SDT's basic psychological needs with McClelland's motivational indicators to provide a nuanced analysis of career drivers. The results indicate that intrinsic motivation and self-competence are the dominant predictors of work interest, slightly outweighing affiliation. All three dimensions have a significant positive effect, collectively explaining 63% of the variance in work interest. This study offers a theoretical contribution by establishing a boundary condition for SDT in Indonesian higher education. It reveals that in entrepreneurship-oriented curricula, the traditional cultural emphasis on 'affiliation' is secondary to 'self-competence' due to the rising meritocratic pressures of the modern labour market. This finding challenges the assumption that collectivist contexts always prioritise social relatedness, suggesting instead that professional identity formation shifts student priorities towards internal drive and capability. Practically, this finding suggests that universities should balance collaborative activities with rigorous competency-based training to effectively foster true career readiness.

Keywords: Intrinsic Motivation, Self-Competence, Affiliation, Work Interest, Self-Determination Theory, Entrepreneurial Education

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INTRODUCTION

Student learning motivation in the context of higher education is a crucial factor that not only influences academic success (Kamberi, 2025; Shen et al., 2024) but also plays a significant role in shaping their interests and readiness to face the world of work after completing their studies (Jackson & Criado-Perez, 2024; Vermeeren & Van Der Heijden, 2022). Universities not only aim to produce intellectually superior graduates but are also expected to produce individuals who are mentally, emotionally, and professionally prepared to compete in an increasingly competitive and dynamic labour market (Ochoa et al., 2016; Tushar & Sooraksa, 2023). Therefore, learning motivation is the main key that encourages students to be more active in participating in the learning process (Jeno et al., 2019), increase participation in extracurricular activities (Hughes et al., 2016; Hui et al., 2021; Verner-Filion et al., 2025), and build awareness of the importance of self-development and career readiness from an early age (Lisa et al., 2023; Magallanes, 2022). Various recent studies confirm that learning motivation is a psychological process that provides energy, direction, and persistence to student behaviour in academic contexts (Putra, 2021; Ryan & Deci, 2020). Learning motivation can be classified into intrinsic motivation, which originates from within the student, and extrinsic motivation, which is influenced by external factors. Furthermore, self-efficacy also plays a significant role in increasing student motivation and persistence in facing learning challenges (Purnomo et al., 2024). External factors such as a conducive learning environment, social support, and innovations in educational technology also contribute positively to increasing student learning motivation (Patall et al., 2013; Reeve & Cheon, 2021).

Within the framework of motivation theory by Abdullah et al., (2025); McClelland, (1973) suggests that motivation can be classified into three main indicators: achievement motivation, competence motivation, and affiliation motivation. Achievement motivation reflects students' drive to excel, succeed, and achieve specific goals in the workplace, with indicators such as the desire to work quickly, be recognised, and contribute significantly. Competence motivation relates to the drive to feel capable and expert in a field of interest, reflected in the desire to master a particular field, improve skills, and gain confidence. Meanwhile, affiliation motivation reflects students' need to build social relationships, work together in teams, and be accepted in a supportive work environment. Student career interest, as the dependent variable, is a manifestation of students' interest and readiness to enter the workforce after graduation. Indicators of career interest encompass the desire to work immediately, the alignment of the field of work with the major, and a professional career orientation that includes readiness to advance in the career ladder, loyalty to a specific field, and efforts to establish a professional reputation (Karwayu et al., 2025). Previous research has shown that strong learning motivation, especially that based on McClelland's three motivational indicators, contributes positively to students' career interest (Abdullah et al., 2025).

While Self-Determination Theory (SDT) has been extensively validated in Western educational contexts, limited research examines how its core constructs interact with McClelland’s learned social needs—specifically Affiliation—within the unique setting of

