“The Journey is Important, but It is the Destination that Motivates Me to Study”

The Relationship of Future Goals to Values and Achievement Goals

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BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Education is one of Singapore’s top national priorities and the basic tool to prepare the country to deal with global changes and competitiveness in the 21st century. Singapore’s proactive response to meet the challenges for the future is encapsulated in a national education’s vision, “Thinking Schools, Learning Nation” (TSLN; Goh, 1997), which envisions the creation of learning environments that develop future generations of thinking, committed, and creative citizens who are life-long learners and capable of making good decisions for Singapore’s future success. To continue the journey of the TSLN vision, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong (2004) more recently called for a “Teach Less, Learn More” (TLLM) educational policy that aims to develop students who are motivated and engaged in learning as well as more prepared for facing life challenges. Underlying the TLLM is a belief that the foundation of a person’s character is his/her values system.

The emphases on values-based character development and future time perspective are consistent and complementary themes throughout the objectives of TSLN and TLLM. This is not surprising as youth’s character development is a critical asset for a nation’s capacity building and future, in particular for Singapore that relies predominantly on its human resources. Whereas Singapore has an internationally reputable educational system producing high quality academic outcomes (IEA, 2004), a substantial number of students could perform better at secondary education. The latest figure available indicated that 80.7% out of 37,453 students in the 2005 cohort scored at least five “O” level passes (Singapore MOE, 2006), which is a benchmark for a secondary student to further his/her education in junior college or polytechnic. Further, 2.6% of the students in this cohort failed to complete their secondary
education (Singapore MOE, 2006). The typical attributions to this underachievement have been socioeconomic status (SES) and familial background (Lee, 2006). A myriad of other sociocultural and psychological factors, and the interaction between them, that could explain Singaporean students’ success are however still left unexplored.

**Purpose of the Study**

In this context, our study focuses on students’ motivation in relation to future time perspective. Of particular interest, we aim to understand how students’ values influence their personally valued future goals and immediate achievement goals in schooling. These relationships, shaped by sociocultural background, home and educational milieus, are posited to influence achievement outcomes (see Figure 1).

![Figure 1: A model depicting the hypothesized relationships among students’ values, future goals, and immediate achievement goals](image)

*Figure 1:* A model depicting the hypothesized relationships among students’ values, future goals, and immediate achievement goals

*Future goals.* The first key component in our hypothesized model is personally valued future goals. These future goals may reflect such things as, but are not limited to, becoming an important person, work or career-related pursuits, or establishing a family (McInerney, 2004; Miller & Brickman, 2004). The future goals to which we refer to are self-relevant, self-defining, and self-determined goals that provide incentive for action (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The emergence of future goals is usually cast part of the developmental and socialization processes that occur in the individual’s sociocultural context.
Values. Miller and Brickman (2004) posit that sociocultural contexts shape future goals through its influences on the individual’s value system. Collectively, experiences between individuals and social groups shape values, that is, what is valued and deemed important to the individual and society in general (Maehr & Nicholls, 1980; McInerney, 2004). Schwartz (2005) defines values as motivational beliefs concerning trans-situational, desirable goals, varying in importance, that serve as guiding principles in people’s life. On the basis of the underlying broad goals expressed by these beliefs, Schwartz (2005a) postulates four broad orientations of values organized along two bipolar dimensions: Openness to Change, Conservation, Self-Enhancement, and Self-Transcendence. The first dimension contrasts Openness to Change and Conservation values. This dimension captures the conflict of an emphasis on one’s own independent thought and action and favouring change versus submissive self-restriction, preservation of traditional practices, and protection of stability. The second dimension contrasts Self-Transcendence and Self-Enhancement values. This dimension captures the conflict of an emphasis on acceptance of others as equal and concern for their welfare versus pursuing one’s own relative success and dominance over others. One other value dimension, Hedonism, which concerns with the pursuit of pleasure or sensuous gratification for oneself, is postulated to be part of openness to change or self-enhancement values depending of the sample being studied (Schwartz, 2005a). In this study, we examined how a comprehensive set of value orientations (viz., Self-Enhancement, Self-Transcendence, Conservation, Openness to Change, and Hedonism) relate to future goals and other components in the model.

