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The Relationship between Regulatory Focus and Creativity among Undergraduate Students at UPSI

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Abstract

This study focused on examining the correlation between regulatory focus and creativity among undergraduate students at UPSI, Malaysia. Using a convenience sampling, the study utilized an online-based survey administered through Google Forms. A total of 153 undergraduate students, aged between 18 to 29 years participated. Participants were required to complete a set of questionnaires that encompassed demographic information, an assessment of regulatory focus using Regulatory Focus Questionnaire (RFQ), and an evaluation of creativity using Person-Environment Fit Scale for Creativity (PEFSC). Results showed that there was a significant positive correlation between the promotion focus and creativity, $r\ (153) = .803$, $p < .001$ whereas a significant negative correlation between the prevention focus and creativity, $r\ (153) = -.711$, $p < .001$. Additionally, the study identified a significant joint relationship between promotion and prevention focus on creativity, $R^2 = .685$, $F(2, 150) = 163.271$, $p < .001$. The implications of this study emphasize the importance of recognizing and accommodating students' regulatory orientations to enhance their overall academic success. However, further research is needed to explore other variables that may mediate the correlation between regulatory focus and creativity.

Keywords: Regulatory Focus, Promotion Focus, Prevention Focus, Creativity

INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, creativity has been associated with artistic domains like film, fashion, art, music, and poetry. However, its importance has expanded beyond these realms and is now crucial for environmental adaptation, daily problem-solving, organizational competitiveness (Mehta & Dahl, 2019), and academic achievement (Akpur, 2020; Zhang, Ren & Deng, 2020). Likewise, human adaptability to the environment has relied heavily on creativity throughout history (Fusco, Parola & Sica, 2021). This is because creativity does not only encompass unique personal interpretations and experiences but also the ability to analyse and solve problems. Creativity, as defined by Amabile et al. (1996) and Walia (2019), encompasses the capacity to generate novel and useful ideas. However, as noted by Lam and Chiu (2002), possessing creative potential alone is insufficient. Transforming creative ideas into tangible outcomes necessitates motivation to harness that potential in response to environmental cues. Interestingly, the prominent creativity researcher Amabile (1996), also stressed the importance of considering motivational factors in the context of creativity. This perspective has gained further support from recent studies highlighting the role of motivation in creative processes (Geng et al., 2018; Kark, Van Dijk & Vashdi, 2018; Luo, Xin, Li & Yu, 2021; Wang et al., 2021). Within this, the regulatory focus has been implicated to offer perspective on the interplay between motivation and creativity (Petrou, Baas & Roskes, 2020).

Undoubtedly, much attention and debate have revolved around the role of regulatory focus as a key mechanism influencing creativity. Drawing from, the regulatory focus theory, individuals exhibit two primary motivational orientations: promotion focus and prevention focus, influencing their goal pursuit and decision-making processes (Higgins, Nakkawita, & Cornwell, 2020). These orientations are linked to distinct desired outcomes and serve different survival-related needs. Promotion focus revolves around achieving positive consequences, emphasizing developmental aspirations, achievement gains, and growth. In contrast, prevention focuses centres on avoiding negative consequences, highlighting security needs, loss avoidance, and fulfilling obligations.

According to Higgins, Nakkawita, and Cornwell (2020) and Peng et al. (2021), promotion focus centres on advancement, growth, and accomplishment, prioritizing positive outcomes and gain/non-gain. Thus, promotion-focused individuals tend to adopt eager/approach strategies, taking risks and actively seeking new solutions, enhancing creativity. Conversely, prevention focus emphasizes duties, obligations, and responsibilities, focusing on avoiding negative outcomes and non-loss/loss. Hence, prevention-focused individuals are cautious, favouring vigilant/avoidance strategies, potentially hindering creativity. However, it's important to note that prevention focus doesn't necessarily stifle creativity; it can trigger cognitive perseverance (Luo, Xin, Li & Yu, 2021). In other words, prevention-focused individuals may persist in creative endeavours to avoid the undesirable outcomes of failing to achieve their goals.