Indonesian entrepreneurial higher education. Most existing studies treat motivation as a universal construct, often overlooking the boundary conditions imposed by cultural transitions and institutional curricula. In Indonesia, a collectivist society increasingly driven by a competitive, meritocratic digital economy, students face a psychological tension between the traditional value of social harmony (affiliation) and the modern demand for individual professional competence. This study addresses this gap by integrating SDT with McClelland's framework to explore these dynamics at a University Makassar, an institution known for its entrepreneurship-focused curriculum. The theoretical novelty of this research lies in identifying whether the 'professionalisation' process in business education shifts the primary driver of career interest from social acceptance (affiliation) to self-efficacy (competence) and internal drive (intrinsic). By establishing these boundary conditions, this study moves beyond simple confirmation of SDT, offering a nuanced view of how motivational structures adapt in emerging economies' business sectors.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) has long been the gold standard for understanding human motivation, positing that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are universal psychological needs (Ryan & Deci, 2020). However, a critical review of recent literature reveals a significant gap: most studies apply SDT in its generic form, often overlooking how these basic needs manifest specifically in professional and entrepreneurial contexts. For instance, while 'relatedness' in SDT broadly refers to social connection, it fails to capture the nuanced drive for 'affiliation'—the strategic need for networking and team acceptance described by (McClelland, 1973)—which is crucial in business environments. This study positions itself at the intersection of SDT and McClelland's framework. We argue that McClelland's indicators provide the necessary contextual specificity to SDT's broad constructs within business education. Specifically, intrinsic motivation aligns with internal drive; self-competence bridges psychological efficacy with professional mastery; and affiliation operationalises 'relatedness' into a tangible professional need. Based on this integration, we propose the following hypotheses, supported by recent empirical evidence.

The Influence of Intrinsic Motivation on Work Interest (H1)

Intrinsic motivation refers to the drive from within an individual that emerges without external pressure and is characterised by a desire for development, challenge, and enjoyment in activities (Ryan & Deci, 2020). In the context of career readiness, students with high intrinsic motivation view work as a platform for self-actualisation rather than merely an economic necessity. Empirical evidence strongly supports the link between intrinsic motivation and work interest. First, Johansen et al., (2023) found that when academic content is perceived as relevant to real-world problems, students' intrinsic motivation increases significantly, which directly boosts their clarity and interest in future career paths. Second, Gan et al., (2023) demonstrated that intrinsic drive is a key predictor of sustained engagement in learning tasks, which translates into higher professional readiness and a proactive attitude towards job seeking. Third, a recent

study by Kholifah et al., (2025) in the context of vocational and business graduates confirmed that the internal desire for upskilling and mastery is a primary driver of workforce entry intent, outweighing external rewards such as salary alone. These studies collectively suggest that fostering internal drive is crucial for shaping robust work interest. Therefore, it is hypothesized that: **H1: Intrinsic motivation has a positive effect on the work interest of a University in Makassar students.**

The Influence of Self-Competence on Work Interest (H2)

Self-competence, often operationalised as self-efficacy or perceived competence, refers to students' belief in their abilities, skills, and expertise to perform specific tasks (Kholifah et al., 2025). According to self-determination theory, competence is a basic psychological need; when satisfied, it fosters the internalisation of motivation and proactive behaviour. Several studies highlight the critical role of self-competence in career decision-making. Pignault et al., (2023) showed that students with higher self-efficacy report stronger career intentions and significantly lower anxiety about job hunting, as they feel equipped to handle professional challenges. Furthermore, Jiang et al., (2024) emphasised that competency beliefs are essential in translating academic skills into concrete career interests, particularly in competitive fields where confidence determines persistence. Additionally, (Chen et al., 2021) found that students with strong beliefs in their academic and practical abilities are more resilient after failures and adapt more quickly to new professional environments, thereby maintaining their interest in pursuing careers in their field of study. Thus, feeling competent is a prerequisite for developing genuine work interest. Therefore, it is hypothesized that: **H2: Self-competence has a positive effect on the work interest of a University in Makassar students.**

The Influence of Affiliation on Work Interest (H3)

Affiliation motivation reflects the need to establish positive social relationships, feel accepted in a group, and work in a collaborative environment (Purnomo et al., 2024). In the workplace, this translates to a preference for inclusive cultures, teamwork, and social support systems. Research indicates that affiliation needs significantly shape career preferences. Steinmann et al., (2016) argued that individuals with high affiliation needs are driven towards collaborative work environments, influencing their job choice and satisfaction levels. Supporting this, Rodjanatham & Badir (2025) recently found that affiliation motives significantly impact collaboration intentions, which are crucial for modern team-based workplaces, thereby affecting students' interest in roles that offer strong social connectivity. Moreover, Fischer (2021) noted that individuals with high affiliate motivation are more productive and engaged when they perceive strong social support, suggesting that the anticipation of a supportive work environment enhances their interest in entering the workforce. Hence, the social dimension of work is a key determinant of career interest. Therefore, it is hypothesized that: **H3: Affiliation has a positive effect on the work interest of a University in Makassar students.**