Achievement goals. Although the future goals under consideration have incentive value, their incentive value is typically viewed as being “too far off, or too general, to

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1 In this study, hedonism is separated from both openness to change and self-enhancement values because I believe, based on its conceptualization and definition, hedonism would have an important nomological network with achievement motivation independent from openness to change and self-enhancement.
shepherd specific actions in immediate situations” (Miller & Brickman, 2004, p. 15). More immediate than future goals affecting school achievement are achievement goals which represent the current purposes students adopt for their learning in achievement situations (Kaplan & Maehr, 2007; Maehr & McInerney, 2004). Two goals commonly researched, including in the Singapore context (Liem, Lau, & Nie, 2007), are mastery and performance goals. The former focuses on the development of academic skills and knowledge, whereas the latter is concerned with the demonstration of ability relative to other students. A third goal, not nearly as well researched, is social goal where students hold social reasons for becoming motivated to achieve or not at school.

**METHOD**

**Participants and Procedure**

A total of 505 lower and middle secondary school students (305 males; 195 females; 5 students did not identify their gender) from a neighbourhood secondary school in Singapore participated in this study. Their ages ranged from 11 to 19 (M=14.77; $SD=1.23$). The administration of the survey was carried out by the authors and two trained research assistants in an individual classroom setting. Students completed survey that took about 45 minutes.

**Measures**

*Future goals.* The modified Future Goal Questionnaire (Brickman & Miller, 2001), consisting of 15 items, was used to measure the extent to which students put importance on five domains of future goals, namely *fame-oriented future goal* (3 items; e.g., I want to become an important person in my society), *job or career-oriented future goal* (3 items; e.g., I want to get a good job), *wealth or money-oriented future goal* (3 items; e.g., I want to make a lot of money), *family-oriented future goal* (3 items; e.g., I want to support my future family),
and society-oriented future goal (3 items; e.g., I want to make a contribution to my society). Cronbach’s alpha internal consistency for the five value subscales ranged from .78 to .87.

**Values.** The Portrait Values Questionnaire (PVQ; Schwartz, 2005) is a 40-item self-report instrument measuring four second-order types of basic values, namely Self-Enhancement (7 items), Self-Transcendence (10 items), Conservation (13 items), and Openness to Change (7 items) and one first-order basic value, Hedonism (3 items). The PVQ comprises short verbal portraits of different people. Each portrait describes a person’s goal, aspiration, or wishes that point implicitly to the importance of a value. An example of the items includes, “Being very successful is important to him/her. S(he) likes to impress other people” (one of the Self-Enhancement value items). For each item, participants were asked, “How much like you is this person?” They were then instructed to cross (X) one of the six boxes labeled: very much like me (scored 6), like me (5), somewhat like me (4), a little like me (3), not like me (2), and not like me at all (1). Cronbach’s alpha internal consistency for the five value subscales ranged from .78 to .86.

**Achievement goals.** The General Goal Orientation Scale (GAGOS; McInerney, Yeung, & McInerney, 2001) was used to measure students’ immediate achievement goals that students may pursue in achievement settings. Three achievement goals were used in this study, namely performance goal, mastery goal, and social goal. Cronbach’s alpha internal consistency for the five value subscales ranged from .67 to .80.

**RESULTS**

**Values and future goals.** A series of simultaneous multiple regression analyses were conducted to identify significant relationships between a set of predictors and criterion variables specified in the model (see Figure 1). First, we regressed each of the future goals on the value model. A fame-oriented future goal was found to be related to Self-Enhancement
Future goals and achievement goals. Next, we regressed each of the three achievement goals on the future goal model. Interestingly, we found different sets of predictors for performance goal and mastery goal. Performance goal was related to future goals of becoming famous ($\beta=.25$) and becoming wealthy ($\beta=.13$), whereas mastery goal was related future goals of getting a good job ($\beta=.19$) and contributing to the society ($\beta=.16$). A society-oriented ($\beta=.11$) and family-oriented ($\beta=.15$) future goals were found to predict students’ pursuit of social goal. On the whole, the future goals contributed a significant amount of the variances in achievement motivations (between 9% and 17%).

