Future and Present Time Perspectives as Predictors of Academic Engagement in a Private Institution in Malaysia

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Abstract: Time perspective has always been associated with the ability of the human cognition to make a distinction in the passing of time into frames of past, present and future. Due to this fact, time perspective could play an important role in understanding students' academic engagement better. This research endeavors to explore the relationship between time perspective and academic engagement among undergraduates. A total of 107 undergraduates participated in the research. Zimbardo Time Perspective Inventory (ZTPI), and Academic Engagement Scale for Grade School Students (AES-GS) were used to identify respondents' time perspective and academic engagement. The findings indicated that there were significant relationship between time perspective and academic engagement. Further analysis using multiple regressions found that future time perspective has the strongest predictive value toward cognitive engagement. Understanding this relationship between time perspective and academic engagement can contribute towards the development of a comprehensive psychological model that can become the basis for future intervention programs aimed towards improving academic engagement.

1. Introduction

Motivation and engagement have been described as "students' energy and drive to engage, learn, work efficiently, and achieve their potential at school and the behaviors that follow from this energy and drive" [1]. As such, motivation and engagement not only play a significant role in understanding students' interest in and enjoyment of study and school, but they also further reinforce academic achievement [1]. Derived from the Social Control Theory [2], the construct of student engagement stresses a lot on a person's feelings of connection and belongingness to social institutions. Academic engagement is referred to as students' need, desire willingness, and compulsion to participate and be successful in the learning process – which in turn will promote higher learning [3].

Apart from the many variables found to influence motivation and engagement, how students perceive the future consequences of a task warrants further exploration. This is because students are also motivated by future consequences [4]. The knowledge of what they would want in future and the ability to achieve it is termed as future time perspective (FTP). Future Time Perspective (FTP) is defined as the capability to predict and anticipate future possibilities, which involves a series of making and organizing. As one of the significant feature of the human cognitive system, FTP offers a sound foundation in establishing "personal goals and planning life spans, exploring future options, and carrying out major decisions" that may affect an individual's life development in various ways [5].

The central of motivation/engagement is derived from the student's ability to relate what they hope to become and with what they are currently engaging in [6]. Therefore, the growth, excellence, and purpose of students' aspiration for their future, should be central to models of motivation. Unfortunately, only a handful of motivational models include such temporal components. Even though it is established that thinking about the future would require one to use a different mental activity as compared to thinking about the present; most theories of motivation do not take this difference seriously. In addition, students' understanding of the future has a real and momentous effect on students' beliefs and motivation to learn which then leads to positive academic achievement [6]. In other words, time perspective influences one's attitude about and goals towards academic tasks, subsequently students' level of academic engagement. By understanding the relationship that exist between time perspective, particularly future time perspective and academic engagement, constructive programs for students who are channeling their energy and drive somewhere apart from academic can be developed.

Theoretical Framework. The theory that forms the basis of this study is temporal construal theory.

According to this theory, time perspective is further divided into five different characteristics; past positive, past negative, present-hedonistic, present-fatalistic, and future [7]. Since this study aimed to focus more on present and future time perspectives, past positive and past negative subscales are not included. Present-time oriented people as those who focus on the present because they feel that they have no control over the future [8]. This present-oriented time frame is then divided into present-hedonistic time perspective, which implies a risk-taking attitude toward time and life, focusing more on present pleasure and pays little attention towards future consequences. In contrast, present-fatalistic time perspective indicates a helpless, hopeless attitude toward the future; believing that they have no control over the future as it is predestined in a way or another. On the other hand, the future time perspective generally serves as an overview of the future and how a person's behavior is largely controlled by the desire to strive for future goals and rewards [7]. Their decisions are often influenced by the abstract mental representations of future consequences and concerns [8].

Another variable in this study, academic engagement is a construct derived from the social control theory. Many understood engagement as a holistic model, but the truth is that engagement is often being described as a multicomponent model that comprises of behavioral engagement, emotional engagement and as well as cognitive engagement. Based on the past literature reviews done on these two areas, often connections were being made with motivation. However, in this research, the motivation aspect or variable will not be investigated as this research aims to find out and to understand the relationship between time perspective and academic engagement as shown below in Fig. 1.
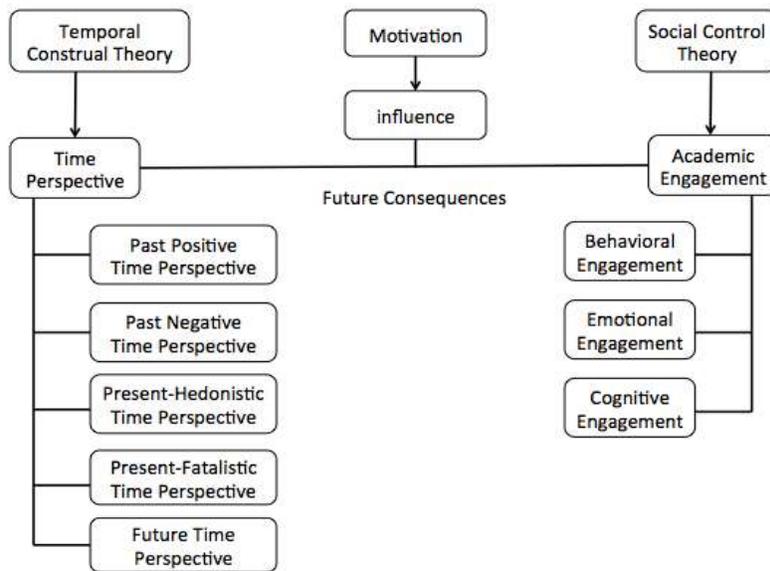
Objectives: This study aims to (a) Determine the relationship between time perspective (present-hedonistic, present-fatalistic, and future) and academic engagement (behavioral, emotional, and cognitive) among undergraduates in Malaysia, and (b) Examine which aspects of time perspective would best explain and predict the different facets of academic engagement among undergraduates in Malaysia.

