TIME PERSPECTIVE AS A PREDICTOR OF ACADEMIC COMPETENCE AMONG BLACK FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS IN THE HUMANITIES

Rinet Steyn

DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE

MAGISTER SOCIETATIS SCIENTIAE

(PSYCHOLOGY)

in the

FACULTY OF THE HUMANITIES

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

at the

UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE

Supervisor: Dr. L. Naudé

November 2012

DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation/thesis hereby submitted by me for the Magister Atrium (Clinical Psychology) degree at the University of the Free State is my own independent work and has not previously been submitted by me at another university/faculty. I further more cede copyright of the dissertation/thesis in favour of the University of the Free State.

ABSTRACT

The aim of the study was to explore the constructs of academic competence and time perspective amongst a population of Black African first-year students from the Faculty of the Humanities at the University of the Free State. A mixed method design was implemented to investigate the research aims in a conclusive manner. The potential of time perspective to predict academic competence was investigated during the quantitative phase. Greater in-depth knowledge was gained by exploring the participants' understanding of the constructs in the qualitative phase.

In the quantitative phase of the study, participants' time perspective was measured with the Zimbardo Time Perspective Inventory (ZTPI), which divides time perspective into five frames: past-positive, past-negative, present-hedonistic, present-fatalistic, and future. Academic competence was conceptualised as the average result of all the modules that the participants had completed during 2011. A multiple regression analysis was conducted in order to measure the amount of variance in academic competence that is accounted for by time perspective. The quantitative results did not indicate a significant predictive value of time perspective in relation to academic competence. However, the past-negative time frame showed a significant negative correlation with academic competence.

During the qualitative phase of the study, focus group sessions and individual interviews were conducted with a select number of participants in order to explore their personal understanding of the relevant constructs. A thematic analysis identified the challenges that were unique to the population as forces that limit academic competence. It was also found that participants apply different time frames and utilise all as motivational forces for achieving academic competence. The way in which social relationships are related to time perspective was identified as an important role player in participants' engagement with their studies.

Keywords: Academic competence, time perspective, higher education, first-year experience, Black African students, education in South Africa, motivation, goals, hope

ABSTRAK

Die doel van die studie was om die veranderlikes van akademiese prestasie en tydperspektief onder 'n populasie van Swart Afrika eerstejaarstudenteaan die Fakulteit van die Geesteswetenskappe in die Universiteit van die Vrystaat te ondersoek.'n Gemengde metode is as navorsingsontwerp geïmplementeer om die navorsingsvrae op 'n beslissendewyseaan te spreek. Die potensiaal van tydperspektief om akademiese prestasie te voorspel is tydens die kwantitatiewe fase ondersoek. Meer in-diepte kennis oor die deelnemers se begrip van die veranderlikes is tydens die kwalitatiewe fase verkry.

Tydens die kwantitatiewe fase van die studie is die Zimbardo Time Perspective Inventory (ZTPI) gebruik om die deelnemers se tydperspektief te assesseer. Tydperspektief wordin vyf raamwerke verdeel, naamlik: verlede-positief, verlede-negatief, hede-hedonisties, hede-fatalisties en toekoms. Akademiese prestasie is gekonseptualiseer as die gemiddelde resultaat van alle modules wat die deelnemers tydens 2011 geneem het.'n Meervoudige regressiewe analise is toegepas om die variansie van akademiese prestasie wat deur tydperspektief verklaar word, te verkry. Die kwantitatiewe resultate het geen beduidende voorspellende waarde tussen tydperspektief en akademiese prestasie opgelewer nie.Die verlede-negatiewe tydraamwerk het wel 'n beduidende negatiewe korrelasie met akademiese prestasie aangedui.

Gedurende die kwalitatiewe fase van die studie is fokusgroepe en individuele onderhoude met 'n geselekteerde hoeveelheid deelnemers gevoer om hulpersoonlike begrip van die relevante veranderlikes te bekom. 'n Tematiese analise het gedui op die unieke uitdagings wat die spesifieke populasie ervaar, wat akademiese prestasie beperk. Daar is ook gevind dat deelnemers verskillende tydraamwerke toepas, en elkeen as motivering tot akademiese prestasie gebruik. Die manier waarop sosiale verhoudings met tydperspektief verband hou, is ook as 'n belangrike rolspeler in die deelnemers se toewyding tot hul studiesgeïdentifiseer.

Sleutelwoorde: Akademiese prestasie, tydperspektief, hoëronderwys, eerstejaar-ervaring, Swart Afrika-studente, onderwys in Suid-Afrika, motivering, doelwitte, hoop

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 1

THE HIGHER EDUCATION MILIEU IN SOUTH AFRICA

Only 15% of students who enrol in South Africa's higher education system graduate within the initial allocated time (Letseka & Maile, 2008). This statistic provides reason for concern, and prompts research investigating contributors to academic success and failure. In an effort to enhance academic success, it is necessary to gain insight into the factors that influence students' academic competence in a higher education institution. The current study will explore the concept of academic competence by considering the role of time perspective. The study will be limited to Black African students, since little research on academic competence and time perspective has been conducted on this population. Also, as a previously marginalised group in South Africa, Black African students are still struggling to produce satisfactory academic results (Jansen, Herman, Matentjie, Pillay, Sehoole, & Weber, 2007). Furthermore, the study will focus specifically on the first-year experience at university, which is regarded as a building block for achievement in future years of higher education (Scott, 2009).

Chapter 1 will describe the educational climate with regards to the South African higher education milieu. Since the population for the study was limited to students of the University of the Free State, the academic context of this institution will be discussed. A brief description of the first-year experience and the relevance thereof in South African universities will be provided. Black African students' experiences within higher education will also be emphasised. A short discussion on the research variables, academic competence, and time perspective, will follow. Lastly, the aim and rationale of the study will be explicated.

1.1   The unique educational climate in South Africa

When the educational history of South Africa is considered, due regard should be given to the lasting impact of the apartheid era. The introduction of Bantu education for Black people (including Coloured, Indian, and Black African races) in 1954 caused the formation of different education systems for Black and White groups (Boughey, 2004). Education for Black people focused on preparing them for the inferior roles they would fulfil within a nationalistic South

Africa (Hopfer, 1997). The role of apartheid in creating segregated communities according to race led to the inferior quality of education for about 80% of the South African population (Jonathan, 2006).

After South Africa's democracy was established in 1994, policies were put in place to encourage students of all races to enter higher education institutions. One of the main goals of the National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE) that was accepted in 2001 was to enhance participation rates by increasing access to higher education (Ngidi, 2007). Despite such policies, the drop-out rates of previously marginalised groups has remained high (Jama, Mapesela, & Beylefeld, 2008). In 2005, the Department of Education (DoE) (2005) reported statistics of drop-out rates for students who were enrolled during 2000: 30% of the students dropped out during the first year of study and 20% during their second year, and only 22% of the remainder graduated within three years. High drop-out rates are costing the National Treasury R4,5 billion per annum (Letseka & Maile, 2008).

The potential benefits of an educated South African population justify encouraged participation in higher education. According to former Minister of Education, Naledi Pandor (2007), the DoE would like to see professionals trained in order to respond to the needs of the country. The DoE (1997) states that education should be utilised as a way of building career paths to produce the required public servants (DoE, 1997). Academic competence is thus associated with the acquisition of skills, knowledge, and abilities in the fight against poverty, which implies empowering previously disadvantaged groups (Jama et al., 2008). Academic competence is further viewed as a way of restoring previous imbalances and creating a less differentiated and more democratic society. Jonathan (2006) claims that academic competence in higher education produces benefits on several levels. Society is enhanced through mastered skills and, on a personal level, better education often results in better working conditions, personal development, income, and quality of life.

1.2   The academic situation at the University of the Free State

University campuses across the globe function differently, and it is therefore necessary to understand the unique experiences and needs of the specific student population under investigation (Pitkethly & Prosser, 2001). The University of the Free State established various means to address the retention of students. The disparity between the success rates of White and Black African students was mentioned in a report to the Minister of Education (University of the Free State, 2011). The Academic Quality Unit was established in 2008 to enhance student learning, while taking cognisance of the under-preparedness of students. The Teaching and Learning Plan has also been implemented in an effort to enhance teaching and learning initiatives, and with the ultimate goal of optimising academic excellence. A tracking system was also recently implemented, with promising results, to warn first- and second-year students who are at risk of academic failure (University of the Free State, 2011).

The Faculty of the Humanities, the largest faculty at the University of the Free State, offers various learning programmes in the fields of language, cultural studies, and social sciences. In an attempt to improve access together with success, the Faculty incorporated various support programmes such as the New Academic Tutorial Programme (NATP) and Academic Facilitation sessions – all aimed at supporting students in order to increase success rates.

In the Faculty of the Humanities, the learning programmes with the highest enrolment figures are: B.A. General, B.A General (Extended), B.Soc.Sc, and B.Soc.Sc (Extended). In Table 1, the success rates (measured in terms of the percentage of students who successfully completed their studies) in the specific learning programmes in the Faculty of the Humanities are summarised. From the table, it is clear that the success rate from 2007 to 2011 varies from 62.53% to 74.24% for the four programmes.

Table 1

Success rates for various learning programmes in the Faculty of the Humanities

LEARNING PROGRAMME	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
B.A. General	67.95%	64.03%	71.38%	74.24%	73.02%
B.A. General (Extended)	62.53%	63.55%	69.18%	68.84%	69.67%
B.Soc.Sc	69.13%	68.54%	63.56%	64.76%	67.8%
B.Soc.Sc (Extended)	69.14%	61.1%	68.91%	67.08%	72.17%

1.3 The first-year experience

The first year at university is viewed as a time of difficult transition, and is regarded as a critical period that has an extensive impact on students' decision to continue their studies. Scott (2009) states that a student's performance during the first year of study creates a foundation in terms of social, personal, and cognitive development for academic competence in the subsequent years of study. Behaviour and cognitive habits established during the first year of study seem to persist during following academic years. It is thus necessary to ensure that students do well during their first year in order to enhance self-confidence and continue the process of building on successes (Cuseo, 2005).

According to Letseka and Maile (2008), first-year students are a group that are especially at risk for dropping out before the end of their first year of study. Many first-year students are underprepared for an environment that requires computer literacy, the acceptance of responsibility for performance, as well as creative and critical thinking skills (Van Schalkwyk, Leibowitz, & Van der Merwe, 2009). The methods used at school for teaching and studying are also often inadequate for further studies. With all the co-occurring challenges, new students are often overwhelmed by all the new duties and changes associated with a higher education setting. In order to pass modules in the higher education milieu, first-year students thus need to adapt to new methods of teaching and studying.

Furthermore, the effective integration of first-year students into the higher education system also presents challenges from an organisational perspective (Crissman Ishler, 2005). First-year students enter the higher educational system with differing backgrounds and, therefore, varying skills, competencies, and values (Reason, Terenzini, & Domingo, 2006). Previous segregation in educational standards adds to the varying levels of preparedness for university (Van Schalkwyk et al., 2009). Higher academic institutions are thus left with the difficulty of establishing standard module content, lecture methods, assessment, and service provision that would accommodate all students.

The importance of the first year of study necessitates a special focus on this year. Potgieter, Davidowitz, and Mathabatha (2008) state that failure rates at higher education systems in South Africa are partially due to the inadequate support offered to university students after admission. Universities are increasingly being called upon to take responsibility for ensuring that students who are admitted develop the benchmark cognitive and non-cognitive skills to cope with their new academic environment in order to become successful graduates (Cuseo, 2005). Sufficient assistance further depends on a solid understanding of the first-year experience. This study will aim to enhance such an understanding by exploring the variables of academic competence and time perspective.

1.4   Black African students

It has been shown that previously disadvantaged groups such as Black Africans, women, and first-generation students have more difficulty orientating themselves at the start of their higher education careers (Jansen et al., 2007). These marginalised groups are often underprepared for the higher education milieu, which results in high drop-out rates. The imbalances in school curricula that were created by the Bantu educational system are still causing many Black African students to be ill equipped for university standards, compared to their White counterparts (Freeman & Hrabowski, 2005). Furthermore, many of the Black African students are the first generation in their families who are able to enter an academic career. Undereducated families are often not capable of providing the necessary support or motivation to first-year students in the family (Jama et al., 2008).

The Education White Paper of 1997 proposed the transformation of the higher education system in South Africa in order for it to meet the needs of the general population (Jama et al., 2008). The White Paper aimed to provide equal access to higher education and empower previously disadvantaged groups, in order to ensure the necessary qualifications to satisfy the demands of a democratic society (Fiske & Ladd, 2004). Specific focus was thus placed on the improvement of academic competence of Black African and female students. However, despite proof of improved rates of participation by these student populations, academic outputs were still skewed in terms of race (Jansen et al., 2007). While White students have an overall graduation rate of 60-70%, Black students achieve a graduation rate of less than a 35%. According to Scott (2009), equity in access is meaningless without equity in outcomes. Means to assure better outcomes for Black Africans should therefore be explored.

Instead of providing support, class situations are often managed in a way that is not conducive to the integration of Black African students into higher education. A study conducted on a Black African population of students provided evidence of discrimination by lecturers in the form of attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours (Thomas, Caldwell, Faison, & Jackson, 2009). The phenomenon of discrimination is especially disconcerting if it leads to a self-fulfilling prophecy, where the victimised group begins to confirm the stereotype by displaying the behaviour that is expected (Taylor, Peplau, & Sears, 2006). It was shown that perceived stereotypical ideas could lead to poorer academic outcomes in an academic milieu (Ruthick, Smyth, Lopoo, & Dusek, 2009).

Government has engaged in continuing efforts to enhance the participation of previously marginalised groups in higher education (Jama et al., 2008). It is also usually these groups that find it most difficult to adapt to the higher education transition, with Black African students struggling the most to prove themselves academically competent (Jansen et al., 2007). Better insight into the specific challenges that this group of students face can indicate the way forward in terms of providing efficient support and enhancing academic competence.

1.5   The importance of fostering academic competence

Worldwide, education is acknowledged as a major means to gain economic prosperity (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009). Higher education is thus necessary in order to develop the competencies associated with improving the financial prosperity of both individuals and the country as a whole. A lack of such competencies limits access to higher income jobs or self-employment activities. It is therefore important to foster academic competence as a way of ensuring the provision of specialised skills, knowledge, and abilities to the labour market (Jama et al., 2008). Individuals who are academically competent are in a position to create a better living environment and escape the continuing poverty cycle often found in the South African context (Akoojee & McGrath, 2004).

Due to the broad scope of interpretation of the term 'academic competence,' there are many ways to define this construct. While some authors choose to define academic competence in cognitive terms only (McLeod & Cropley, 1989; Fraser & Killen, 2003; Jama et al., 2008), others claim that non-cognitive factors should also be considered (Trautwein, Roberts, Schnyder, & Niggli, 2009; Van Schalkwyk et al., 2009; Lopez, 2009). Although the effect of non-cognitive factors is recognised, the current study will measure academic competence quantitatively by only using the academic results obtained during 2011. The qualitative phase of the study will, however, aim to gather broader ideas on the factors constituting academic competence.