Understanding the relationship between regulatory focus and creativity is significant for several reasons. Firstly, it provides insights into fostering creativity in educational settings. Research suggests that creativity positively predicts academic achievement (Zhang, Ren & Deng, 2020). By identifying students' predominant regulatory traits, educators can tailor their teaching methods and create environments conducive to unleashing creative potential. For promotion-focused students, innovative teaching approaches can stimulate creative efforts, while prevention-focused students may benefit from personalized task framing and positive feedback (Zou, Wei, Ke, and Wei, 2020).

Moreover, students can identify strategies to enhance their creative thinking, problem-solving, and idea generation by examining their regulatory focus. This self-awareness equips them to tackle complex challenges and contribute to societal progress. An open, risk-tolerant environment can empower prevention-focused students to strive for their ideal selves, encouraging more creative ideas and solutions (Luo, Xin, Li & Yu, 2021) and induce situational promotion focus by emphasizing students' interests, aspirations, and ideals, fostering an environment supportive of learners' autonomy (Wang et al., 2021).

The study addresses some identified gaps in the existing literature. It begins by highlighting the limited attention given to student samples in the study of the relationship between regulatory focus and creativity, as previous research has primarily focused on employee samples. It also points out inconsistencies in research findings related to promotion and prevention focus on creativity. Next, most current research has predominantly treated regulatory focus as a moderating or mediating factor while exclusively studying its connection with creativity. Additionally, previous studies mainly focused on Chinese settings, limiting the generalizability of their results to other Asian or Western cultures.

To address the objective of this study, the researcher proposed the following research questions:

1) Is there any correlation between promotion focus and creativity among undergraduate students?
2) Is there any correlation between prevention focus and creativity among undergraduate students?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study employs a correlational research design using a quantitative approach which was conducted through an online platform. The research population consisted of 19,592 undergraduate students at UPSI, with a conveniently sampled size of 150 participants. The sample size was calculated using G*Power software, with parameters set for a two-tailed Pearson correlation, an alpha value of 0.05,

power of 0.95, and an effect size of 0.3, resulting in a required sample size of 138. However, the researcher opts for a sample size of 150 to include attrition and enhance hypothesis testing.

Instruments

The instruments used included questionnaires with demographic information, the Regulatory Focus Questionnaire (RFQ) to assess regulatory focus, and the Person-Environment Fit Scale for Creativity (PEFSC) to assess creativity. The demographic section collects information on gender, age, ethnicity, faculty department, and program type.

Regulatory Focus Questionnaire (RFQ)
The RFQ, developed by Higgins et al. (2001), measured promotion and prevention focus using a Likert scale. It consists of 11 items, with 6 for promotion focus and 5 for prevention focus. The scores were standardized to determine participants' predominant focus.

Person-Environment Fit Scale for Creativity (PEFSC)
The PEFSC, developed by Sen, Acar, and Cetinkaya, assesses creativity with 14 items in personal and environmental dimensions, using a five-point Likert scale. Scores are categorized as high or low based on z-scores (PEFSC; Sen, Acar, & Cetinkaya, 2014).

Participants

Based on descriptive statistics, demographic information from a total of 153 undergraduate students from UPSI was collected and analysed in this study. There were 21 male participants (13.7%) and 132 female participants (86.3%). Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 29 years old, with a mean age of 22.59 years and a standard deviation of 1.958. Participants identified their ethnicity as Malay (51.0%), Chinese (37.9%), Indian (7.8%), and Other (3.3%).

The Faculty of Human Development (FPM) had the highest representation among participants at 27.5%, followed by the Faculty of Human Sciences (FSK) at 13.7%, the Faculty of Management and Economics (FPE) at 13.1%, the Faculty of Music and Performing Arts (FMSP) at 12.4%, the Faculty of Sciences and Mathematics (FSMT) at 9.8%, the Faculty of Languages and Communications (FBK) at 8.5%, the Faculty of Arts, Computing, and Industry Creative (FSKIK) at 7.8%, and the Faculty of Sports Sciences and Coaching (FSSKj) at 6.5%. Among the participants, 47.1% were enrolled in Bachelor of Science (BSc) programs, 34.0% in Bachelor of Arts (BA) programs, and 19.0% in diploma programs.