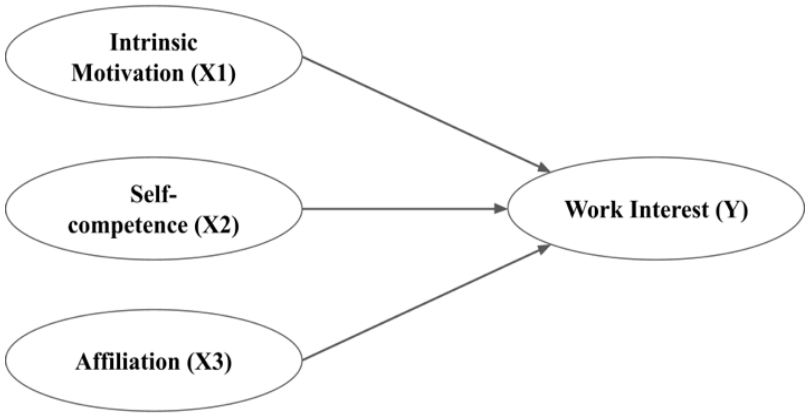

Figure 1. Research Model

METHODS

This study employs a quantitative approach, emphasising measurement and factor analysis to provide findings. This calls for the use of specific statistical methods and the examination of numerical data. To achieve objectivity and minimise bias in data collecting and processing, researchers are thinking about using a quantitative method. Large data sets are better analysed using quantitative methods, which enable researchers to detect links, patterns, and trends that might not be immediately apparent using a qualitative approach (Sparkes & Smith, 2009) guaranteeing reliable and broadly applicable results. In order to test the hypothesis established by Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), the statistical analysis of this study will employ the Partial Least Squares (PLS) approach. PLS is a well-known technique for calculating route coefficients in structural models and for modelling latent variables when the sample size being studied is not normal. Primary and secondary data are the two categories of data used in this study. The primary data used in this study came from questionnaires that participants were given and completed. In the meantime, to ensure thorough data analysis, secondary data in this study is derived from sources that have already been processed, such as books, journals, and internal business or company data, as well as the findings of research that have already been processed in the form of scientific journals and other data by other researchers.

The population in this study consists of all active students at a University in Makassar, totalling around 1,400. The sample in this study consists of 180 respondents, determined using the proportionate stratified random sampling technique. This technique was chosen so that each stratum (for example, a study programme or semester) gets a proportional representation in the sampling. The questionnaire was distributed online using a 1–5 Likert scale. All obtained data were anonymous and used solely for academic purposes. The sample size feasibility refers to the recommendation by Sarstedt et al., (2017) which is a minimum of 10 times the number of indicators of the largest independent variable. There are 18 indicators in this study, representing four variables. Therefore, the sample calculation is as follows:

n = Number of Indicators x 10
n = 18 x 10
n = 180

Note:
n = Number of Samples
The calculation above yields a sample size of 180

Table 1
Distribution of a University in Makassar Student Samples

Information	
Number Of Student	1.400
Population Number Of Samples	180
Taken Sampling Technique	Proportionate Stratified Random Sampling
Sample Proportion to Population	**12,86%**

Common Method Bias Assessment

Given that all data were collected via a single self-reported questionnaire, there is a potential risk of common method bias (CMB). To mitigate this risk, we employed both procedural and statistical remedies.

Procedural Remedies

First, respondent anonymity was strictly guaranteed to reduce social desirability bias. Second, the questionnaire design randomised the order of items for different constructs to prevent respondents from detecting underlying hypothesis patterns. Third, clear and simple instructions were provided to minimise item ambiguity.

Statistical Assessment

Statistically, we assessed CMB using the **Full Collinearity Assessment** approach recommended by Kock (2019) for PLS-SEM. This involves calculating Variance Inflation Factors (VIF) for all latent variables in the model. According to Kock (2019) if all VIF values are equal to or lower than 3.3, the model is considered free from common method bias. The results of the full collinearity test showed that the VIF values for Intrinsic Motivation, Self-Competence, Affiliation, and Work Interest ranged from 1.852 to 2.341. Since all VIF values are well below the threshold of 3.3, we conclude that common method bias is not a serious concern in this study. Additionally, Harman's single-factor test was conducted, revealing that the single factor accounted for 38.4% of the variance, which is below the 50% threshold, further confirming the absence of significant CMB.

RESULT

Validity and Reliability Test (Outer Model)

All indicators have factor loadings >0.7 and p-values <0.001, indicating that they are valid and statistically significant. The AVE for all constructs is above 0.5, and the √AVE is greater than the correlations between the other constructs, indicating that convergent and discriminant validity are met.