Achieving academic competence is beneficial to both the individual and the greater South African society. In order to utilise the potential opportunities for individuals entering the labour force, it is important to enhance through-flow numbers at the university level. It is therefore necessary to explore and understand the variables that correlate with academic competence.

1.6   The relevance of time perspective in an academic context

It has been shown that the way students regard time may has an influence on their academic success. Zimbardo and Boyd (1999) proposed a theory of time perspective that describes the non-conscious processes used to structure experiences according to different time

frames. Through this process, order and meaning can be ascribed to a variety of personal and social situations that people experience (Préau, Apostolidis, Francois, Rafel, & Spire, 2007). Time frames can therefore impact on the way that information is recalled and utilised in present moments. The Zimbardo Time Perspective Inventory (ZTPI) will be used to measure the construct of time perspective (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999). The inventory distinguishes between five different time frames: past-positive, past-negative, present-hedonistic, present-fatalistic, and future time frames.

Time perspective can thus be regarded as a broad construct with a potential impact on various human functions. The fact that a certain time frame can influence how individuals plan ahead and work toward achieving goals makes it a relevant topic in the exploration of academic competence (Mello & Worrell, 2006). Knowledge on the students' general orientation towards time can provide insight into their engagement with academic activities.

1.7   Aim and rationale of the study

The Council of Higher Education (CHE) conducted a study in 2004 on the changes that were witnessed in the South African education system over a decade of democracy (CHE, 2007). The conclusion of the study was that educational transformation in the country is a complex process that is by no means complete, and that the implemented interventions are still yielding unsatisfactory results (Jama et al., 2008). Research on the possible contributors to academic competence is thus necessary to direct future interventions that would assist students in this regard.

It appears that it is especially Black African first-year students that struggle to adapt to a higher education system (Jama et al., 2008). A need thus exists for unique interventions that can promote the academic competence of previously disadvantaged groups. Phan (2009) also states that there is still a paucity of research pertaining to the experience of time perspective among non-Western societies. The present study will focus on a Black African population, since insufficient information is available regarding the dynamics of academic competence and time

perspective in this group. A population of first-year students was chosen, as the first year is regarded as a crucial foundation for future academic study (Scott, 2009).

Planning ahead, referring back to previous experiences, and applying self-discipline in the present are all functions of time associated with studying. It is therefore assumed that the way in which time is experienced will influence academic studies. A large research corps has specifically indicated a correlation between a future time frame and academic competence (Adelabu, 2007;Harber, Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999; McInerney, 2004; Mello & Worrell, 2006; Padawer, Jacobs-Lawson, Hershey, & Thomas, 2007; Peetsma, Hascher, Van der Veen, & Roede 2005).

Thus, the aim of the present study is to establish whether time perspective can predict academic competence amongst a Black African first-year population. The research aims further include the exploration of students' subjective experiences of this association. A mixed-method design was followed to answer the research aims, as it allows for studying the constructs from different methodological paradigms. The quantitative phase of the study will measure the possible contribution of time perspective in predicting academic competence. A more in-depth understanding of these constructs will be gained during the qualitative phase.

1.8 Chapter layout

The chapters to follow firstly provide the theoretical framework for understanding the constructs to be investigated in this study. In the literature review, theories will be explicated and previous research in this field will be summarised. The later chapters summarise the methodology followed to reach the aims of the study. The chapters will highlight the following aspects:

Chapter 2 will provide a description of the variable *academic competence*. Definitions from the relevant literature will be compared, and a final definition to be usedin the study at hand will be provided. Furthermore, a comprehensive model of influences on student learning and

persistence by Reason et al. (2006) will be incorporated in order to describe influences on students' academic competence.

Chapter 3 focuses on the second variable, namely time perspective. The chapter will start with a conceptualisation of the term. A description of the different dimensions of time perspective will then be provided, as defined by Zimbardo and Boyd (1999), followed by an explanation of the influences on the construct. Different psychological constructs that are related to time perspective will be discussed. Specific attention will be paid to the association between time perspective and academic competence.

The research questions will be stated in Chapter 4, together with the proposed methodologies to investigate the questions. Characteristics of the population will be mentioned, as well as the methods used to obtain the sample of participants. The process of data gathering will be explained as it pertains to both the quantitative and qualitative phases. A discussion on the analyses used for both phases will follow. Lastly, the quantitative results of the study will be provided.

The discussion and interpretation of the research results will be elaborated on in Chapter 5. A discussion on the results of the quantitative data gathering will be provided in relation to the findings of the qualitative study, as well as previously mentioned literature.

Chapter 6 is the concluding section of the study, which will contain the most prominent qualitative findings. The limitations of the study will follow, together with recommendations for future research on the relevant constructs.

1.9   Conclusion

This chapter aimed to sketch the context in which the current study will take place. Insight into the unique situation of the South African educational system offers a better understanding of the challenges regarding academic competence at the University of the Free State. The importance of academic competence as a potential means to gaining economic prosperity and

rectifying previous imbalances is especially relevant to the poverty-stricken in South Africa. As a previously marginalised group, Black African students, specifically, experience greater difficulty in adapting in higher education institutions. Furthermore, the first-year experience present students with many challenges, impacting on the achievement of academic competence.

CHAPTER 2

ACADEMIC COMPETENCE

Higher education and the acquisition of academic competence allow individuals to enter specialised positions in the labour force, which provides them with a stable source of income (Altbach et al., 2009). According to Tinto (2006), knowledge on student retention has not been sufficiently translated into increased student graduation and persistence. The complexity of this construct calls for efforts to enhance understanding of the factors that contribute to first-year students' academic competence. This chapter will introduce the variable of academic competence by aiming to define the term. Furthermore, a differentiation will be made between organisational and individual definitions of academic competence. The model of Reason et al. (2006) will be used as a way of organising the various influences on academic competence.

2.1 Definition of academic competence

Different interpretations of the term 'academic competence' are found in the literature. The manner in which the construct is defined depends on the aim and context of the relevant study (Keeve, 2010). In the literature, the terms 'performance' and 'achievement' are often used interchangeably. There are however, small nuances that differentiate the terms from one another. The definition contained in the APA Dictionary of Psychology (Vandenbos, 2007) will be provided, followed by the application of each term. The distinction between academic competence as defined from an organisational and individual level will be explored.

2.1.1 Different terms describing academic functioning

Competence refers to "one's development repertoire of skills, especially as it is applied to a task or set of tasks" (Vandenbos, 2007, p. 204). Moser (2008) agrees that academic competence describes the combination of fundamental attitudes, skills, and knowledge that enables students to perform academically. The term further indicates the effective application of knowledge, rather than the mere presence thereof. Skills relevant to classroom participation, regulatory abilities, and school-related relationships also contribute to academic competence (Valiente,

Lemery-Chalfant, Swanson, & Reiser, 2008). It is thus a wide term that takes non-academic experiences into account when describing a student's competence.

Performance is defined as "any activity or collection of responses that leads to a result or has an effect upon the environment" (Vandenbos, 2007, p. 685). The focus is thus on the results of academic ventures. Valiente et al. (2008) view academic performance as the grade point averages achieved by students. In the South African higher education context, this can be translated into the final module results. Douglas (2010) agrees that final results should be viewed as a representation of academic performance. Performance, thus, is determined by systematic assessment, and has a narrower meaning than 'competence' (Gardner, Upcraft, & Barefoot, 2005).

Achievement is defined as "the attainment of some goal" (Vandenbos, 2007, p. 9). Diseth and Kobbeltvedt (2010) argue that academic achievement is indicated by an examination grade that shows that a goal has been reached. For Barna and Brott (2011), academic achievement requires purposefulness, motivation, self-efficacy, and intentionality. This definition would thus entail a much more subjective and therefore relativistic interpretation, since achievement is dependent on the specific goals set by students or organisations.

Although all the above mentioned definitions seem appropriate for the exploration of academic outcomes, the term 'academic competence' was chosen for the current study. This term refers to the application of skills as measured by a specific task, such as an examination, which justifies the use of students' academic results for the quantitative phase of the study. However, the definition further acknowledges that success at higher education institutions is not limited to the attainment of results. It also includes the development of well-rounded students who are able to integrate acquired knowledge and skills. The qualitative phase of the study will focus on the elaborated interpretation of the term.

2.1.2 Organisational definitions of academic competence

From an organisational perspective, academic results provide statistical data that comment on the functioning of the larger system (CHE, 2007). Drop-out and retention rates are viewed as important factors in defining academic competence. The CHE (2007) defines dropping out at university level as any student leaving the institution without a degree. Retention is viewed as the continued participation of students in the institution, until a degree is completed. Drop-out and retention rates offer a way of indicating where masses of students find themselves in the process of attaining academic competence. Success rates are calculated by comparing the attained and failed module credits for a specific year (DoE, 2005). Achieving academic competence is thus measured by the amount of students passing modules and eventually obtaining a qualification.

There are however, complexities when using retention and drop-out rates in defining academic competence. Hagedorn (2006) argues that there are many different factors that should be considered when drop-out is defined. For example, a student who leaves the education system only to return later should not be viewed as a drop-out. The fact that only students who attain a degree within the initially proposed time limit are considered in retention figures might therefore skew the rates (Hubbell, 2007). A more diverse university population with a variety of needs thus necessitates revision of these definitions.

2.1.3 Individual definitions of academic competence

An individual's perspective on academic competence is based on the individual student's experience of success at university level, and will therefore differ between individuals. Within this individual framework, definitions of academic competence can be divided into two categories. Some authors choose a more holistic perspective that includes both cognitive and non-cognitive factors when describing academic competence. Other authors prefer to define academic competence only in terms of the percentages (based on performance in tests and examinations) obtained by students.

In the holistic view, McLeod and Cropley (1989, p. 1) view academic excellence as defined by a variety of aspects, including "quick learning, effective storing and retrieving of material, application of learned material as well as an appreciation of knowledge and new ideas."Van Schalkwyk et al. (2009) are of the opinion that a combination of attitudes, skills, and strengths are responsible for student success at higher education level. Such a view supports the notion that academic competence is more than cognitive competence, and that other personal characteristics should also be acknowledged. According to Trautwein et al. (2009), success at university is also dependent on the effort that students are able to invest in their studies. The constellation of all the skills involved in students' preparedness to apply themselves to their studies is therefore regarded as an indicator of academic competence.

Ho and Hau (2008) focus attention on the difference between successful academic results and the integration of learned material to apply into practice. Since short-term memorising can still produce good examination results, academic competence is not necessarily proven by high academic results. The focus should rather fall on the meaningful incorporation of new information with the goal to use this knowledge in daily situations. According to this view, the ultimate measure of academic competence is the ability to utilise the knowledge and skills obtained through completed modules.

The distinction between the holistic and the percentage view of academic competence can be illustrated by the difference in learning and performance goals. With learning goals, students aim to achieve academically through the process of integrating new material to improve internal abilities (Sigelman & Ryder, 2009). On the other hand, when students have performance goals, the aim is to prove competence in measurable terms. A student who adheres to learning goals will thus measure competence on an internal level as the acquisition of new knowledge, skills, and abilities. Students adhering to performance goals will be influenced by outside forces, and will therefore measure academic competence according to the academic results achieved.

In South Africa, academic success is measured mainly through examination results, which explains the high priority of preparing students for test situations (Fraser & Killen, 2003). The importance placed on the nationally standardised Grade 12 final results stimulates the

development of achievement goals. Defining academic competence according to a percentage allows for a precise method of measuring. In this regard, Lopez (2009) mentions the importance of implementing measures to assess students' progress in academic subject areas. Progress is then measured by comparing students' previous academic results to more recent results. Douglas (2010) also views the use of final academic results as a fair and accurate way of defining student success. Standardised test scores or examination scores are thus regarded as the measurements for this variable.

In the present study academic competence is mainly focused on the individual's interpretation of the term. The percentage view was used during the quantitative phase in order to establish the predictive value of time perspective. More holistic views on academic competence were explored during the qualitative phase of the study. Although mentioned to a lesser degree, the organisational perspective on defining academic competence is also recognised. The influencing factors will be discussed accordingly.

2.2   Factors influencing academic competence

The many studies conducted in the field of academic competence indicate the multidimensionality and complexity of predicting this construct (Keeve, 2010). Jama et al. (2008) emphasise the importance of identifying the factors that play a significant role in predicting academic competence. These factors would indicate the areas that require further attention in order to increase students' success rates. Due to the diversity within a student population, various influencing factors should be taken into account when aiming to understand the concept of academic competence (Tinto, 1975). Fraser and Killen (2003) state that there is no single predictor that can sufficiently account for academic competence, and that a combination of factors should therefore be considered.

There is an on-going debate on whether to use pre- or post-admission characteristics to predict academic competence. Geiser and Santelices (2007) view the academic results obtained by Grade 12 learners as an important predictor of future academic competence. Ngidi (2007) questions the accuracy of only using Grade 12 results, and states that non-cognitive factors

should also be taken into account. Fraser and Killen (2005) focus on the importance of post-admission characteristics when aiming to predict academic competence. Factors such as the culture of the peer group, concept of time, approach to studies, motivation, cultural expectations, and academic self-concept were explored in their study.

Furthermore, the South African context includes students from different cultural backgrounds, which results in various expectations, academic skills, and life experiences (Fraser & Killen, 2003). In this regard, Tinto (2006) encourages the consideration of social, cultural, economic, and institutional forces that may contribute to student retention. It is therefore necessary to include not only a global view of influencing factors on academic competence, but also one that is specific to South African higher education institutions.