2. Material and Methods
Research Design. This study utilized the quantitative descriptive survey design to gather information from a large sample. This design also allows depiction of the levels and patterns of the variables studied. To further explore the hypothesized correlations among the variables, a descriptive correlational design is used. Threats of intervening variables normally associated with this type of design are controlled statistically using multiple regressions.

Participants and Measures. A total of 107 undergraduates aged between 18 to 26 years old were selected using simple random sampling method. The finding from this study indicated that out of 107 samples, 35 (32.7%) of them were males while the remaining 72 (67.3%) were females. The mean age of the sample was 21.30 years old.

Instruments. In this research, participants' time perspective was measured using *Zimbardo Time Perspective Inventory (ZTPI)* and as for academic engagement, *Academic Engagement Scale for Grade School Students (AES-GS)*, developed by [9] was used. The reliability analysis conducted showed that all subscales fulfilled the standard requirements of psychological testing. The Cronbach alpha coefficient was .69 for Future Time Perspective and .89 for the Academic Engagement Scale.

3. Results and discussion

Bivariate correlation analysis was first conducted to explore the nature of the relationships among the variables studied. It was found that there is a significant and positive relationship between time perspective and academic engagement as a whole, $r = .24$, $p < .05$. Further exploration showed significant, but very weak correlation between present-hedonistic time perspective and behavioral engagement, $r = .152$, $p < .01$, which explains that the present-hedonistic time perspective that undergraduates employ would

not have an influence on their level of behavioral engagement. The result of this finding seems to be different from [10] and perhaps the disparity of the findings shown in this research is due to the differences that was brought about by culture as indicated by [11] and [5]. As for present-fatalistic and behavioral engagement, results indicated a significant but very weak correlation of $r = -.274$, $p < .01$. Findings done by [12] also pointed that students who are more inclined towards the present-fatalistic time perspective, the more likely they are to have a lower level of self-efficacy. As for the relationship between future time perspective and behavioral engagement, the analysis showed that there are a medium and positive relationship between these two variables of $r = .415$, $n = 107$, $p < .01$. In other words, future time perspective would have a larger influence on undergraduates' behavioral engagement in comparison to present-fatalistic. It is also very likely that students who are actively engaged behaviorally are more inclined towards future orientation (Table 1).

Table 1: Pearson Product-moment Correlations Between Measures of Time Perspective and Academic Engagement

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Time perspective	-				.237*			
2. Present-hedonistic		-				.152	.189	.210*
3. Present-fatalistic			-	-	-	-.274**	-.109	-.295**
4. Future				-	-	.415**	.128	. .528**
5. Academic engagement	.237*	-	-	-	-			
6. Behavioral engagement		.152	-.274**	.415**		-		
7. Emotional engagement		.189	-.109	-.128			-	
8. Cognitive engagement		.210*	-.295**	.528**				-

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The finding from this research is consistent with the findings gathered by [8], although in this research the level of significance was higher than what he had concluded – significant but to the extend of virtually non-significant. He also explained that the rationale on why FTP would have a significant correlation with behavioral engagement was because students who were more predisposed towards future orientation believe that they can control their academic achievement through the regulation of their study habits and efforts. Therefore, they are more likely to put in more effort to understand the material given to them and to use many different learning strategies to help them learn better – all of these are clearly reflected in the students' behavior.

With regards to cognitive engagement, it was found that there were significant relationships between present-hedonistic (as $r = .21$, $p<.05$), present-fatalistic ($r=-.295$, $p < .01$), and future time perspective ($r = .528$, $p < .01$) with cognitive engagement.

When multiple regression analysis was run, future time perspective (.365) makes the strongest unique contribution in explaining behavioral engagement, compared to present-hedonistic (.247) and present-fatalistic (-.275) (Table 2). The findings also indicated that future time perspective was the highest predictor of cognitive engagement (.476), followed by present-hedonistic (.315) and present-fatalistic (-.293). This supports the notion that time perspective is a very important aspect of human cognition as established by previous studies [13]. Regression analysis was not done for emotional engagement, as there were no significant correlations between the variables involved.

Table 2: Multiple Regressions – Time perspective as Predictors of Academic Engagement

	Academic Engagement			
	Behavioral		Cognitive	
Variables	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β
Model I				
Time Perspective	.264		404	
Present Hedonistic		.247		.315
Present Fatalistic		-.275		-.293
Future		.365		.476

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, it is inevitable that educators understand and respond to the differences in students' time perspective accurately. The differences in the students' time perspective will have a direct effect on their behavioral and cognitive engagement. Students who are more concerned with future goals are the ones most likely to be engaged cognitively and behaviorally. It is also interesting to note that, students who do not feel that they have control over their future and more concerned with present pleasures are also behaviorally and cognitively engaged, although the relationship is not as strong. It would be interesting to study if short-term goals and rewards can influence these students who are most likely extrinsic in their motivation. As hypothesized, the higher the hopelessness and helplessness attitude towards future, the lower the behavioral and cognitive engagement. By understanding the relationship between time perspective and academic engagement, educators can subsequently plan for intervention plans to increase academic engagement functions as a whole with the help of time perspective. When students are able to change their current time orientation into a time orientation that would effectively help students to be engaged academically, students will then be able to improve and change their own behavior to be more in line with their educational and life goals [14].

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