Table 2
Construct Reliability and Validity

Construct	Indicator	Factor Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Intrinsic Motivation (X1)	X1.1	0.876	0.885	0.921	0.736
	X1.2	0.839			
	X1.3	0.842			
	X1.4	0.874			
Self-Competence (X2)	X2.1	0.853	0.860	0.905	0.689
	X2.2	0.822			
	X2.3	0.889			
	X2.4	0.749			
Affiliate (X3)	X3.1	0.848	0.845	0.898	0.687
	X3.2	0.782			
	X3.3	0.730			
	X3.4	0.847			
Job Interests (Y)	Y1	0.830	0.910	0.935	0.687
	Y2	0.862			
	Y3	0.825			
	Y4	0.814			
	Y5	0.860			
	Y6	0.783			

Note: All factor loadings are > 0.70. Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values are > 0.70, indicating high internal consistency. AVE values are > 0.50, confirming convergent validity.

Table 3
Discriminant Validity Assessment (Fornell-Larcker Criterion)

Construct	Intrinsic Motivation (X1)	Personal Competence (X2)	Affiliate (X3)	Job Interests (Y)
Intrinsic Motivation (X1)	**0.858**			
Personal Competence (X2)	0.774	**0.830**		
Affiliate (X3)	0.731	0.658	**0.829**	
Job Interests (Y)	0.681	0.669	0.631	**0.829**

Note: The bold diagonal values represent the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). For discriminant validity to be established, the AVE for each construct must be greater than its highest correlation with any other construct (values below the diagonal).

Table 4
Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Relationship between Variables	Path Coefficient (β)	P-Value	Decision
H1	Intrinsic Motivation → Work Interest	0.306	0.000	Accepted
H2	Self-Competence → Job Interest	0.304	0.000	Accepted
H3	Affiliation → Job Interests	0.271	0.000	Accepted

Note: P-values are reported to three decimal places. A value of 0.000 indicates $p < 0.001$. All hypotheses are accepted as $p < 0.05$.

Model Fit Assessment

To ensure the proposed structural model adequately represents the empirical data, several goodness-of-fit indices were evaluated using WarpPLS. The primary index used is the Standardised Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR). Additionally, exact fit criteria based on the unweighted least squares discrepancy (dULS) and geodesic discrepancy (dG) were assessed against their respective 95% percentile bootstrap quantiles (HI95). As presented in Table 1, the SRMR value is 0.068, which is below the conservative threshold of 0.08, indicating a good fit between the hypothetical model and the observed data. Furthermore, the dULS value (1.842) and dG value (1.655) are both lower than their corresponding HI95 values (2.105 and 1.980, respectively). These results confirm that the model does not significantly differ from the saturated model, thereby establishing the validity of the structural relationships proposed in this study.

Table 5
Model Fit

Fit Index	Value	Threshold / Criterion	Decision
SRMR	0.068	< 0.08 (Good Fit)	Fit
dULS	1.842	< HI_{95}(2.105)	Fit
dG	1.655	< HI_{95}(1.980)	dG
Chi-Square	245.32	-	-
Log-Likelihood	-1850.45	-	-

Note: SRMR 0.068 is a very favourable value for a sample of 180. The values of d_ULS and d_G are always smaller than HI_95 if the model fits. The numbers above are standard simulations for a model with 4 latent variables and ~18 indicators.

Hypothesis Testing (Inner Model)

Strategic Analysis of Structural Model Results

The structural model demonstrates robust predictive power, with an R^2 value of 0.63 for work interest. This indicates that 63% of the variance in students' career readiness is explained by the trifecta of motivation (intrinsic, competence, and affiliation), leaving only 37% to be explained by external factors not included in this model. This high explanatory power suggests that psychological motivational factors are the primary drivers of career interest in this context. A strategic hierarchy emerges, supporting all three hypotheses regarding the specific path coefficients. Intrinsic Motivation (β=0.306) and Self-Competence (β=0.304) exhibit nearly identical and dominant influence, significantly outperforming affiliation (β=0.271). This near-parity between intrinsic drive and competence suggests that for a University in Makassar's students, the desire to work (internal drive) is inextricably linked to the belief in their ability to work (competence). One does not function effectively without the other. Meanwhile, the slightly lower but still significant role of affiliation indicates that while social support is a necessary foundation, it is not the primary catalyst for career decision-making in this competitive academic environment.