Since it is impossible to account for all the factors influencing academic competence, the present study will make use of a model that was designed to highlight certain overarching factors. Reason et al. (2006) proposed a model that organises the multiple factors influencing students' academic competence at university level (illustrated in Figure 1). The model integrates both the organisational and individual perspectives on academic competence, with a stronger emphasis on the holistic individual viewpoint. The model is based on previous research by Astin (1993) and Terenzini, Springer, Pascarella, and Nora (1995). These sources will also be discussed in order to enrich the description of each category.
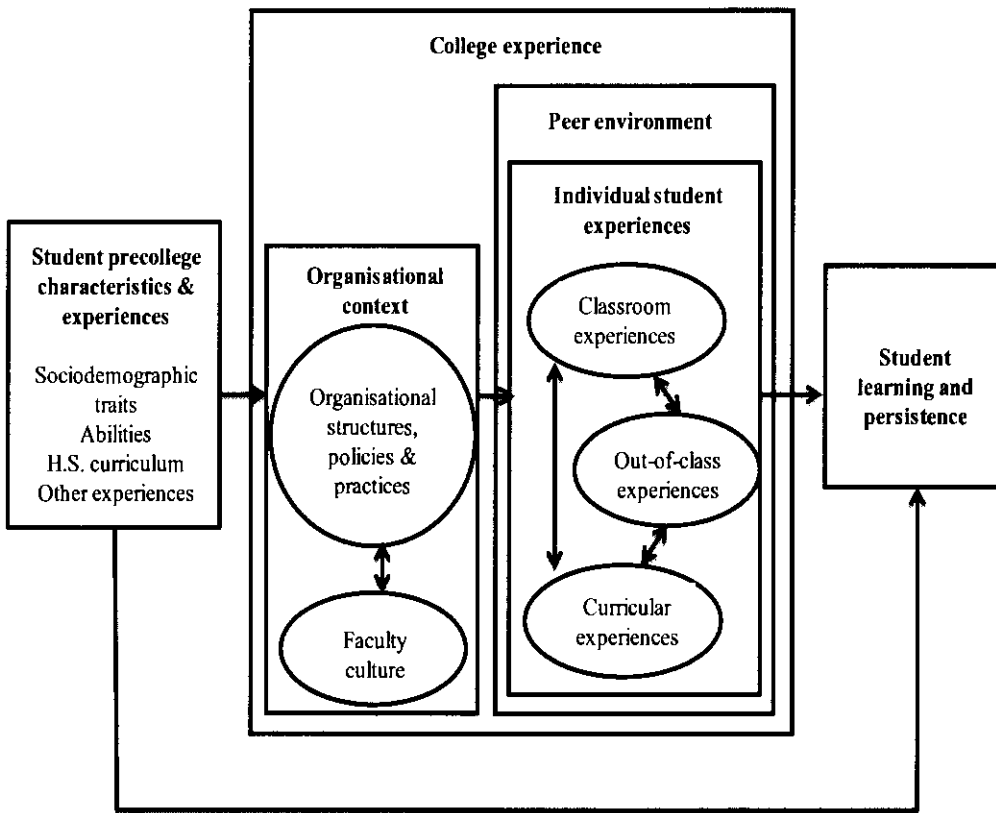
Figure 1

Comprehensive model of influences on student learning and persistence. Flow chart indicating the various influences on academic competence in an academic setting. Adapted from "First things first: Developing academic competence in the first year of college" by R.D. Reason, P.T. Terenzini, and R.J. Domingo, 2006, *Research in Higher Education, 47*(2), p. 154.

The underlying hypothesis of the model is that students arrive at universities with differing personal, academic, and demographic characteristics (Reason et al., 2006). Traits like these will contribute to the way in which students approach and engage with the university experience. All academic activities take place within an organisational context, and the structures, policies, and cultures therefore have at least an indirect influence on the students' experiences. Academic engagement is also influenced by the experiences that students share within their peer environment, both in and out of class. Furthermore, it has been shown that support and camaraderie with fellow students can enhance individuals' successful adaption to higher education (Fraser & Killen, 2003).

It is thus the combination of students' characteristics established before entering higher education, together with the experiences at university, that shape the learning and persistence that students will exhibit (Reason et al., 2006). Learning and persistence are also related to the achievement of academic competence. The parts of the model that concern students' characteristics and experiences established before entering higher education and individual student experiences are especially relevant to the current study, and will be discussed at greater length.

2.2.1 Students' pre-university characteristics and experiences

According to Tinto's model of student persistence/withdrawal behaviour (1975), first-year students enter higher education with different background characteristics, including family status, academic aptitudes, and school experiences. It is important to consider thesepre-existing characteristics, since these are the resources that will be tapped into once students enter an institution of higher education. It is also reasonable to expect that students have already established rich sources of skills through their experiences in the school system and their societal environment (Reason et al., 2006). These traits will influence the initial commitment to the institution, as well as the desire to graduate. On an organisational level, pre-university characteristics (such as Grade 12 results) are used to determine students' potential to pass the chosen modules at university level, in order to decrease drop-out rates (Fraser & Killen, 2005). According to Reason et al.'s model (2006), pre-university characteristics and experiences entail sociodemographic traits, abilities, high school curriculum, and other experiences.

a)   Sociodemographic traits

According to Terenzini et al. (1995), parent's education, family income, race, and gender are the major sociodemographic traits for consideration. Ngidi (2007) further identified the past experiences in cultural interactions as important contributors to students' engagement in academic careers. In a country such as South Africa, which is still racially segregated to a large extent, it is especially vital to consider the influence of sociodemographic traits on academic competence. Many Black African students currently entering universities are first-generation

students (the first in their family to enter university). Undereducated families are often not capable of providing the necessary support or motivation to students in their families (Eccles, 2005). Insufficient finances for higher education can further limit the broadening of future opportunities. University fees, books, accommodation, and food can add up to impossible expenses for families with limited financial resources (Jama et al., 2008). The legacy of apartheid and the consequent challenges (as mentioned in Chapter 1) associated with the experiences of Black Africans add to a lower rate of academic competence in this racial group. According to LeCroy and Krysik (2008), previously disadvantaged populations (such as Black Africans and women) generally tend to display poorer academic performance.

b) Abilities

Certain abilities that students obtained before the transition to higher education show a positive relationship with later academic competence. In the study conducted by Keeve (2010), a distinction is made between cognitive and non-cognitive abilities in the prediction of academic competence. Both categories of ability are important in the consideration of a student's preparedness to engage in higher education activities.

With regards to cognitive abilities, Terenzini et al. (1995) found that mathematical and literary abilities associated with intelligence tests are important considerations in predicting academic competence at university level. Cognitive ability is, however, a broader term than intelligence, and, therefore, associated with a greater spectrum of skills (Foxcroft & Roodt, 2009). The application of planning, memorising, examination preparation, note taking, and communication with students and lecturers can all be viewed as important abilities that contribute to success at university level (Soares, Guisande, Almeida, & Pa'ramo, 2009). Students who failed to develop these abilities will thus be more likely to experience difficulty in adapting to a higher education setting.

According to Afolabie, Ogunmwonyi, and Okediji(2009), the prediction of academic competence, for decades, focused on what was regarded as constructs of intelligence, such as mathematical, spatial, and verbal skills, as well as logical reasoning. However, these aspects

have proven to be insufficient in predicting the potential academic competence of first-year students (Afolabi et al., 2009). A case was further made by Ngidi (2007) for the consideration of non-cognitive abilities in preparing students for higher education. In this regard, emotional intelligence is viewed as an important contributor to academic competence. This construct is defined as "… the behavioural and interpersonal adjustment of the individual to a particular environment or situation" (Foxcroft & Roodt, 2009, p.131). Afolabi et al. (2009) states that emotional intelligence impacts on academic performance, and will therefore assist in the transition to higher education. The intelligent application of abilities like self-discipline, motivation, and emotional regulation influence how individuals cope with daily challenges. These abilities are influenced by the extent to which students are focused on the past, the present, or the future (Rabinovich, Morton, Postm, 2010). The length and clarity of the future pictures that students are able to integrate with their current behaviour will affect the engagement with academic activities (Leondari, 2007).

The ability of applying learned resourcefulness can further be compared to what Terenzini et al. (1995) describe as a positive intellectual orientation. Kennett and Reed (2009) define learned resourcefulness as "… the basic self-regulatory skills needed to handle everyday life challenges" (p. 154). It thus includes the application of self-regulatory skills that are necessary to manage the broad spectrum of challenges that make up the transition to higher education. These skills include self-discipline, fighting procrastination, and conscientiously carrying out all assigned tasks. Learned resourcefulness is further claimed to be associated with better problem-solving skills, self-control and positive self-instruction (Rosenbaum & Cohen, 1999). Resourceful students would thus be able to manage new stress related to time pressure, financial complications, and personal problems. Students who are able to limit concerns about future challenges and focus on their goals are more likely to achieve successful outcomes (Padawer et al., 2007). Commitment to academic competence is also a self-regulatory skill, which Potgieter et al. (2008) associate with higher retention rates.

Another important non-cognitive ability that increases the likelihood that first-year students will master their workload is the capacity to cope with greater responsibility. It cannot be assumed that the school environment has empowered learners to take control of their own

academic competence by applying self-discipline (Stupnisky, Renaud, Daniels, Haynes, & Perry, 2008). In a study done at the University of Pretoria on the post-enrolment factors perceived as influencing students' success, self-discipline and effort were found to be among the strongest contributors to academic competence (Fraser & Killen, 2003). These abilities are thus shaped by lasting patterns of behaviour, already adopted at high school level.

c)   High school curriculum

According to Terenzini et al. (1995), the educational background of new students will shape the pattern of their subject choices, as well as their educational success. Academic competence in higher education institutions is therefore reliant on the competencies obtained at high school level. However, first-year students are further required to build competencies beyond what they have thus far obtained. Unlike the situation at school, university students are expected to take responsibility for their own academic success (Scott, 2009). At a higher institution, students are also expected to engage more actively in the modules by applying creative and critical skills (Van Schalkwyk et al., 2009). The large, less personal classes, together with a new-found freedom might, however, disrupt students' focus on their studies. Since high schools do not sufficiently equip learners to take responsibility, first-year students often lack competencies in this regard (Potgieter et al., 2008).

Although the curriculum for mainstream high schools in South Africa is standard, the differences in teaching quality and methods created by the previously segregated educational system are still apparent (Fraser & Killen, 2005). All students should thus have been exposed to the same learning material, but the extent to which they understand and integrate the information is likely to be different. In theory, the standardised school curriculum should be sufficient to prepare learners to adapt successfully to the higher education setting. As evidenced by the high drop-out rates found amongst the first-year population, it is clear that new students are not sufficiently prepared by high school institutions (Letseka & Maile, 2008).

d)   Other experiences

A study conducted in Portugal indicated the danger of utilising only cognitive factors to predict students' academic competence. Of the students predicted to fail, 50% succeeded, while 30% of those predicted to succeed, failed (Soares et al., 2009). There is thus a large variance in the construct of academic competence that has to be explained by other experiences. Considering the unique attributes of every individual student, as well as the educational context, many other aspects could potentially play a role in academic competence.

2.2.2 Organisational context

Astin (1993) claims that the size of the university, the size of the faculty, and the investment in student services, academic advisement, and library services are all factors that could influence the academic competence of students. Astin (1993) further states that students who experience acceptance and support from the faculties show increased effort in their academic engagement. Organisational issues regarding the situation at the University of the Free State were briefly described in Chapter 1. Due to the size and limitations of the research study at hand, factors such as organisational structures, policies, practices, and faculty cultures only warrant brief discussion. These are however, recognised as important role players that should be taken into account when exploring influences on academic competence.

a)   Organisational structures, policies, and practices

The structures, policies, and practices that are in place in an organisation can influence students' holistic development and retention. Crissman Ishler (2005) states that university structures should support a climate where all students (diverse races, part-time, disabled, and international) can be equally integrated. According to Potgieter et al. (2008), failure rates at higher education systems in South Africa are partially due to the inadequate policies aimed at supporting first-year students after admission. It seems that there are few efficient programmes in place to develop the lacking competencies of first-year students. Simply understanding the

factors contributing to student drop-out rates is not sufficient to help students persist and succeed, and behavioural interventions by the university are therefore required (Tinto, 2006).

b)   Faculty culture

The culture of any organisation includes the expectations and values shared by its people (Parumasur, 2008).Reason et al. (2006) report that the organisational culture and environment can be more influential than concrete organisational characteristics such as mission, size, and selection criteria. It thus appears that the amount of contact that students experience with faculty members can influence general satisfaction with the academic milieu, and therefore increase their academic competence. Time spent talking to individuals from the faculty, working together with lecturers, and having social contact with faculty members might be supportive of students' learning experiences (Astin, 1993). In fact, these interactions are important contributors to students' continuous learning and skill development, and also influence changes in psychosocial, attitudinal, and cognitive domains (Reason et al., 2006). Also, Tinto (2006) emphasises the role of the faculty in involving students in an effort to increase retention numbers.

2.2.3 Peer environment

Reason et al. (2006) regard the peer group as one of the key influences that impact on undergraduate students' development and growth. In fact, involvement in activities with other students and the associated sense of institutional belonging has been shown to decrease drop-out rates (Astin, 1993). Encounters with new people and ideas are regarded as a means to knowledge acquisition, module mastery, skill growth, development of interpersonal and leadership skills, increased community involvement, and more inclusive racial, political, and gender attitudes (Reason et al., 2006). This is, however, dependent on a student's involvement and effort invested in extracurricular and interpersonal situations.

Fraser and Killen (2003) further claim that affiliation with a student community is an important contributor to successful integration in higher education. Students who feel integrated are more likely to persist with their academic careers (Astin, 1993).Social adjustment is an

important task, which plays a big role in the way that students from previously disadvantaged groups are able to fit into their new environment (Chang & Le, 2010). First-year students will be more likely to experience satisfaction on a psychological level if the initial challenge of attaining social acceptance can be overcome. In fact, social problems such as lack of support and friendship with peers are associated with lower academic competence (Zhang, Zhao, & Yu, 2009). Due to greater involvement in campus life, students residing in hostels tend to show a greater orientation toward intellectual growth (Terenzini et al., 1995).

The experience of positive peer relations within an academic setting adds to the value students place on their academic careers, which has an enhancing effect on their performance. A student's academic orientation is significantly influenced by the perceived value that friends place on education (LeCroy & Krysik, 2008). A more positive perception from peers is associated with greater motivation, persistence, effort, and expectancy of success (Zhang et al., 2009). However, fellow students who devalue academic competence may also have a negative influence on their peer students' success. Previous research indicates that students who drop out of higher education are more likely to have friends who dropped out or who are considered underachievers (LeCroy & Krysik, 2008).

According to Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural perspective, learning takes place within a social context, and therefore depends on the learner's social interaction. Within this perspective, students would benefit from engaging with peers who possess superior knowledge in some area, if a social relationship is shared. Also, sociodemographic traits influence the kind of exposure and stimulation that students have had since their childhood years. It can thus be expected that students from different cultural backgrounds would differ in their knowledge base (Sigelman & Ryder, 2009). This would mean that, within the diverse South African culture, students also differ in terms of the knowledge that they have to offer one another.

2.2.4 Individual student experience

According to Schreiner and Hulme (2009), students' unique affective factors account for the way in which they take responsibility for their education and the attainment of personal

competence to achieve success. The degree to which students are prepared to engage in academic and extra-curricular activities would depend on their individual needs. Also, academic activities might be standard, but the effects thereof would differ, depending on the experience of each individual. Every individual student has a unique learning experience, influenced by a unique combination of personal history, values, and previous learning (Reason et al., 2006).

a)   The classroom experience

Experiences in the classroom consist of all the activities and the interpretations that take place during lectures (Astin, 1993). In order to enhance the learning experience and create better academic competence, it is necessary for students to be fully engaged with the relevant subject through reading, critical questioning, and discussion (Reason et al., 2006). Lecturers' availability and preparation, as well as good rapport with students, are associated with more improvement in students' academic competence (Reason et al., 2006). Terenzini et al. (1995) also view class participation, instructor effectiveness, and exposure to exams, reports, and text books as contributing factors to students' academic competence.