Values and achievement goals. We also regressed each of the achievement goals on the value model. Performance goal was related to Self-Enhancement values ($\beta=.52$); mastery goal was related to Conservation values ($\beta=.26$); and social goal was associated with Self-Transcendence ($\beta=.14$), Conservation ($\beta=.19$), and Hedonism ($\beta=.12$) values.
Figures 2, 3, and 4 present all the significant paths depicting the relationships between values, future goals, and achievement goals.

**Figure 2:** An empirical model depicting the significant paths between values, future goals, and performance goal (using simultaneous multiple regression) (see text for standardized regression coefficients in the model).

**Figure 3:** An empirical model depicting the significant paths between values, future goals, and mastery goal (using simultaneous multiple regression) (see text for standardized regression coefficients in the model).
To test a mediational analysis, i.e., to examine if students’ future goals mediate the relationships between their values and achievement goals, we selected variables that fulfil the three criteria outlined by Judd and Kenny (1981). Three requirements must be satisfied to empirically validate mediation of a direct relationship (see Judd & Kenny, 1981). First, for mediation to be a relevant issue, a relationship between the predictor variable and the outcome measure must be established. Second, to document the first link in the mediational chain, a relationship between the predictor variable and the hypothesized mediator must be established. Third, to document the second link, a relationship between the mediator variable and the outcome measure must be established while controlling for the predictor variable, and the relationship between the predictor variable and the outcome measure should be reduced. In testing this mediation, we validate the findings we found using multiple regression analyses, reported above, using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM).
In the performance goal model, the relationship between Self-Enhancement values and the performance goal was mediated by fame-oriented and wealth-oriented future goals (see Figure 2). SEM showed that the mediational model provided a satisfactory fit to the data, GFI=.90, CFI=.90, and IFI=.90. A summary of the mediational analysis for the performance goal model is presented in Figure 5.

**Figure 5:** Final empirical model showing the mediational model of future goals in the relationship between values and performance goal (all paths are significant at \( p<.01 \)) – for the sake of clarity, only latent variables are shown.

In the mastery goal model, the relationship between Conservation and the mastery goal was mediated by career-oriented and society-oriented future goals (see Figure 3). SEM showed that society-oriented future goal was no longer a significant predictor of mastery goal, and was therefore dropped from the model. A summary of the mediational analysis for the mastery goal final model is presented in Figure 6. The fit statistics indicated that the model fit our data well, GFI=.93, CFI=.93, and IFI=.93.
Figure 6: Final empirical model showing the mediational model of future goals in the relationship between values and mastery goal (all paths are significant at $p<.01$) – for the sake of clarity, only latent variables are shown.

In the social goal model, the relationship of Self-Transcendence and Conservation to social goal was mediated by family-oriented and society-oriented future goals (see Figure 4). SEM showed that the mediational model provided a satisfactory fit to the data, GFI=.93, CFI=.95, and IFI=.95. Figure 7 presents the final model of the mediational analysis for the social goal.

Figure 7: Final empirical model showing the mediational model of future goals in the relationship between values and social goal (all paths are significant at $p<.01$) – for the sake of clarity, only latent variables are shown.

Educational and Theoretical Significance of the Study

For a country that seeks for excellence in various domains of endeavours and has relied solely on its human resources, students’ underachievement is a disadvantage for
Singapore. This study addresses the importance of Singaporean students’ future vision in their motivation to study, and examine how these future goals are shaped by the educational, sociocultural, economic, and political contexts through their influences on the students’ values and self-concept. The issues addressed in this research are critical to our understanding of how underachievement may be attributable to the students’ future goals as without a vision for the future the present is purposeless and perhaps meaningless for them. Thus, the issues addressed in this study clearly reflects the theme of 2007 AERA conference, “Research on Schools, Neighbourhood, and Communities: Towards Civic Responsibility”, and in particular addressing the issue of capacity building among underachieving Singaporean students.

References


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