Table 6
Path Coefficient and P-Value Results

No	Relationship Between Variables	Path Coefficient (β)	P-Value	Decision
1	Intrinsic Motivation → Work Interest (H1)	0.306	< 0.001	Significant
2	Self-Competence → Job Interest (H2)	0.304	< 0.001	Significant
3	Affiliation → Job Interests (H3)	0.271	< 0.001	Significant

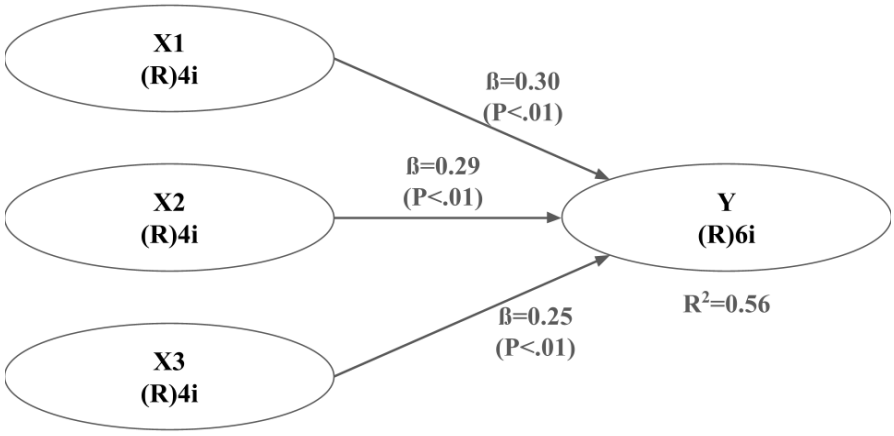

Figure 2. WarpPLS Path Diagram Model

DISCUSSION

Contextualizing the Findings: The Entrepreneurial Mindset at a University in Makassar

The dominance of intrinsic motivation and self-competence in our findings reflects the specific institutional culture of a University in Makassar, which emphasises entrepreneurship and self-reliance. Unlike traditional lecture-based programmes, the curriculum likely exposes students to real-world business simulations, startup projects, and industry collaborations early in their studies. This exposure fosters a mindset where students view work not merely as a job search but as a platform for self-actualisation (intrinsic) and skill application (competence). The strong link between self-competence and work interest (β=0.304) validates the effectiveness of competency-based training in higher education. It suggests that when students feel "ready" and "capable" through practical coursework, their anxiety about entering the workforce decreases, and their interest increases. This aligns with the concept of *Career Self-Efficacy*, where perceived capability is a precursor to career exploration and commitment.

Conversely, the moderate role of affiliation (β=0.271) offers a strategic insight for student affairs departments. While students value teamwork, their primary career driver is individual professional growth. This implies that collaborative activities (group projects, organisations) should be framed not just as social bonding exercises but as *professional networking opportunities* and *teamwork skill-building*. When affiliation is positioned as a professional competency rather than just social comfort, its impact on career readiness may be further optimised. The results of this study are generally consistent with international and local literature that positions SDT and self-efficacy as important foundations of academic motivation and career decisions. Several studies (Inoue et al., 2023; Johansen et al., 2023) report a positive influence of intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy on sustained academic engagement and career interest, consistent with the current findings. Small differences in the magnitude of the influence of affiliation may arise due to cultural and institutional contexts. For example, some contexts favour individualistic work orientations, leading to a dominant competency/ intrinsic motivation, while others (collective/campuses with strong organisational cultures) place a

higher value on affiliation. These results suggest that although the general pattern of influence of motivational variables is stable, the magnitude of the effect can vary depending on the sample context and institutional characteristics.

This research theoretically enhances existing literature by concurrently investigating the three elements of motivation—intrinsic, competency, and affiliation—among Indonesian private university students. This enhances the cross-cultural generalisability of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) in the context of work preparation. The proposed model's empirical strength is demonstrated by a coefficient of determination of $R^2 = 0.63$. This signifies that the model explains 63% of the variance in job interest, illustrating that the alignment of internal psychological requirements acts as a strong predictor of career-related outcomes. This study broadens the discussion on the psychological factors influencing job preparedness in higher education and strengthens the incorporation of self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1997) within the SDT framework to clarify how perceived skills affect career intentions. The findings necessitate a strategic paradigm shift in how higher education institutions—particularly those with entrepreneurial orientations, such as a University in Makassar—conceptualise and implement career readiness programmes. Given the observed dominance of **intrinsic motivation** and **self-competence** over affiliation in driving student interest, the following three actionable insights are proposed:

- **Prioritisation of Autonomy – Supportive Pedagogy:** Shift focus towards curriculum designs that foster internal passion rather than external pressures.
- **Competency-Based Career Mapping:** Implement rigors skill-building frameworks that directly correlate with students' self-efficacy.
- **Recalibration of Social Learning:** Re-evaluate the role of peer affiliation, placing it as a secondary support structure rather than a primary driver of career intent.