The attitudes that students experience from both fellow students and lecturers also seem to influence the learning situation in class. With the recent history of apartheid in South Africa, discriminatory attitudes are still present in many situations. Although the decline of blatant racism has been noticed globally, subtle forms of discrimination are still evident, with damaging effects on the victims (Taylor et al., 2006). Lopez (2009) claims that perceived discrimination may be one of the key reasons for underachievement amongst previously disadvantaged groups. Negative stereotypes may influence performance and motivational factors, which creates a low expectation of success (Freeman & Hrabowski, 2005).

b)   Out-of-class experience

The development of students is shaped by more than just their class and instructional experience. Other, out-of-class experiences that influence students' academic competence are: relationships with fellow students, socialising with students and lecturers, topics of conversation

that stimulate development, non-assigned books to read, work experience, and membership in organisations (Terenzini et al., 1995). Such experiences indicate an active engagement in knowledge acquisition that is beyond prescribed activities. The amount of opportunities for learning offered by the institution and the degree of students' readiness to engage in these opportunities contribute to their further development (Reason et al., 2006). Thus, students who engage in diverse environments and learn from diverse opinions are more likely to develop holistically. In order for students to fully realise the learning opportunities available out of class, it is necessary that they view such development as priority.

c)   Curricular experience

Academic competence is influenced by the degree to which students' needs are satisfied by their module choice (Reason et al., 2006). Students who attend modules that cover current topics are more likely to experience satisfaction (Terenzini et al., 1995). It appears that the interdisciplinary integration of various fields also enables students to form holistic perspectives on ideas. According to Astin (1993), personalised approaches that incorporate written evaluation, research requirements, and logical argumentation ensure that a variety of skills are acquired. Students therefore prefer a less structured curriculum with the availability of various options.

It can also be expected that the curricular experience associated with a specific area of study influences a student's academic competence. The nature of the student's chosen study field might develop certain skills to a greater degree than other fields would (Reason et al., 2006). While some subjects teach students to think in terms of rules, others encourage the development of evaluative and critical thinking skills. A subject like mathematics requires students to use concrete principles to solve intricate problems, while a more abstract subject like philosophy will rather promote attitudes of relativism. Modules presented by the Faculties of the Humanities are generally less prescriptive, and students are expected to develop new ways of understanding and expression.

2.3   Conclusion

In this chapter, the terms 'achievement' and 'performance' were considered in an effort to clarify the construct of academic competence. The term 'academic competence' was chosen because it includes the measurement of skill application, as well as the overall ability to be a well-rounded student. In the current research, academic competence will be further explored, mostly through a focus on the individual, where both percentage and holistic views are incorporated. The organisational perspective will receive a lesser focus.

The model of Reason et al. (2006) provides an organised way to study the factors that influence academic competence. The model enables the prediction of student learning and persistence by considering pre-university characteristics, as well as organisational and peer environments. The theory on time perspective encompasses many of the influencing factors described in Section 2.2. The adopted time frame would influence students' resources, motivation to engage, peer interactions, and willingness to develop. Since individuals tend to refer to past experiences when exposed to new information, time perspective is especially relevant within the first-year experience (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999). Further elaboration on the construct of time perspective will follow in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3
TIME PERSPECTIVE

Time is an underlying construct to all human behaviour, and the way individuals think about time influences consequent actions. An individual's time perspective is viewed as a frame of reference used to make sense of daily events (Holman & Zimbardo, 2009). People differ in their conceptualisation of time, and varying orientations to time are therefore found in different people. This chapter will start by providing a working conceptualisation of the variable *time perspective*. A discussion on the different frames of time perspective, as distinguished by Zimbardo and Boyd (1999), will follow. The theory on time perspective will be elaborated on through a discussion of the related constructs of goals, hope, motivation, and expectation. The chapter will conclude with comments on the relationship between time perspective and academic competence.

3.1   Conceptualisation of time perspective

For every person, a unique time span exists, in which actions are projected and the consequences are lived (Holman & Zimbardo, 2009). According to Harber et al. (2003), the fact that all activities fall in time and obey its laws indicates the necessity for human beings to acknowledge and understand this vital construct. Time perspective is the foundational process underpinning a host of other processes associated with the activities of daily living. A sense of time provides humans with a self-concept, a personal history, ambition, pride in accomplishments, and also a consciousness of mortality (Kairys, 2010). Since time perspective is such an extensive concept, various definitions are found in literature (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999).

The word 'perspective' indicates that the construct is seen as a representation of objects or events that fall in the past, present, or future (Holman & Zimbardo, 2009). According to Seijts (1998), a time perspective enables individuals to foresee, anticipate, make plans, and organise future possibilities by taking into account past situations and present decisions. Zimbardo and Boyd (1999, p.1271) define time perspective as "...the often non-conscious process whereby the continual flow of personal and social experiences are assigned to temporal categories, or time

frames, that help to give order, coherence, and meaning to those events." A distinction is thus made between time perspectives and time frames. 'Time perspective' is a more general term, referring to the influence of time on human thoughts and actions. A time frame is a specific orientation to time (situated in the past, the present, or the future) within a given situation. Zimbardo and Boyd (1999) differentiate the following time frames: past-positive, past-negative, present-hedonistic, present-fatalistic, and future.

For Peetsma et al. (2005), time perspective is an attitude consisting of the components of cognition, affection, and behavioural intention. Cognition is the expectations of, or ideas regarding, the past, present, and future, as well as knowledge of societal realities. The affectionate component is the feeling experienced toward a life domain viewed in time. The behavioural intention constitutes the direction of action. Pienaar and Bester (1996) chose to distinguish time perspective as a cognitive schema, a motive, or a personal characteristic.

A time frame is especially utilised when individuals are confronted with new information. An automatic process takes place, where individuals make sense of their experiences by dividing lived situations into different time frames (Harber et al., 2003). Momentary episodes can then be joined and organised into a coherent sequence (Holman & Zimbardo, 2009). New experiences can thus be placed on a time continuum, which assists in adding meaning to events. A time frame therefore enables an individual to recall past experiences and integrate them with new information, which allows for interpretation of the events (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999). It can therefore be concluded that a time frame offers a way of dealing with social and physical worlds by creating a way to perceive and make sense of the information in the environment.

A specific time frame can also influence decisions. An attitude is elicited by comparing the current choice with other similar situations experienced at previous times (Rabinovich et al., 2010). Time perspective thus entails the consideration of potential outcomes of current actions by replaying previous outcomes. However, when making decisions, individuals are not limited to past behaviour as the only frame of reference. Immediate consequences, as well as possible future effects, are also considered when deciding on the best choices. It is often the length of

time that a person considers decisions that determines actions (Seijts, 1998). The focus on the past, the present, or the future will thus determine which decision is made.

3.2   Frames of time perspective

Mello and Worrell (2006) state that time perspective is the orientation that individuals have about the future, the past, and the present. Zimbardo and Boyd (1999) distinguish between five different frames of time namely, past-positive, past-negative, present-hedonistic, present-fatalistic, and future time frames. Each of these time frames will be explained in an effort to clarify the different time frame variables as considered in the current study.

3.2.1   Past time frames

The daily functioning of people who are orientated toward the past is largely influenced by previous experiences and memories (Harber et al., 2003). This orientation thus stems from a constant focus on a personal history. Two dimensions are differentiated – a past-positive and a past-negative time frame. Individuals with a past-positive time frame have a nostalgic and sentimental orientation to life. These people tend to have a high regard for tradition and family, and often present with high self-esteem and levels of happiness (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999). The past-negative time frame is also an orientation towards the past, but is accompanied by a negative attitude, as individuals with this time frame focus on past experiences that were unpleasant. Negative attitudes that influence current behaviour can be created by actual negative events or the negative interpretation of events (Liniauskaité & Kairys, 2009). People with this time frame tend to cling to their set ideas, which are often conservative (Boniwell & Zimbardo, 2004). Within the past-negative time frame, exposure to new experiences is often avoided for the safety of a known environment.

3.2.2   Present time frames

People who are present-orientated focus their attention on the present moment. When making a decision or taking action, they are less likely to either compare potential consequences

or obsess about past experiences (Harber et al., 2003). This time frame is thus characteristic of individuals who are more inclined to live for the moment and be fully present in every experience. This mind-set can be conducive to wellbeing, since it is closely related to the concept of mindfulness, which is the ability to be fully present and aware (Compton, 2005).

The present time frame is further divided into two dimensions. Firstly, people who are present-hedonistically orientated aim to get the most pleasure out of their current situation (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999). These individuals are open to friendships and adventures, and seek thrills and activities that are high in intensity (Boniwell & Zimbardo, 2004). Within a present-hedonistic time frame, people will prefer to place present gratification before duty. Excitement and entertainment experienced in the present will not easily be sacrificed for the achievement of future goals (Liniauskaité & Kairys, 2009).

The second time frame is the present-fatalistic time frame, which is characterised by an orientation of helplessness towards life and future events (Liniauskaité & Kairys, 2009). With such a time frame, it is difficult to acknowledge how present actions are related to future outcomes. Instead, there is a reliance on fate, and planning is therefore viewed as a futile activity (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999). Furthermore, a present-fatalistic time frame is associated with higher levels of anxiety and depression (Harber et al., 2003).

3.2.3 Future time frame

By far the most research on time perspective is focused on the future time frame. Seijts (1998, p. 156) states that adopting a future time frame is to "Live for the moment in preparation of the future." Individuals who are future orientated are constantly conscious of potential future events. The future is viewed as closer, leading to a higher level of vigour and intensity in working in the present (Gjesme, 1983). Future-orientated individuals are not motivated solely by immediate rewards, but always keep the consequences of their deeds in mind (Boniwell & Zimbardo, 2004).

A constant involvement with the future can be regarded as either positive or negative. Future-orientated individuals are able to delay gratification, and therefore display less excitement-seeking and risky behaviour (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999). Sufficient self-discipline enables the suppression of current needs in order to realise future outcomes (McInerney, 2004). The danger is, however, that future-orientated individuals deny themselves any momentary pleasures or indulgences, since such engagement is regarded as "time-wasting" (Boniwell & Zimbardo, 2004). Future-orientated people may struggle to be fully present in the moment; pondering the future in an effort to ensure control might come more natural. Even though this time frame is highly associated with success in various areas of life, it is not always the most conducive to a state of wellbeing (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999). Anxious people with a continuous focus on the future might experience it as threatening, resulting in higher levels of stress (Gjesme, 1983).

Previous research focused mostly on the advantages of a future-orientated time frame, thereby showing less regard for the past and present time frames. Zimbardo and Boyd (1999) argue that past and present time frames should be viewed as complementary to a future time frame. The ideal should be the adoption of the most appropriate time frame for a specific setting. A balanced time perspective is thus proposed, where it is possible to move from one time frame to another, according to the demands of a specific situation. Liniauskaité and Kairys (2009), however, state that individuals usually focus their attention on one of the time frames, rather than combination. An overused time frame poses the risk of becoming a rigid style, where behaviour is acted out without much thought (Seijts, 1998).

3.3   Influences on time perspective

Time perspectives can be affected by life changes, since the choice of time frames are responsive to individual development (Kairys, 2010). An individual's dominant time frame may thus change at times, in order to adapt to the specific demands of a new situation. Adversity and life stress can affect an individual's sense of time in a powerful way. The people as well as physical situations in an individual's direct environment further impact on the importance placed on a certain frame (Phan, 2009). McInerney (2004) views parental influences, spirituality,

technology, societal values, and perceived opportunities as factors that influence the formation of a time frame.

The generation an individual belongs to could further influence the establishment of a time frame. McInerney (2004) claims that, previous generations had a more predictable future, because norms dictated the necessity of institutions such as a lifelong career, marriage, and family ties. The perception of a less predictable future can influence younger generations in two possible ways: 1) young people may attempt to retain as much control as possible being mainly concerned with the future in order to realise opportunities, or 2) they may choose to detach themselves from the uncertainty by simply living for the moment (present time frame) (McInerney, 2004). In an academic milieu, this means that, while some students are working hard to distinguish themselves, others are oblivious to the advantages of a good academic record.

Individuals' use of time frames can further be regarded as a process that is shaped by the social and cultural worlds in which they function (Holman & Zimbardo, 2009). Seijts (1998) also views time perspective as an outcome of socialisation, where societies provide an organised template of ideal future events and goals. According to Taylor et al. (2006), Western cultures tend to encourage individualism, autonomy, and uniqueness. This may predispose students from a Western culture to take control of their own lives and thus act more future orientated (Campen, 2006). According to Mokwena (2007), traditional African cultures tend to have a higher regard for ancestral histories and past events. People who adhere strongly to these cultures may thus be more inclined to orientate themselves toward the past rather than the future (Mokwena, 2007). Thinking about the future might even be regarded as inappropriate in collectivistic societies where the present and past is more strongly emphasised.

Since time perspective is highly influenced by cultural ideas, the meaning ascribed to the specific time frames will thus vary between different cultures (McInerney, 2004). Foxcroft and Rood (2009) warn that a possible cultural inclination could skew the results of research studies, due to limited cultural sensitivity. Little research on time perspective has been conducted on non-Western populations (Adelabu, 2007). Exploring a Black African population would thus

necessitate a culturally sensitive approach, where conclusions are made based on the unique experiences of the cultural group being studied.

3.4   Constructs associated with time perspective

The conceptualisation of time perspective (as discussed in Section 3.1) indicated that the construct is broad and potentially related to a plethora of other constructs. Due to this fact, it is necessary to focus attention on constructs associated with views on time that are specifically relevant to the academic milieu. Again, most research on constructs that pertain to time perspective is focused on the future time frame.

3.4.1   Goals

Goals are the drive behind much of human behaviour, since goals assist people to mobilise the resources they have at their disposal (Egan, 2007). Setting goals depends on a realistic acknowledgement of available resources, followed by the will to achieve a certain outcome (Snyder, Feldman, Shorey, & Rand, 2002). Therefore, goals operate as the cognitive component that is responsible for anchoring the hope to achieve. A distinction is made between approach goals and acts of forestalling negative outcomes (Snyder, 2002). An approach goal is associated with a desire to achieve the goal in the future or maintaining a present goal. Forestalling a negative outcome, on the other hand, is an effort to stop something unwanted from happening.

Goal setting is influenced by what is perceived as possible and important within a specific situation (Leondari, 2007). It is thus the ideals that are created in the mind that result in a sense of purpose in life. These ideals act as motivators for people to display behaviour that is instrumental in the attainment of future goals (Snyder, 2002). Individuals who set goals are more likely to value future outcomes, and therefore spend more time integrating their current lives with their envisioned future lives. Less time spent on planning for the future often results in poorer decisions, since relevant information is not always taken into account (Padawer et al., 2007).

