

College Students' Life Orientation and Their Perceived Academic Stress

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Abstract. College students' perception of their academic stress may vary in relation to their life orientation. The four factors—perception of workloads and examinations, pressure to perform, self-perception, and time restraint—plays a significant role in their perception of academic stress. Unfortunately, there is limited research on perceived academic stress and life orientation. With that being said, this quantitative correlational study aimed to contribute to the literature and studies by examining the relationship between academic stress and life orientation on college students. This study was conducted on college students enrolled in St. Michael's College Iligan Inc. SY 2024-2025. The data was gathered through using and fully adopting standardized questionnaires, Perceived Academic Stress Scale and Life Orientation Test (Revised) Questionnaire, which were administered to the three hundred forty-four respondents. The gathered data were subjected to the following statistical tools: mean and standard deviation, and spearman (rho) rank correlation. The findings showed that there is no significant relationship between perceived academic stress and life orientation among college students. Based on the results, an awareness program was created to help students manage their academic stress. The program focused on providing them insights on healthier coping mechanisms, time management, and balancing academic stress and their life orientation.

Keywords: *college students, life orientation, perceived academic stress*

Introduction

College is a life-changing journey for students as it is filled with different experiences, challenges, and opportunities. As they navigate through this phase, academic stress often becomes their inevitable companion. On the other hand, life orientation is pivotal to how students perceive and approach these challenges, and often, optimism plays a vitally important role in facing these phenomena. Consequently, students who impose higher optimism was found to experience less stress with their academic pursuits (Aisyah et al., 2023). However, academic stress can be crucial to the state of students' life orientation as well, for not everyone has the same disposition of optimism regarding academic stress. Accordingly, high academic stress may result in reduced optimism, consequently affecting students' well-being (Popa-Velea et. al., 2021). This prompts the researchers to investigate the underlying relationship behind the dynamics of students' perceived stress in their academe and their life orientation as

related studies are yet to be sufficient in proving that there is a relationship between the abovementioned variables.

The students of St. Michael's College of Iligan, Inc. are inevitably experiencing challenges in their academic rigor. With this, the researchers are determined to know the students' perceived academic stress in terms of its sources (i.e. self-perception, time restraint, pressures to perform, and perceptions of workloads and examinations) and their life orientation in terms of optimism to shed light of insights to help them develop better coping skills for academic stress and disturbances of life orientation.

Theoretical and Empirical Background

The research on college students' life orientation and its relationship with academic stress, several theories were utilized to serve as a foundation on investigating the relationship and how these theories relate to each research question.

The PERMA Model explains the concept of academic stress by emphasizing the importance of well-being and its components (i.e. positive emotion, engagement, relationship, meaning, and accomplishments) can help students manage and reduce stress (Seligman, 2011). Accordingly, students' level of academic stress was decreased, and maintained a positive outlook in the future by balancing and fulfilling life through participating in activities with the elements of PERMA. The Dispositional Optimism theory states that optimism reflects a broader outlook in life (Scheier & Carver, 1985). Students' optimistic life orientation can help them balance the stress they may face in their academic endeavors.

Research Objectives

The study sought to determine the relationship of perceived academic stress and life orientation among the college students in St. Michael's College in Iligan City.

Specifically, this paper examined the following:

1. The respondents' level of perceived academic stress;
2. The respondents' level of life orientation; and
3. The significant relationship between the respondents' level of perceived academic stress and their life orientation.

Methods

The study utilized a descriptive correlational approach to measure students' perceived academic stress and their life orientation. This quantitative approach was a suitable design for this study to determine the relationship between the two main variables mentioned, using fully adopted standardized questionnaires. The respondents of this study were randomly selected from the eight (8) colleges in St. Michael's College of Iligan, Inc. who were enrolled during the first semester of academic year 2024-2025.

The students were asked to answer two standardized questionnaires. The 18-item Perceived Academic Stress Scale by Bedewy and Gabriel (2015) was adopted in this study to measure the students' level of academic stress as perceived by them, which was developed to assess the sources of their stress (i. e. self-perception, time restraint,

pressures to perform, and perceptions of workloads and examinations). The 10-item Revised Life Orientation Test by Scheier et al. (1994) was also adopted in this study to measure the level of life orientation imposed by students.

Mean and standard deviation were used to determine and measure the average location and variation of the students' level of perceived academic stress as well as the degree of their life orientation. Moreover, Spearman rho correlation was employed to test for significant relationships underlying between the main variables and their subscales. The data gathered was treated with utmost confidentiality and anonymity.

Results and Discussion

The results and findings of this study are presented chronologically based on the objectives of the study as presented herein.