RESULT

Based on Pearson's correlation analysis, the results revealed a significant positive correlation between promotion focus and creativity among undergraduate students in Malaysia, $r = .803$, $p = .00$ at .05 alpha level. The degree of correlation was high. The direction of correlation indicates positive relationship and it means as promotion focus increases, creativity also increases.

The correlation result also unveiled a significant negative correlation between prevention focus and creativity among undergraduate students in Malaysia; $r = -.711$, $p = .00$ at .05 alpha level. The degree of correlation was high. The direction of correlation indicates negative relationship and it means as prevention focus increases, creativity tends to decrease.

DISCUSSION

The study revealed a statistically significant positive correlation between promotion focus and creativity among undergraduate students in Malaysia. This result aligns with previous research by Sulistiawana, Ekowati, and Putri (2020), Geng et al. (2018), Zou, Wei, Ke, and Wei (2020), Kark, Van Dijk, and

Vashdi (2018), Petrou, Baas, and Roskes (2020), Luo, Xin, Li, and Yu (2021), Li, Li, and Lin (2018), and Lee, Park, and Paik (2019), which have also explored the relationship between promotion focus and creativity. Sulistiawana, Ekowati, and Putri (2020) found that promotion-focused individuals demonstrated the ability to identify creative solutions, especially when combined with individual engagement and intellectual stimulation. This suggests a reciprocal relationship between promotion focus and creativity, where promotion focus motivates individuals to engage in creative thinking and problem-solving. Kark, Van Dijk, and Vashdi (2018) suggested that promotion focus is associated with open thinking, the generation of distinct ideas, and positive emotions that facilitate creative performance.

Regarding prevention focus, the study found a significant negative correlation with creativity, suggesting that individuals with a higher prevention focus tend to exhibit lower levels of creativity. This result is consistent with studies by Sulistiawana, Ekowati, and Putri (2020), Li, Li, and Lin (2018), Lee, Park, and Paik (2019), Geng et al. (2018), and Kark, Van Dijk, and Vashdi (2018), which have also explored the relationship between prevention focus and creativity. Sulistiawana, Ekowati & Putri (2020) argue that prevention focus, characterized by risk aversion and a focus on fulfilling duties and obligations, is negatively associated with creativity due to its prioritization of conformity and avoidance of failure. Consequently, they are more inclined to maintain a conventional and safe status rather than pursuing innovative approaches. Contrastingly, Luo, Xin, Li, and Yu (2021) found a positive relationship between prevention focus and creativity, suggesting that prevention focus may have a complex relationship with creativity influenced by factors such as cognitive perseverance and mood states. Especially when individuals are activated in prevention-focused states, such as through fear or unfulfilled prevention goals, the activation and energization of individuals, regardless of their focus on promotion or prevention, appear to be significant factors in enhancing creativity.

Interestingly, these results contrast with those of Wang et al. (2021), who found no significant relationship between prevention focus and creativity. It is suggested that the influence of regulatory focus on creativity may depend on situational factors, task characteristics, individual differences, and emotional states. While some researchers argue that prevention focus could hinder creativity due to its sensitivity to negative outcomes, risk-averse tendencies, and preference for local processing, it's essential to recognize that the relationship between prevention focus and creativity is intricate and multifaceted. Further research is necessary to fully grasp the complexities of this relationship.

CONCLUSION

The research investigated the correlation between regulatory focus (promotion and prevention) and creativity. The findings reveal a significant positive correlation between promotion focus and creativity. This correlation is supported by previous studies that emphasize the role of promotion focus in stimulating creative thinking and problem-solving. Conversely, prevention focus shows a significant negative correlation with creativity. This negative correlation is attributed to risk aversion and focus on avoiding mistakes associated with prevention focus. These findings are consistent with previous research. That highlights the inhibitory effect of prevention focus on creativity. However, there are some conflicting results regarding the relationship between prevention focus and creativity, indicating the need for further investigation and consideration of contextual factors.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

The researchers adhered to the privacy and confidential policies. No information about the participants was asked nor disclosed. All respondents agreed to participate by clicking yes on the Google form before proceeding to the questionnaires. The data was secured in a passworded folder for safekeeping and limiting access to only the researchers.

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