The very act of setting goals implies an eye on the future and, thus, at least a moderate presence of a future time frame. In this regard, Simons, Vansteenkiste, Lens, and Lacante (2004, p. 122) define a future time frame as "the present anticipation of future goals." People who are orientated toward the future tend to have a clearer idea of what they desire and do not desire (Leondari, 2007). A future time frame is associated with long-term and elaborate goals, as well as a clearer picture of how to pursue those goals. A person who is constantly considering the future will have more specific goals and spend more time on activities aimed at realising those goals (Padawer et al., 2007). Individuals who are less future orientated will be less inclined to display behaviour associated with realising goals.

Furthermore, individuals' selection of goals is influenced by their perception of the future. When a broad view of the future is held, goals are set with the idea of optimising the future, and prioritised accordingly (Leondari, 2007). People with a more expanded view of the future, view the time to reach a future goal as psychologically shorter than those with a limited view of time will (Padawer et al, 2007). The future is thus a big role player in the daily planning in the lives of individuals with an extended view of time. When the future is viewed as limited, goals also tend to be more short-term in nature. The focus will rather be on the satisfaction of emotional or hedonistic desires, as in the case of the present-hedonistic time frame (Lang & Carstensen, 2002). It can therefore be concluded that individuals with an orientation toward the past will be less likely to consider the long-term effect of an action on a goal as often as a future-orientated person would. People with a present-hedonistic time frame are by definition impulsive, and setting extensive goals would therefore appear less natural to them (Campen, 2006). It should however, be acknowledged that a present-hedonistic time frame does not imply a lack of goals. The goals of a past- or present-orientated person may simply be in the nearer future, and have a different focus (Phan, 2009). For example, a present-hedonistic individual might set a goal of always experiencing as much pleasure as possible.

3.4.2 Hope

In simple terms, hope can be described as a desire, together with a sense of optimism in fulfilling that desire (Curry, Snyder, & Cook, 1997). Instead of viewing hope as limited to

moments of distress, Snyder et al. (2002) encourage a more active view of hope as the simple drive behind pursuing goals. Hope is divided into two categories: agency and pathways (Snyder et al., 2002). While agency is viewed as goal-directedness, pathways are the plans to meet goals. Pathways can also be viewed as the cognitive component responsible for creating the means to achieve hoped-for outcomes. Hopeful people tend to create many pathways to circumvent the potential obstacles they might encounter (Snyder, Irving, & Anderson, 1991). Cognitive plans are however, of little use if there is no belief in one's ability to follow planned pathways and accomplish goal achievement. Agency, therefore, provides the energy and drive behind cognitive pathways.

Hope can thus be viewed as an attitude that guides goal-achieving behaviour. It is the confidence that initiates the necessary energy and appropriate resources in pursuing goals (Rand, 2009). The degree to which a person is goal directed is strongly related to hopefulness. People with hope are motivated by their set goals, and are therefore more prepared to face challenges that might prevent goal attainment (Snyder et al., 2002). Individuals with hope are therefore able to adapt to new situations with flexibility by finding new ways of achieving their goals in the face of environmental limitations (Chang, 1998). Rand (2009) further claims that hope as an attitude increases the belief that outcomes are achievable, which results in a hopeful view of both the self and of the world. Hope is thus the view that one has the ability and the world has the necessary resources to sufficiently enable the achievement of a desired outcome.

Hope is, to a great extent, related to a person's time perspective, since hope encourages people to engage in conscious efforts to obtain future aims (Snyder et al., 2002).Previous experiences can also inform the sense of hope that individuals experience in the present. A person without hope is less optimistic about the future, and therefore tends to invest less energy in working towards positive outcomes. People without hope would therefore also be less likely to busy themselves with activities aimed at increasing the potential of achieving such outcomes. Problem-solving skills are more readily applied when aiming to achieve hoped-for outcomes (Chang, 1998). This does not necessarily imply a lack of hope in individuals who are orientated towards the past or present. The hope might only be directed towards goals that are less associated with the future. However, by definition, the past-negative and present-fatalistic time

frames imply a smaller measure of hope (Liniauskaité & Kairys, 2009). The assumption can thus be made that these individuals would be less enthusiastic to engage in activities that would lead to later achievement.

3.4.3 Motivation

Motivation is the process that assists individuals to persist with their goal achievement despite the obstacles they might have to face. Perceptions are the cognitive component of motivation that influences the amount of drive stimulated within a specific situation (Svinicki, 2004). Ideas about the possibility of success can therefore influence engagement in situations. According to Ryan and Deci (2000a), motivation includes a number of intentional and activation aspects like persistence, energy, and direction. Motivation can thus be described as the drive that leads to a focus of resources on pursuing a certain goal. This drive creates arousal to act, and homeostasis is established if success is achieved (Gjesme, 1983). Lack of satisfaction will lead to motivation to engage in further trials.

In the literature on motivation, a distinction is made between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). Intrinsic motivation is viewed as the need to explore, extend abilities, and learn by utilising opportunities and challenges (Simons et al., 2004). It is often associated with constructs such as confidence and interest, which show a high correlation with creativity and performance (Ryan & Deci, 2000b). In contrast, individuals with extrinsic motivation engage in activities to elicit a certain outcome that is external to the self, rather than participating for inherent satisfaction. A third type of motivation, namely a-motivation, is experienced when individuals do not regard the contingency between behaviour and outcomes as meaningful, which has a negative effect on performance (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). The type of motivation that people hold depends on their ability to internalise the values of the activity, as well as the extent to which the activity is regarded as valuable.

Kauffman and Husman (2004) postulate a strong link between motivation and thoughts on the future. Future aspirations and ambitions, together with the relation with current duties, seem to be a big contributor to individuals' levels of motivation (Stupnisky et al., 2008). A future time

frame is related to cognitive functions, which enable people to conceptualise future outcomes in terms of present behaviour (Boniwell & Zimbardo, 2004). Stupnisky et al. (2008) further refer to a "utility value," which is regarded as the extent to which present task requirements are similar to the requirements of future tasks. Acknowledging the utility of present activities that are related to the requirements of future activities will thus increase motivation. In contrast, individuals who are orientated towards the past would rather find motivation by drawing from experiences they had throughout their lives (Simons et al., 2004).

3.4.4   Expectation

Wigfield and Eccles (2000) define expectations as individuals' beliefs regarding their level of performance on a certain task. Accordingly, beliefs about one's own competence and the value placed on a specific activity will determine the choice of activity, and level of performance and persistence. Furthermore, expectations are related to an attitude of either optimism or pessimism. Pessimism is characterised by poor confidence in one's own ability to achieve future goals (Rand, 2009). In contrast, optimists evaluate life in a positive manner, and believe that it is possible to be in control of experiences. People who tend to have positive expectations often have better coping strategies and are more able to see and utilise the potential for growth and development (Compton, 2005).

Expectations can also be viewed as attitudes about the future, which implies a certain level of focus on the future time frame (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). However, only being aware of the future might not be enough to achieve goals. It is rather the positive inclination towards the future that encourages people to behave consistently with the positive expectations that they hold for their own achievements. It includes the belief that the nature of the world is such that actively pursuing goals would be a worthwhile venture (Rand, 2009). Individuals with positive expectations are more conscious of opportunities and rewards that are waiting to be seized (Compton, 2005). Negative expectations can be due to the belief that there will always be limitations to the achievement of goals. These beliefs are more in line with a past-negative time frame. Since the past is a frame of reference with which to interpret new events, previous experiences will have an influence on expectations for the future (Rand, 2009). Likewise, a

person who has experienced previous success might come to expect more achievements from the future.

3.5   The association between time perspective and academic competence

The contribution of the constructs discussed above implies the importance of time perspective when exploring academic competence. Peetsma et al. (2005) claim that time perspective has a significant impact on academic competence, as learning includes successive steps in time that lead to the achievement of academic competence. Studying practices are dependent on previous experiences, and rely on present effort to invest in future aims.

Various studies on the association between time perspective and academic competence have been conducted. A study on a population of students regarded as academically talented indicated that students inclined to a future time frame tend to achieve better results (Mello & Worrel, 2006). In another study involving Black American adolescents, Adelabu (2007) found a relationship between academic competence and time perspective, and concluded that students who are more future orientated tend to outperform their past- or present-orientated peers. In South Africa,Van der Linde, Naudé, and Esterhuyse (2010) reported a significant relationship between academic performance and the future and present fatalistic time frames in a Grade 12 population.

The remainder of this section will be organised into the cognitive orientation, utility value, and behavioural outcomes that result from specific time frames as they pertain to academic competence. These categories were chosen because they appeared to be the three most prominent themes in the association between academic competence and time perspective in the literature. Specific reference will again be made to the constructs of goals, hope, motivation, and expectation.

3.5.1   Cognitive orientations

For the current discussion, cognitive orientations refer to the thinking patterns that individuals engage in as these relate to their time perspective. For people who are orientated towards the future, decisions are dominated by consideration of possible future outcomes (Boniwell & Zimbardo, 2004). In an academic milieu, future-orientated students will thus be able to keep the future in mind when engaging in curricular and out-of-class experiences, which Reason et al. (2006) regard as contributors to eventual academic competence. Potential short-term and long-term outcomes are anticipated in order to formulate a plan of action for any event (Phan, 2009). Goals provide the cognitive means to focus decisions made in the present on future realities (Leondari, 2007). Academic goals offer a way to optimally prepare oneself with the necessary skills to take action when career opportunities present themselves. The hope to achieve goals, together with expectations for success, has been implied as contributing to greater academic competence and lower drop-out rates (LeCroy & Krysik, 2008).

Another cognitive orientation associated with academic competence is the perceived amount of control that students have over academic competence. It seems that first-year students are especially vulnerable to feeling out of control due to the challenge inherent in the transition to higher education (Fraser & Killen, 2003). In the Reason et al. (2006) model, a distinction can be made between controllable and less controllable contributors to academic competence. While first-year students cannot change much about their pre-university characteristics or the university's organisational context, they are able to control their engagement, both in and out of class.

Students with an intrinsic motivational system will experience more control over their studies (Rand, 2009). In this sense, control is viewed as individuals' belief that it is within their capability to predict and influence at least some aspects in their environment. Individuals are more motivated when the value of, and control over, their current efforts are clear (Stupnisky et al., 2008). Due to the fact that future-orientated people are able to envision their future selves, they also experience a greater sense of control over their destinies (McInerney, 2004). Students

who are present-fatalistic believe that they only have limited control over their lives, and would therefore be less motivated to exert energy in their academic work (Campen, 2006).

3.5.2 Utility of current academic ventures

Utility value can be regarded as the acknowledgement of current academic efforts in establishing future goals. Future-orientated individuals will make greater investments in their academic careers, because they are constantly aware of the connection between studying and their potential professional lives (Mello & Worrel, 2006). Students who expect their efforts to influence future outcomes will thus be more likely to engage in proper preparation for tests and assignments (Stupnisky et al., 2008). Individuals who can link the material that they are studying to the work they will be doing later on will also be motivated to work harder. The utility of the chosen curriculum (Reason et al., 2006) will thus influence motivation to study.

Due to definite aims in life, future-orientated students are able to clearly see the link between current effort and distant future outcomes (McInerney, 2004). There is also a greater awareness of the actions that need to be implemented in order to attain goals. In a study conducted by De Volder and Lens (1982), it was found that individuals who are aware of distant goals and ascribe a greater instrumental value to work in order to achieve those goals are also able to perform better academically. Students who view academic competence as a tangible reality would thus be more encouraged to perform in the activities over which they have control.

The perceived utility of academic activities also depends on the type of goals that are set. When an academic activity is viewed as a goal in itself, students will be less motivated than if the activity is seen as the means to a achieving a future goal (Simons et al., 2004). This idea is also related to the distinction previously made between learning and performance goals. A learning goal is more conducive to academic competence, and entails that individuals set goals in order to increase their own competence (Sigelman & Ryder, 2009). With performance goals, the emphasis is on the outcome and the favourable judgments by others (Snyder et al., 2002). Within the Reason et al. (2006) model, performance goals emphasise curricular and classroom experiences, while learning goals focus on eventual academic competence. Since students with a

future time frame are able to see the value of current learning for future situations, they are more likely to adhere to learning goals rather than performance goals (Kauffman & Husman, 2004).The short-term focus of performance goals implies a decreased focus on future utility value.

The utility value ascribed to academic efforts can enhance motivation. Students who attribute their achievement to ability rather than effort tend to be less motivated to perform academically (Phan, 2009). Awareness of the importance of their current studying practices leads to increased motivation and, consequently, increased skill development (Liu, Cheng, Cheng, & Wu, 2009). Motivation provides a sense of control that encourages students to take more responsibility in utilising the opportunities at hand, in order to succeed academically (Phan, 2009).

3.5.3 Behavioural outcomes

Behavioural outcomes are the observable outcomes that result from the cognitive orientations and acknowledgement of utility, mentioned in the previous two sections. Since future-orientated individuals tend to view their current actions as related to future goals, their task activity level is higher than that of those students with a past or present orientation (McInerney, 2004). Students conscious of the future are more likely to schedule, plan, and complete assigned tasks on time, which are all behaviours associated with better academic competence (Harber et al., 2003). The curricular and classroom experiences (Reason et al., 2006) can thus be optimised. It was found that individuals with a long-term planning perspective tend to have higher qualifications and income (Padawer et al., 2007). Future-orientated individuals are thus more likely to engage in activities that are purposeful and instrumental to their set goals. Instead of simply finishing tasks for the sake of completion, these students are more likely to be aware of the future value of academic activities, and will therefore deliver better quality work (McInerney, 2004).

Snyder (2002) proposes that hopeful students find multiple pathways to fulfil their goals. These students are more likely to also acknowledge peer and faculty engagement (mentioned in

the Reason et al. (2006) model) as possible means to attaining academic competence. It is further claimed that students with high hope are more able to trust themselves, and therefore exhibit a more positive orientation towards solving their problems (Snyder et al., 2002). Less anxiety during tests and better academic achievement can thus be expected. In general, hopeful students experience better life satisfaction and engage in fewer disengagement strategies when faced with problems (Chang, 1998). Hopefulness is, however, not limited to a future time frame. Campen (2006) claims that students with a past-positive time frame also have a tendency to view the future optimistically, and therefore experience greater mastery.

Hopeful students also have the ability to stay motivated and counteract negative emotions. Svinicki (2004) identified four motivational aspects that influence students' academic behaviour. Firstly, motivation increases students' focus, and assist them in paying attention to the work that they have to study. Motivation further directs what the students pay attention to. It was also found that students with higher motivation are more able to persist in achieving their goals in the face of hardship. Motivated students are thus able to persist in their studies, despite the presence of pre-university handicaps. Lastly, motivation keeps students working towards benchmarks, and, further, enables them to monitor their progress. The cognitive orientation towards time perspective thus influences students' motivation, which impacts on their behaviour accordingly.