Table 1

Level of the Respondents' Perceived Academic Stress

Factors	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD	Description
Self-perception	1.00	4.80	2.34	0.734	<i>Low</i>
Time Restraint	1.40	4.80	2.91	0.534	<i>Moderate</i>
Pressure to Perform	1.00	5.00	2.94	0.799	<i>Moderate</i>
Perceptions of Workloads	1.25	5.00	2.75	0.814	<i>Moderate</i>

Table 1 represents the level of the respondents' perceived academic stress. Self-perception has a mean of 2.34, indicating a low level. This indicates that low self-perception correlates with lower self-esteem (Torres et. al, 2020). Time Restraint, with a mean of 2.91, is rated as moderate. This shows that students experienced stress during exams due to time pressure (Koudela-Hamila et. al, 2020). Pressure to perform, with a mean of 2.94, is similarly moderate, which implies that a competitive environment increases stress, leading to anxiety and depression (Schels, 2023). Finally, Perceptions of Workloads, with a mean of 2.75, is also moderate. This implies that students feel stress due to heavier workloads (Aihie & Onaka, 2019).

Table 2

Level of the Respondents' Life Orientation

Scoring Scale	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD	Description
3.20 – 4.00	3.40	4.00	3.64	0.22	<i>Very High</i>
2.40 – 3.19	2.40	3.10	2.60	0.17	<i>High</i>
1.60 – 2.39	1.60	2.30	2.07	0.20	<i>Moderate</i>
0.80 – 1.59	1.00	1.50	1.30	0.20	<i>Low</i>

Table 2 shows the level of the respondents' life orientation. The highest mean score is 3.64, and the lowest mean score is 1.30. Overall, the respondents' level of life orientation was high. The findings suggest that most college students maintain a

positive outlook despite uncertainties reflecting high levels of optimism. This aligns with the research which found that students exhibited resilience and a positive mindset even during the challenges of the pandemic (Broner et. al, 2022). The theory of Dispositional Optimism explains that dispositional optimism helps students cope with uncertainties by fostering resilience and adaptive strategies, enabling them to persist toward their goals despite obstacles.

Table 3

Relationship Between Levels of Perceived Academic Stress and Life Orientation

Level of Life Orientation	Correlation Coefficient (<i>rho</i>)	p-value
Self-Perception	- 0.037	0.499
Time Restraint	- 0.032	0.560
Pressure to Perform	- 0.014	0.495
Perception of Workloads and Examinations	0.039	0.468

**, Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

*, Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

Table 3 presents the relationship between life orientation and perceived academic stress. The results show weak negative correlation between life orientation and self-perception, time restraint, pressure to perform, all of which are not statistically significant. Life orientation and perceptions of workloads and examinations also showed no significant relationship, however, they have a weak positive correlation. These findings suggest that increases in optimism are weakly associated with decreases in self-perception, time restraint, pressure to perform, and perception of workloads and examinations, but these relationships are not strong enough to be considered statistically significant.

This indicates that changes in life orientation do not reliably predict changes in levels of academic stress. Research found no significant relationship between self-perception and optimism (Leon, 2023). Studies also support these findings, showing weak or no significant correlations between time restraints, perceptions of workloads, and optimism (Borbon, 2021 & Smith, 2019). While optimism may slightly associate academic stress, the evidence is not strong enough to suggest any direct, meaningful correlation.

Conclusion

The level of perceived academic stress among college students of St. Michael's College Iligan Inc. was investigated and has been found to be average which means their academic stress can be manageable. Additionally, the students' level of life orientation implies that they uphold a positive attitude towards life, even amid unpredictable outcomes. Overall, the relationship between the students' life orientation and perceived academic stress exhibited a weak correlation, and was revealed to be not

significant. Consequently, the following recommendations were provided by the researchers.

Recommendation

Given the scope of the research setting, target population, and the methodology used in this study, the researchers suggest the following recommendations to enhance current programs for these specific groups and to ensure the validity and relevance of any future replications of this study.

To the School Administrator. They may foster a supportive environment that is beneficial to students' welfare and that would help them manage their academic stress and maintain a healthier balance between academic and personal life.

To the Teachers. They may implement a supportive and less stressful academic environment by implementing a balanced assessment schedule, promoting collaboration, not competition among students, encouraging students to have a break and self-care, and teaching time management and study skills to empower them to handle their academic stress more effectively.

To the Guidance Counselors. They may organize a monitoring program for students' mental health and academic stress levels by conducting regular feedback sessions or surveys to identify ongoing problems regarding academic pursuits and adapt programs as needed to meet the evolving needs of students.

To the Future Researchers. They may use this as the foundation for their future research. They may continue this study or identify and evaluate additional research gaps. Future researchers may: (1) change the study's context and intended audience (e.g., student officers and students from top performing schools) ; (2) do additional research on the development of psychological interventions and/or awareness; and (3) administer the tests to a bigger sample size.

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