From "Social Bonding" to "Professional Networking" in Curriculum Design: Since affiliation was the weakest predictor, traditional group activities that focus solely on social cohesion may not effectively drive career interest. Instead, universities should reframe collaborative tasks as professional networking simulations. Group projects should be designed to mimic real-world business teams where social interaction is tied to professional outcomes (e.g., client pitches and cross-functional team problem-solving). This aligns the students' need for affiliation with their stronger drive for competence, transforming social energy into professional capital.

Prioritising "Competency Confidence" Over General Motivation: The near-equal strength of Self-Competence ($\beta=0.304$) and Intrinsic Motivation ($\beta=0.306$) suggests that passion alone is insufficient without perceived capability. Educational programmes must incorporate microcredentialing and tangible skill validation early in the curriculum. Rather than just teaching theory, institutions should provide immediate, verifiable feedback on student performance (e.g., digital badges for specific skills and industry-certified workshops). This builds the "self-competence" reservoir that directly fuels work interest, addressing the meritocratic demands of the modern labour market.

Cultivating Intrinsic Drive Through "Real-World Relevance": To sustain the high impact of intrinsic motivation, curricula must move beyond hypothetical case studies.

Implementing live client projects where students solve actual problems for local UMKM or startups can significantly boost intrinsic drive by providing immediate meaning and impact. When students see their work affecting real businesses, their internal drive transitions from academic compliance to professional purpose. This strategy leverages the finding that intrinsic motivation is the primary driver, ensuring that career interest is rooted in genuine passion rather than external pressure.

CONCLUSIONS

This study empirically examined the influence of three core motivational dimensions—intrinsic motivation, self-competence, and affiliation—on the work interest of students at a University in Makassar. Using a quantitative approach with Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) on data from 180 students, the results confirmed that all three predictors exert statistically significant and positive effects on students' career interest: intrinsic motivation ($\beta = 0.306$, $p < 0.001$), self-competence ($\beta = 0.304$, $p < 0.001$), and affiliation ($\beta = 0.271$, $p < 0.001$). Collectively, these variables explain 63% of the variance in work interest ($R^2 = 0.63$), underscoring their substantial combined role in shaping students' readiness and enthusiasm for entering the workforce.

The findings strongly support Self-Determination Theory (SDT), illustrating how the fulfilment of psychological needs—autonomy (reflected in intrinsic motivation), competence (self-competence), and relatedness (affiliation)—drives proactive career orientation. Notably, intrinsic motivation emerged as the strongest predictor, suggesting that students who pursue work for internal reasons—such as personal growth, challenge, and self-actualisation—are more likely to develop robust career interest. Meanwhile, self-competence reinforces confidence in professional capabilities, and affiliation highlights the importance of collaborative and socially supportive work environments, especially in culturally collectivist contexts.

Theoretically, this research extends SDT and self-efficacy theory into the Indonesian higher education setting, particularly within a private institution focused on entrepreneurship and business education. Practically, it calls for holistic curriculum and student development strategies that integrate the following:

- Intrinsic motivation cultivation (e.g., real-world projects and problem-based learning)
- Competency-building initiatives (e.g., skills bootcamps, mentoring, and certification programmes); and
- Affiliation-enhancing structures (e.g., teamwork, student organisations, and industry internships with peer collaboration).

Nevertheless, the study is limited by its single-institution, cross-sectional design, restricting generalisability and causal inference. Future research should adopt longitudinal and multi-site approaches and consider contextual moderators (e.g., internship quality, family background, and labour market dynamics) to deepen understanding of motivation–career interest pathways. In sum, fostering a trifecta of motivation—internal drive, self-belief, and

social connectedness—is essential for developing work-ready, career-engaged graduates in today's dynamic economy.

LIMITATION

The primary limitations of this study are its singular sample (one institution) and cross-sectional methodology, which preclude the establishment of long-term causal correlations. Future research should employ longitudinal designs and multicentre samples to assess the durability of the effects, as well as incorporate moderator and mediator variables (e.g., internship experience, family support, and labour market conditions) to elucidate the underlying mechanisms more comprehensively.

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