The specific goals that individuals have, will however, determine where their energy and commitment are focused (Campen, 2006). Anderman and Wolters (2006) suggest that motivation influences the level of engagement in activities, as well as the choice of those activities. The direction of students' motivation would thus influence their engagement in both classroom and out-of-class experiences, which might further impact on academic competence. In this regard, a distinction can again be made between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsically motivated students are motivated to take part in out-of-class experiences that foster personal and academic growth, without necessarily receiving measurable rewards.

From the above discussion, it is clear that the literature indicates an association between academic competence and time perspective. The manner in which students are cognitively orientated to time influences how they think and therefore engage with academic practices.

Students who are aware of the utility of their present efforts in accomplishing goals in the future are more motivated to apply themselves academically. Time perspective further impacts on the behaviour that students exhibit, as it relates to study practices.

3.6   Conclusion

In this chapter, time was explained as an underlying construct to the way that individuals orientate themselves. This implies that time influences every human action. Zimbardo and Boyd (1999) propose five frames of time perspective that have a significant impact on the way individuals think and behave. Goals, motivation, hope, and expectations are all constructs that are related to an individual's orientation towards time. The chapter concluded with an explanation of the manner in which time perspective might influence academic competence by referring to cognitive orientation, utility value, and behavioural outcomes. In the following chapter, the methodology followed to explore time perspective as a potential predictor of academic competence is explained. The discussion will further elaborate on the methodology used to gain an understanding of the participants' experiences of the constructs.

CHAPTER 4
METHODOLOGY

This chapter will discuss the methodology used to conduct the study. The research aim will be stated first, which will set the stage for further discussion. The research design will be explained, followed by the population group, as well as the sampling methods used for the current study. Data gathering through the use of inventories, focus groups, and interviews will then be discussed. Ethical considerations that are relevant to the research will be provided. A discussion on the data analysis will follow, where both quantitative and qualitative methods will be explained. The chapter will conclude with the quantitative results.

4.1   Research aim

According to Ngidi (2007), there is still a paucity of current literature pertaining to the understanding of academic competence in South African higher education. Since an individual's orientation to time unconsciously influences thoughts and behaviour (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999), the construct of time perspective may shed light on the process of achieving academically. The present research project therefore investigated academic competence and the understanding of time perspective amongst Black African first-year students in the Faculty of the Humanities. The study aimed to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent does time perspective predict academic competence among Black African first-year students in the Faculty of the Humanities?

2. What are Black African first-year students' perceptions of time perspective as it relates to their academic competence?

4.2   Research design

The research design specifies the necessary procedures to be followed in order to achieve the aim of the research. The current study was non-experimental, and the participants were

therefore neither subjected to an intervention nor manipulated in any way (Maree, 2009). Furthermore, the present study was exploratory in nature, and had the objective of gaining a broader insight into a specific phenomenon (Bless, Higson-Smith, & Kagee, 2006). The lack of clarity on predictors of academic competence necessitated such an investigative approach. A mixed-method design was chosen for the current study, and the rationale for this choice will be discussed below.

4.2.1   Non-experimental research

Since the present research did not include the application of an intervention, the design was non-experimental. Participants were thus only studied with regard to certain variables at one specific point in time (Foley & Valenzuela, 2005). Participants were not introduced to a pre- and post-testing situation, since no constructs were manipulated. The aim did thus not include testing the consequences of a planned intervention. This type of non-experimental research is usually also explorative and descriptive in nature (Babbie & Mouton, 2003).

4.2.2   Exploratory research

Exploratory research is usually conducted in a setting where knowledge is limited. One of the main goals of this type of research is to establish greater insight into the construct, in order to direct future research (Babbie & Mouton, 2003). In accordance with descriptive research, this approach also necessitates a flexible attitude, without pre-set ideas about possible findings (Neuman, 2011). The exploratory approach was adopted in order to gain a better understanding of the specific situations associated with academic competence at first-year level as it pertains to time perspective. The quantitative phase of the study explored the possibility of a correlation between academic competence and time perspective. The qualitative phase was more focused on students' understanding of the mentioned constructs.

4.2.3   Descriptive research

In descriptive research, the aim is to describe a specific experience through observation of the sample being studied. Events are viewed through the participants' eyes, while experiences are placed in the wider historical and social framework (Foley & Valenzuela, 2005). The objective is not simply to describe the various patterns, but also to account for the possible origins and implications thereof (Babbie & Mouton, 2003). This design allows for the gathering of a great amount of data that could provide information that reaches beyond the topic of exploration (Berg, 2009). The quantitative phase of the study investigated, in a non-biased manner, the participants' time perspectives as they relate to academic competence. By utilising a descriptive approach, the results of the quantitative phase could further be made sense of through the qualitative discussions with participants. Data could thus be interpreted according to the subjective perceptions of participants as these pertain to their social contexts.

4.2.4   Mixed-method design

An on-going dispute has been raging for more than a century, aiming to prove the superiority of either the quantitative or qualitative paradigms of research. These two paradigms are, to a great extent, viewed as opposites and two incompatible ways of conducting research (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). However, the mixed-method research design allows for the integration of the two paradigms.

The quantitative paradigm emphasises the measurement of various phenomena, as well as the production of results in numerical terms. Quantification is based on the positivistic paradigm, which relies on standardised situations, observable measurements, and testable hypotheses (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Researchers using the quantitative framework believe in an ultimate truth that can be discovered, if the correct techniques are followed, which truths can be generalised to the greater population (Cheek, Onslow, & Cream, 2004). The researcher should therefore be distant and emotionally uninvolved with the participants and the setting of the study, in order to prevent any possible biases. Quantitative methodology further focuses on universal cause and effect laws, and therefore assumes an explanatory paradigm (Bless et al., 2006).

On the other hand, qualitative research is defined as a methodology aiming to understand cultural and social contexts, along with the underlying processes that results in patterns of behaviour (Maree, 2009). This approach is more in line with the interpretive paradigm. Qualitative methods enable the researcher to develop an understanding of how individuals structure their lives to derive meaning from events. Supporters of the qualitative paradigm view a distant relation with the studied phenomena as neither possible nor desirable, and prefer personal involvement in the process (Johnson & Owuegbuzie, 2004). In the qualitative paradigm, the world of knowledge is made up by people with different beliefs, values, and assumptions. Individual experiences should thus be explored in order to understand reality.

According to the quantitative perspective, social research should be conducted in the same scientific way that is applied in the natural sciences. This method provides results in terms of numbers, which has the advantage of being exact (Maree, 2009). Berg (2009), however, states that when people are studied statistically as a means to produce numerical data, results may present a skewed perception of reality. The goal of qualitative research is therefore to understand the meaning and interpretation from the perspective of participants being studied within their current environment. Qualitative studies thus aim to describe certain phenomena by using words and sentences (Neuman, 2011).

Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2005) encourage a mixed-method design where both paradigms are viewed as opposite sides of an interactive continuum, with the possibility of complementing one another. The integration of the quantitative and qualitative methods of research combines the strengths of both the positivistic and interpretive cultures. Positivism provides a scientific way of rigorously testing hypotheses using quantitative data, while the interpretive culture emphasises meaning that is socially constructed and relative (Neuman, 2011). The mixed method design allows the researcher to combine concepts, methods, approaches, language, and techniques of both paradigms, which offers a more comprehensive way of answering the research question (Johnson & Owuegbuzie, 2004). The use of mixed-method designs can also be seen as a strategy to create triangulation, which is the combination of multiple methods in an effort to establish more valid results (Baban, 2008). By making use of a triangulation process, the studied

phenomena are viewed from different perspectives, which enable the researcher to challenge biases instead of supporting the status quo.

However, critics of mixed-method designs claim that quantitative and qualitative paradigms lieat different ends of the research spectrum, and should therefore not be combined. According to Borrego, Douglas, and Amelink (2009), the incompatibility of the methods do not allow for a combination of the two. There is also the possibility that the specific combination of methods chosen to answer a research question is not the most appropriate selection of strengths from both paradigms (Amaratunga, Baldry, Sarshar, & Newton, 2002). The danger lies in the possibility that a random mixture of methods may not contribute to the effective study of constructs. A lack of clear guidelines to make the most pragmatic choice can leave the researcher with an experience of vagueness (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

A mixed-method design was chosen for the current study since it enabled the combination of the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative paradigms. The quantitative data and results received from the inventories enabled the exploration of a possible relationship between academic competence and time perspective. The potential of time perspective to predict academic competence was specifically explored. These two constructs are, however, complex terms that are influenced by various other ideas. A qualitative inquiry through the process of individual interviews and focus groups sessions allowed for the gathering of valuable information regarding individual understanding of the constructs.

4.3   Population group and sampling procedures

The population of interest in the present study was Black African first-year students in the Faculty of the Humanities at the University of the Free State. The first-year students included students in their first year of study, both academically and historically. The research population was further limited to Black African students, which meant that White, Coloured, and Indian students were excluded from the study. The students were all studying at the Faculty of the Humanities, and were registered for modules in languages and social sciences.

Since it would be impractical to investigate an entire population, sampling offers a way to go about choosing a group of participants that will represent the greater population. Sampling thus provides a means of investigating the research questions in a way that is less time consuming and more cost effective (Bless et al., 2006). Different sampling methods were used to gather participants for the quantitative and qualitative phases of the present research study.

A non-probability sampling method, namely convenience sampling, was used to gather the participants for the quantitative phase. This type of sampling implies that the chances of a specific participant being included in the sample cannot be measured (Bless et al., 2006). Participants are chosen based on the fact that they are easily accessible. Since this method is easy to administer, and therefore time-effective, its use for selecting participants for the research at hand was warranted (Maree, 2009). Random sampling, which allows the researcher to determine the probability of inclusion of each element of the population, was not used to gather participants. It is questionable to what extent the participants were representative of the population being studied. Generalisation of the quantitative results to the rest of the population should thus be done with care (Babbie & Mouton, 2003).

Sampling in the qualitative phase of the research aimed to acquire the richest sources of information to gain insight into the research questions (Stake, 2005). A purposive sampling method was used to achieve this goal. Specific criteria were thus kept in mind when the participants for the focus groups and interviews were selected (Patton, 2002). Three focus group sessions and two individual interviews were conducted with the participants who had the highest test scores on each of the time frames measured by the ZTPI. Participants who scored high on the future and the present-fatalistic time frames respectively were chosen for the two interviews. It was thus possible to explore the ideas of the different time frames, and elicit how these ideas impact on academic practises.

A total of 178 participants took part in the quantitative phase of the study. According to Pallant (2007), 75 participants are adequate for a quantitative multiple regression study with five independent variables. A group of 14 participants was then purposively chosen to join the qualitative discussions.

The quantitative sample's biographical information is summarised in Table 2 (below).

Table 2

Biographical information of the quantitative sample

Biographic detail		N	%
Gender	Male	48	27
	Female	129	72.5
	Unanswered	1	0.6
Age	18	41	23
	19	58	32.6
	20	39	21.9
	21	19	10.7
	22+	19	10.7
	Unanswered	2	1.1
Home language	English	13	7.3
	Afrikaans	1	0.6
	Sotho	75	42.1
	Other	89	50
Language of education	English	173	97.2
	Afrikaans	4	2.2
	Unanswered	1	0.6

The table indicates that female participation in the current study outweighed male participation by 45.5%. This reflects the gender demographics in the Faculty of the Humanities at the University of the Free State, where more women prefer to study Humanities (Keeve, 2010). According to a meta-analysis conducted by Su, Patrick, and Armstrong (2009), female students more often choose to study courses in the Humanities, since their vocational interests revolve around working with people instead of objects. More than half (55.6%) of the participants were either 18 or 19 years old, and it can thus be assumed that their studies at a higher education institution commenced directly after high school.

It is significant that, while only 7.3% of the students in the sample indicated English as their first language, 97.2% of the sample were being taught in English. This is the case in many higher education institutions, where multi-cultural settings necessitate the choice of a universal language to offer education. In South Africa, English is the chosen language, and many students are therefore expected to study in their second or third language (Makgalemele, 2005).Stephen (2007) states that students are disadvantaged if they are not sufficiently proficient in the language of instruction. These students can be expected to exhibit a less comprehensive understanding of the subject fields. The fact that the students in the sample did not have the opportunity to study in their first language could thus impact on their ability to conceptualise and grasp complex information, which would have an influence on their academic results.

4.4   Data gathering

It is necessary to gather significant information from the sample of participants in order to answer proposed research questions. In the present study, a process of triangulation was used, where different methods of data collection were applied to increase the validity of the gathered data. Using multiple methods also strengthens the conclusions made in a study (Berg, 2009). Triangulation further increases in-depth insight into the constructs as they are understood by the participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The quantitative data-gathering process required the participants to complete an inventory regarding time perspective. Retrieving the final academic results obtained by the sample during 2011 was also part of the quantitative process. The qualitative data-gathering process consisted of semi-structured focus group sessions, as well as individual interviews with participants chosen from the sample. These procedures were used to establish an in-depth knowledge base for understanding the constructs at hand. Furthermore, participants were asked to provide biographical information, such as their age, race gender, home language, and language of education. It was specifically necessary to ascertain the ethnic identity of each participant in order to identify the Black African students. The information also assisted in establishing the demographic details of the chosen sample.

4.4.1 Quantitative data gathering

To enable empirical study, variables should be operationalised in such a way that they can be observed or measured in a reliable and valid manner (Babbie & Mouton, 2003). The operationalisation of the relevant variables further discriminates between characteristics that form the core of the variables, and characteristics that are less important for current purposes (Bless et al., 2006). Through this process, a precise description of the characteristics of each variable relevant to the present study could be created.

4.4.1.1 Academic competence

For the purposes of the current research, academic competence was operationalised as the average score of the final academic results that students obtained for all their first-year modules during both semesters of 2011. The mark for each module is made up of a 50% continuous assessment as well as a 50% examination mark. Taking the whole year's work into account provides the most accurate and complete picture of students' academic competence during their first year of study. Instead of taking a categorical perspective, academic results were viewed on a continuum. Therefore, no distinction was made between a passing and failing academic result.

The final academic results were obtained from the University of the Free State's Student Academic Services, after the participants provided their student numbers and gave consent for this information to be accessed by the researcher. In the Faculty of the Humanities, students have the opportunity to choose from a variety of modules presented as part of the Faculty's curricula. Howell (2004) indicates that using the mean score of individuals' module combinations provides a more accurate picture than working with single module scores. This method can be regarded as a fair indication of the participants' academic competence. It should however, be recognised that the different modules have varying degrees of difficulty. Using only the mean scores of the modules might therefore not be an accurate indication of how students compare to one another.

4.4.1.2 Time perspective

Inventories provide a standardised way of testing a large group and obtaining results that categorise the population into different groups (Stroh, 2000). The ZTPI was used as an operationalisation of the variable *time perspective*. The aim of the measure is to assess an individual's orientation to time by distinguishing between five different time frames (past-positive, past-negative, present-hedonistic, present-fatalistic, and future) (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999). Each of the time frames acts as a representation of an individual's cognitive conceptualisation of, and attitude towards, time. Each sub-scale is empirically independent, which means that individual profiles can be established separately for every time frame (Préau et al., 2007).

A Likert-type scale was used for the inventory, where participants were asked to indicate to what extent they regard a statement as characteristic. The options in this scale ranged from a 1 (very uncharacteristic) to a 5 (very characteristic). The inventory consisted of 56 items, which were divided between five different subscales – each measuring a different time frame. The items were divided into the different scales as follows: 9 for past-positive, 10 for past-negative, 15 for present-hedonistic, 9 for present-fatalistic, and 13 for future time frame. The maximum score per scale was equal to the amount of items, multiplied by 5, and the minimum was multiplied by 1. Some of the items were in reverse form, and had to be adjusted during the scoring process (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999).

In a study aiming to validate the ZTPI, the test-retest reliability measures were established for a sample of 361 students from the San Francisco State University. The ages of the participants ranged from 16 to 62, and they came from diverse ethnic backgrounds. The Cronbach αcoefficients for the time frames were established as 0.8 for past-positive, 0.82 for past-negative, 0.79 for present-hedonistic, 0.74 for present-fatalistic, and 0.77 for future (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999). These reliability figures can be regarded as high, since it is generally accepted that a coefficient of higher than 0.7 is sufficient (Foxcroft & Roodt, 2009).Abousselam (2005) established a Cronbach αcoefficient of 0.72 for the future time frame scale in a study conducted among Grade 12 learners in South Africa. Van der Linde et al. (2010) further found a

Cronbach αcoefficient of ranging from 0.443 to 0.661 for the various time frames in a South African study on Black African Grade 12 learners.

The convergent and discriminant validity of an inventory can be tested by assessing the relationship with other measures that were designed to assess comparable constructs (Bless et al., 2006). The Zimbardo and Boyd (1999) study showed that the ZTPI is significantly related to concepts tested by other psychometric measures, including the Beck Depression Inventory, the Conscientiousness Scale, Ego Control Scale, and Consideration of Future Consequences Scale. The discriminant assessment also showed that the instrument offers the psychological measurement of a unique area that is not described by other constructs (such as the Big Five Questionnaire). It was further found that the different scales are correlated with outcomes on a variety of topics (aggression, depression, impulse control, novelty seeking, and egocontrol), therefore ensuring predictive validity (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999).

For current research purposes, first-year classes were identified, and lecturers were asked for permission to have their students complete the ZTPI. The inventories were self-administered, and completion took place at the end of the class session. It should be kept in mind that the inventories were in English and Afrikaans–which together was the first language of only 7.9% of the sample. The inventories were thus not standardised for the population used in this research. Foxcroft and Roodt (2009) warn that administering an inventory in a second or third language might affect the reliability of the results. Due to the fact that comprehension might have been compromised, the data might not have provided an accurate picture of the participants' time perspective.

4.4.1.3 Reliability

The original reliability figures of the ZTPI were gathered from an American population. It was thus decided to calculate the reliability for the current population as well. A Cronbach αcoefficient was calculated for every time frame on the inventory, in order to obtain an indication of the reliability of this application of the measure. A Cronbach αcoefficient

calculation allows for the comparison of the total score on the inventory to every individual item on the time frame scales. Internal consistency is thus measured, which provides an indication of how consistently every item contributes to the greater score (Salkind, 2008). The figures obtained are provided in Table 3 (below).

Table 3

Cronbach αcorrelations for the different time frames

Time frames	Number of items	Cronbach's α
Past-positive	9	0.495
Past-negative	10	0.73
Present-hedonistic	15	0.659
Present-fatalistic	9	0.674
Future	13	0.691

The Cronbach αcoefficient for the different time frames ranged from 0.495 to 0.73. Overall, the reliability of the tests based on the Cronbach αcoefficient was adequate. According to Foxcroft and Roodt (2009), a questionnaire used for a group should have a reliability of 0.7 or higher. Huysamen (2001) indicates that a Cronbach αcoefficient of 0.6 can be regarded as sufficient. According to these guidelines, only the past-positive scale, which yielded a Cronbach αcoefficient of 0.495, was not sufficiently reliable.

4.4.2 Qualitative data gathering

Gathering data from a qualitative perspective entails the observation of some part of a social world. The qualitative data-gathering process in the present study thus aimed to gain deeper insight in the participants' subjective understanding (Patton, 2002) of the different time frames, and their relation to academic competence. Four participants were selected for three different focus groups, and two individual interviews were also conducted. This data would later provide the means of interpreting and, therefore, understanding the phenomenon in question (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The qualitative data-gathering process provided an expansion of the information obtained during the quantitative questionnaires.

4.4.2.1 Focus groups and individual interviews

In focus groups, a carefully chosen group participates in a discussion on a specific topic (Berg, 2009). The rationale for the use of focus groups is based on the assumption that a wide range of experiences, as well as detailed accounts thereof, will be stimulated as interaction is motivated (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005). It is thus assumed that a discussion format will elicit forgotten memories and decrease inhibitions to speak one's mind. The fact that a focus group discusses a single topic, rather than answering questions, distinguishes it from other means of qualitative data gathering (Nieuwenhuis, 2009). Debate, and even conflict, can thus be encouraged. A focus group allows the gathering of in-depth information that provides clarity regarding issues that were previously not understood. It is further useful in the sense that both the participants and the researcher have the opportunity to learn from each other (Berg, 2009).

It was decided to also include individual interviews in the data-gathering process, in an effort to gain more in-depth information from some participants. In individual interviews, the interviewer has a general direction in mind for the conversation, but allows the participant to determine specific topics (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005). This enables the researcher to ask questions in order to gain knowledge that underlies the mentioned ideas (Babbie & Mouton, 2003).

In the present study, the focus group sessions continued for more or less 40 minutes, while the individual interviews lasted for about 20 minutes. Both the focus group sessions and the interviews started with general questions on participants' ideas regarding academic competence. Participants where then asked about their individual views regarding academic competence. With regards to time perspective theory, participants were encouraged to elaborate on their ideas related to the past, the present, and the future. The constructs associated with time perspective (mentioned in Chapter 3) spontaneously formed part of the conversation.

The focus group sessions and the interviews were semi-structured in nature, and continued until data saturation was reached. The fact that the samples for the focus groups and interviews only made up a small section of the population limited generalisation to a certain extent

(Niewhuisen, 2009). However, the aim of the qualitative phase was to gain a more in-depth understanding of subjective understandings. All the discussions that took place during the focus group sessions and the interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim for further analysis.

4.4.2.2 Trustworthiness

The qualitative data-gathering process aimed to achieve trustworthiness (i.e. proving the worthiness of the research) by being fair and balanced, and acknowledging the diversity in interests, perspectives, and realities of the participants (Babbie & Mouton, 2003). The study achieved credibility by giving an honest account of the respondents' realities. This was ensured by continuing with the interviews until a point of saturation was reached, and also by using a voice recorder to refer back to what was discussed. Dependability was achieved through the triangulation process, and it can thus be expected that a repeat of the present study will produce similar findings (Denzin & Lincon, 2005). Confirmability was ensured by providing themes, summaries, and integrated findings on the data gathered. The results are therefore assumed to be a product of the interviews, rather than the researcher's biases (Babbie & Mouton, 2003). The participants' direct words will also be quoted to increase trustworthiness.It should, however, be acknowledged that the researcher attempted the discussions with the research questions and relevant literature in mind, which might have led to bias in the questions asked.

4.5   Ethical considerations

The current study is part of a bigger research study of students in the Faculty of the Humanities. Permission for this project was granted by the University of the Free State. The Dean of Students gave consent for the inventories to be administered during lecture time. Lecturers further granted permission for completion of the inventories during lecturing time.

Documentation on the aim and nature of the study was handed out to students, along with the inventories, in order to ensure informed consent. The documentation also stipulated that participation was voluntary. Participants were thus also allowed to withdraw from the study at

any time, as is suggested by Gregory (2003) as an ethical practice. Participants had to sign this document before commencing with the inventory. By signing the document, the participants also gave permission for their academic records to be accessed.

During the qualitative data-gathering process, participants were briefed on the nature of their participation. Keeping confidentiality within a group setting presents some challenges. Participants were asked to keep the information discussed during the focus groups confidential (Allan, 2008). Confidentiality also provides the participants with a sense of security and consequent comfort in sharing their stories (Gregory, 2003).

Confidentiality was maintained in handling all inventories, academic records, focus group discussions, and individual interviews, in order to protect the privacy of all participants. No identifying data were included in the transcripts, and all the information was stored securely. It was, however, necessary to obtain student numbers in order to access the participants' academic records.

4.6   Data analysis

After the relevant data were collected, a process of data analysis was utilised to make sense of all the gathered information. Through this process, patterns that could add insight into the research question were detected (Bless et al., 2006). Due to the mixed-method design utilised, the analysis process was also divided into a quantitative and qualitative section, and will be discussed accordingly.

4.6.1   Quantitative analysis

The aim of the first research problem was to establish to what extent students' academic competence can be predicted by their time perspective. A standard multiple regression analysis was chosen to measure the impact of time perspective on academic competence. This method provides a way of understanding the effect of one variable on another (Hoyt, Imel, & Chan, 2008). The multiple regression analysis was specifically utilised because it allows for the

inclusion of various predictive variables. With a standard multiple regression, all the variables are entered into the equation at once in order to establish how much unique variance is explained by the different independent variables (Pallant, 2007). The predictive power of each time frame in explaining the variance in academic competence could thus be calculated.

In the current study, *academic competence* was the criterion variable, and the different *time frames* in time perspective theory (past-positive, past-negative, present-hedonistic, present-fatalistic, and future) were the different predictor variables. By completing a multiple regression analysis, the contribution of each time frame in predicting academic competence could be calculated. This statistical method was applied using the SPSS programme (Pallant, 2007).

4.6.2 Qualitative analysis

After the focus group discussions had been transcribed, a thematic analysis was performed in order to identify emerging themes that became apparent across and between various time frames. Thematic analysis is regarded as one of the foundational methods in qualitative analysis. This method allows the researcher to sift through a vast amount of gathered data (Babbie & Mouton, 2003). The process includes finding links in order to condense the initial amount of diverse ideas (Glaser, 1965). While content analysis focuses on the frequency of the occurrence of certain data, thematic analysis searches for themes that reappear (Lawal, 2009).

Initially, in the thematic analysis, the qualitatively rich data had to be distinguished from data that were less relevant to the research problem (Babbie & Mouton, 2003). After the identification, all the marked data were coded for further exploration. Through this process, patterns emerged in the data, which could then be regarded as themes. Through careful re-reading of the data, the emerging themes that would be important for describing the phenomenon were found. These themes allowed the association of ideas with similar content. The frequency of similar ideas provided an indication of relative importance. A specific theme could thus provide a way to describe and organise the observations during the focus groups sessions and interviews. On a more complex level, a good theme would aid interpretation of the studied construct (Ferreday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

Once themes have been identified, the search for emerging themes across and between various time frames can be reviewed through a process of constant comparison (Lawal, 2009). In the present study, ideas on how the different time frames were linked with academic competence were further elicited. Only then could the themes be interpreted in an effort to answer the second research question. An inductive approach thus allows the researcher to identify definite themes from the qualitative data (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

4.7   Quantitative results

This section will report on the findings that were obtained from the data analysis. The discussion will be limited to the results obtained from the quantitative process. The qualitative results will be explained in Chapter 5 as part of the discussion section. This allows the immediate comparison of the emerging qualitative themes with the quantitative conclusions.

4.7.1   Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics offers a way to organise a gathered data set by describing the various characteristics of such a set (Salkind, 2008). In the following section, descriptive information regarding academic competence and time perspective (including the different time frames) is summarised using of mean scores (providing information about the tendency that most of the individual scores followed) and standard deviation scores (indicating the amount of deviation from the mean) (Maree, 2009).

With regard to academic competence, the mean score for the final results that students received for all their first-year modules during both semesters of 2011 was 55.46%, with a standard deviation of 9.718. Table 4 provides data on the distribution of the mean scores of academic results.

Table 4

Descriptive statistics for academic competence

Mean score of academic results %	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
26-30	3	1.8	1.7
31-35	4	2.3	3.9
36-40	6	3.4	7.3
41-45	11	6.2	13.5
46-50	30	16.,8	30.3
51-55	26	14.6	44.9
56-60	45	25.2	70.2
61-65	28	15.7	86
66-70	15	8.4	94.4
71-75	9	5.1	99.4
76-80	1	0.6	100

The mean scores for academic results ranged from a minimum of 28% and a maximum of 76%. The fact that 30.3% of the students did not achieve an average above the pass mark rate indicates a high possibility that a significant amount of modules were not passed. It can thus be assumed that quite a few participants would need to repeat at least some of their first-year modules. Less than 1% of the participants achieved a distinction (above 75%).

Table 5 provides statistics regarding the mean, standard deviations, and minimum and maximum scores obtained on the ZTPI. Furthermore, the mean score per item will be compared to those established by Zimbardo and Boyd (1999).

Table 5

Descriptive statistics for the time perspective scales

Time frame (with number of items in scale in brackets)	Minimum score (with lowest possible minimum score in brackets)	Maximum score (with highest possible maximum score in brackets)	M	SD	*M* per item. (Calculation : total scale mean divided by number of items)
Past-positive (9)	20 (9)	43 (45)	30.87	5.665	3.43
Past-negative (10)	10 (10)	46 (50)	29.94	7.331	2.994
Present-bedonistic (15)	27 (15)	70 (75)	51.04	7.266	3.403
Present-fatalistic (9)	9 (9)	39 (45)	21.04	6.122	3.338
Future (13)	29 (13)	63 (65)	46.94	8.044	3.611

On the past-positive scale, a mean score of 30.87 and a standard deviation of 5.665 were found. The individual scores on this scale ranged from 20 to 43 out of a possible 45.

On the past-negative scale, a minimum score of 10 and a maximum of 46 out of a possible 50 were found. The overall mean score of the scale was 29.94, while the standard deviation was 7.331.

The present hedonistic scale yielded scores ranging from 27 to 70 out of a possible 75. The mean was 51.04 and the standard deviation was 7.266.On average, the sample scored somewhat higher on this scale than on the rest of the scales.

The present-fatalistic scale yielded a mean of 21.04 and a standard deviation of 6.122.The individual scores ranged from 9 to39 out of a possible 45.

Scores between 29 and 63 out of a possible 65 were found on the future scale. The mean score of the whole scale was 46.94, and the standard deviation 8.044. This was also the scale with the greatest standard deviation, which indicatedabroader spectrum of answers.

Zimbardo and Boyd (1999) obtained the following mean scores per item: 3.71 for past-positive, 2.89 for past-negative, 3.44 for present-hedonistic, 2.37 for present-fatalistic, and 3.47 for future. The study conducted by Zimbardo and Boyd (1999) thus indicated mean scores per item that are comparable to the mean scores found in the study at hand. When comparing the mean scores per item for every scale, it becomes clear that the future time frame achieved the highest score. The past-negative time frame had the lowest mean score per item. Comparative mean scores per item were found for the past-positive, present-hedonistic, and present-fatalistic time frames.

4.7.2   Inferential statistics

Inferential statistics offer a way to make generalisations from the sample to the larger population (Salkind, 2008). In the current study, the inferential statistics provided information regarding how much variance in academic competence can be explained by the different time frames. Firstly, correlations between the various variables were determined. Table 6 provides the Pearson's product moment correlations found between academic competence and the different time frames.

Table 6

Pearson's product moment correlations between academic competence and the different time frames for the total sample

	Past-positive	Past-negative	Present-hedonistic	Present-fatalistic	Future
Academic competence (mean score for academic results)	-0.025	-0.129*	-0.070	-0.034	0.095
Past-positive	-	-0.001	0.161*	-0.051	0.201*
Past-negative		-	0.403*	0.387*	0.050
Present-hedonistic			-	0.199*	0.027
Present-fatalistic				-	-0.294*
Future					-

* $p < 0.05$

No significant correlation was found on the 0.01 level. The only time frame that had a significant correlation with academic competence (mean score for academic results) was the past-negative scale, with a negative correlation that is significant on the 0.05 level. This implies that, for the current sample, academic competence tends to be lower when the past-negative time frame is higher, and vice versa. None of the other time frames indicated a significant correlation with the mean scores on academic competence.

Between the different time frames, various significant correlations (on a 0.05 level) were found: between the present-hedonistic and past-negative, present-hedonistic and past-positive, present-fatalistic and past-negative, present-fatalistic and future (negative correlation), past-positive and future, and present-fatalistic and present hedonistic.

It is important to note that the various predictor variables showed more correlation with one another than with the criterion variable. However, the correlations were inadequate to create multicolinearity, which is usually indicated by $r > 0.9$ (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010).

The correlations were therefore not high enough to decrease the validity of the multiple regression model (Pallant, 2007).

The results from the multiple regression analysis are provided in Table 7 (below).

Table 7

Contributors of time perspective to R², with academic competence as the criterion variable for the total sample

Dependent variable	R	R²	Adjusted R²	Std. Error of the Estimate
Academic competence	0,17	0,029	0,001	9,714

A standard multiple regression was completed to measure the extent to which the five time frames predict academic competence. The value of R indicates the correlation between academic competence and time perspective, which amounted to 0.17. The R^2 value is the amount of variability of academic competence, accounted for by time perspective. Time perspective thus explained 2.9% of the academic competence construct. The adjusted R^2 value indicated that 0.1% of the R^2 percentage should be subtracted when generalising the variability from the sample to the larger population. The standard error of the estimate of 9.714 accounted for the possible variation in the estimated values. This measure assists in assessing the absolute size of the prediction error (Hair et al, 2010). The significance value ($p < 0.404$) indicated that the 2.9% variance of academic competence that is explained by time perspective is insignificant.

4.8   Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of the methodology used to address the research aim. The research at hand was exploratory in nature, and therefore aimed to gain insight by investigating the construct of time perspective and how it relates to academic competence. In order to address the research questions, a mixed-method design was chosen, thereby combining

the strengths of both the quantitative and qualitative research paradigms. Both convenience and purposive sampling methods were used to choose a sample of the population of Black African first-year students at the University of the Free State's Faculty of the Humanities. In order to answer the first research question, the ZTPI was administered to 178 students. The results were analysed with a standard multiple regression method in an effort to determine whether time perspective could predict academic competence. Focus groups and individual interviews provided data, which were analysed thematically.

The most significant results discussed in this chapter include the fact that only the past-negative scale significantly correlates with academic competence. The results further indicate high correlations exist between various different time frames. In the next chapter, the results obtained from the qualitative data-gathering phase will be provided. Connections with the literature discussed in Chapters 1 to 3 will further be made with regards to both the quantitative and qualitative results.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE RESULTS

The aim of this chapter is to discuss the quantitative and qualitative findings of the study. The data were processed in order to answer the research questions posed. First, the statistical results reported in Chapter 4 will be interpreted by providing possible theoretical explanations. Second, the qualitative themes that emerged during the focus group sessions and interviews will be discussed. The discussion aims to link the results of the current research with the existing literature on the topic. Furthermore, the results of both the quantitative and qualitative data-gathering processes will be interpreted in a corroborating manner to illuminate the combined data set.

5.1. Discussion of quantitative results

The aim of the quantitative phase of the study was to explore whether time perspective can predict academic competence among Black African first-year students. The discussion to follow will firstly focus on the two separate constructs and will then continue with an explication of academic competence and time perspective in relation to one another.

5.1.1 Academic competence

The data gathered on academic competence indicated that the participants' average academic result for 2011 was 55.46%, which is barely above the required pass mark of 50%. It can thus be assumed that, for the current sample, various modules were not passed. This validates the national concern regarding the poor academic results found in South African higher education (Letseka & Maile, 2008). It further validates research to increase insight into the factors limiting achievement of academic competence, especially amongst the current population.

Biographical variables might be contributing factors to the sample's poor academic competence. Research by Freeman and Hrabowski (2005) indicates that previously marginalised groups tend to underperform, compared to their non-marginalised counterparts. Jansen et al. (2007) also

found lower success rates amongst the Black African population in South Africa. The other distinguishing characteristic of the population is the fact that the students were all in their first year of study. The unique challenges that first-year students face might further contribute to the poor academic competence (Letseka & Maile, 2008).

5.1.2 Time perspective

The future time frame had the highest mean score per item when the various time frames were compared. This indicated a higher response rate from the participants on items that elicited future time thinking. The response pattern was probably due to the fact that the participants were all part of a student population, which implies preparation for the future (Boniwell & Zimbardo, 2004). The lowest mean score per item was found on the past-negative time frame. People who score high on this scale tend to be less inclined to plan ahead, since there is a strong focus on past events that are regarded as negative (Lianiauskaité & Kairys, 2009). The pessimistic attitude associated with the past-negative time frame limits hope, motivation, and the focus on future goals which are all detrimental to the achievement of academic competence.

Various significant correlations were found between the different time frames. Significant correlations were found between the following time frames: present-hedonistic and past-negative, present-hedonistic and past-positive, present-fatalistic and past-negative, present-fatalistic and future (negative correlation), past-positive and future, and present-fatalistic and present-hedonistic. The present-hedonistic frame is therefore associated with both the past-positive and past-negative time frames. This indicates a tendency of individuals who are focused on gratification to also include the past in their decision-making processes. Both the present-fatalistic and past-negative time frames are associated with pessimistic thinking, which explains the correlation. The future time frame is associated with the past-positive time frame, which is an optimistic orientation that is negatively correlated to the pessimistic thinking pattern associated with the present-fatalistic frame. It can thus be assumed that, in the current sample, optimistic thinking is associated with a greater orientation toward the future. It further appears that individuals with present-hedonistic time frames also experience fatalistic thinking, which is correlated to future time thinking.

Significant correlations between the different time frames were also found in previous research that utilised the ZTPI. In the original study by Zimbardo and Boyd (1999), significant correlations were found between all the time frames, with the least significant correlation found between the past-positive and present-fatalistic time frames. Liniauskaité and Kairys (2009) found all the time frames to be significantly correlated, except for the past-positive and past-negative time frames. Préau et al. (2007) also indicated a significant correlation between all the time frames. In the present study, the present-fatalistic and past-negative time frames showed the strongest correlation.

The correlations found in the current as well as previous studies thus indicate that the time frames are not mutually exclusive (Harber et al., 2003). An individual can display the characteristics of different time frames. Even though the existence of a dominant time frame is acknowledged, it is postulated that every person applies different time frames in varying degrees in different situations (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999). It thus appears that the current population will also be able to switch between the different time frames in response to the specific requirements of a situation. The question remains how and when the different time frames are used for situations. The discussion of the qualitative phase of the research will shed light on this question.

5.1.3 Academic competence and time perspective

The future time frame had the highest mean score per item when the various time frames were compared. This indicated a higher response rate for items that elicited future time thinking. The response pattern was probably due to the fact that the participants were all part of a student population, which implies preparation for the future (Boniwell & Zimbardo, 2004). The lowest average score per item was found on the past-negative time frame. People who score high on this scale are less inclined to plan ahead, since there is a strong focus on past events that are regarded as negative (Lianiauskaité & Kairys, 2009). The pessimistic attitude associated with the past-negative time frame thus limits hope, motivation, and setting future goals which are regarded as detrimental to the achievement of academic competence.

The results obtained from the Pearson product moment correlation yielded a significant correlation between academic competence and the past-negative time frame. For the current sample, it can thus be assumed that, the more participants rely on the past-negative time frame, the lower their chances of achieving academic competence tend to be. Individuals that engage in a past-negative time frame do not often engage in planning and strategising about future outcomes that are associated with academic competence (Harber et al., 2003). Due to the pessimistic assumptions that are characteristic of this time frame, individuals are less hopeful about the effects of their own efforts in establishing future career opportunities (Liniauskaité & Kairys, 2009). Students with a past-negative orientation will be less motivated to actively engage in academic endeavours, due to a focus on previous negative experiences (Leondari, 2007).

None of the other time frames showed a significant correlation with the academic results. It is especially surprising that no correlation was found between the future time frame and academic competence, since a large number of research studies indicate the association between these two variables (Adelabu, 2007; Boniwell & Zimbardo, 2004; Harber et al, 2003; McInerney, 2004; Mello & Worrell, 2006; Phan, 2009). This relationship is to be expected if one considers the fact that individuals orientated toward the future are more conscious of the relationship between current effort and future outcomes (Leondari, 2007). It is therefore expected that students engaging in future thinking are also more likely to invest in their academic work. The results obtained from previous studies were thus not replicated in the current study.

A few methodological concerns could possibly explain the insignificant findings of the present study. The validity of the operationalisation of academic competence could have compromised significant results. The reliability of the ZTPI might have further weakened the strength of the measurement, which would have made significant results less likely. These contributing factors will be discussed in greater depth in the section on limitations of the study in Chapter 6. Besides the measurement concerns, the unique characteristics of the population should also be considered as an explanation of the insignificant findings. It thus seems that this population experiences the relationship between academic competence and time perspective in a manner different to that of the populations in previous studies. The qualitative results will offer more information in this regard.

5.2   Discussion of the qualitative results

The aim of the qualitative section of the research was to explore the participants' understanding of the relation between time perspective and academic competence. Initially, the intention was to investigate the specific themes that emerged from the various time frames separately. Thus, participants who tended to use a specific time frame more prominently were grouped together for the focus groups and individual interviews. However, during the data analysis, it became apparent that the same themes emerged on more or less the same level of depth, despite the dominant time frame. The different conversations were therefore not interpreted separately, but rather in a holistic manner. The high correlation between the different time frames, found in the qualitative phase of the study, further justified this integration.

The thematic analysis yielded various themes. In this section, the themes will be discussed in relation to the literature, in order to corroborate the quantitative findings. A diagram was designed to organise the themes that emerged (see Figure 2, below).
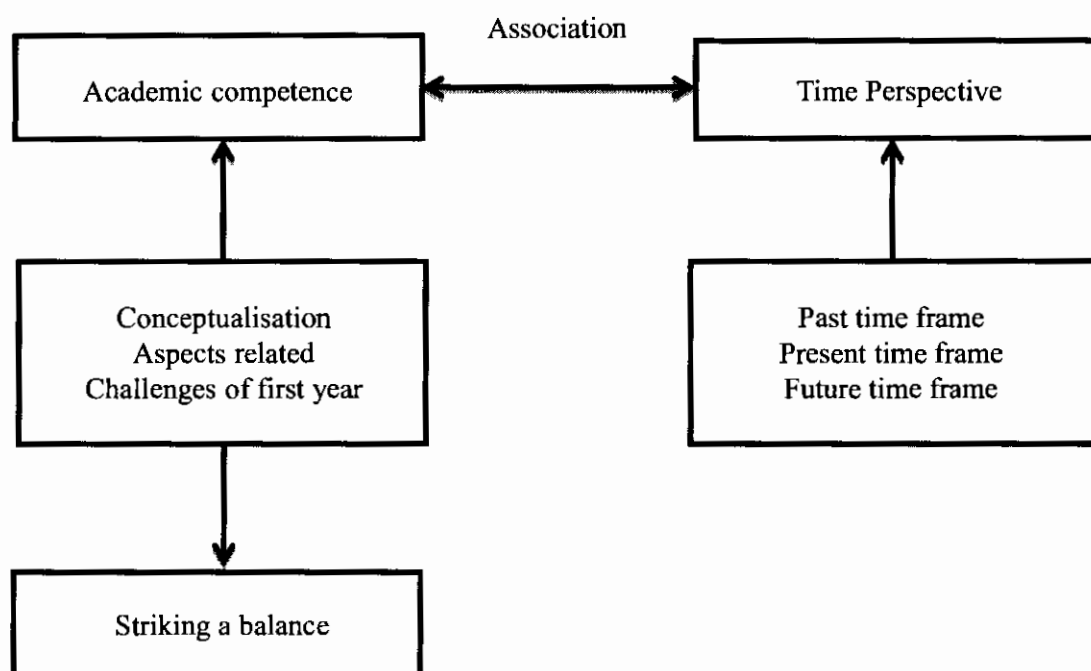

Figure 2

A representation of the themes that emerged during the qualitative phase of the study

5.2.1 Academic competence

The discussions on academic competence elicited the participants' perspectives and attitudes on academic practices in the higher education environment. The aim was to gather information on how participants conceptualise academic competence, as well as their understanding and views of this concept. During the discussions, various contributing aspectsto the experience of academic competence were mentioned. The challenges that keep participants from attaining academic competence were further explored.

5.2.1.1 Conceptualisation of academic competence

With regards to the conceptualisation of academic competence, some of the participants provided ideas that were relevant to an organisational focus. These conversations were, however, limited and less prevailing in the conceptualisation of academic competence. The participants were thus less concerned with the contribution of their academic results to the university's drop-out and retention rates, which is the focus of the CHE (2007). The role of the greater organisation was thus acknowledged as a contributing influence and will be further explored in the next section of the chapter.

The participants related their understanding of academic competence as it pertains to the individual's experience of success at university level. This perception is unique to the student population, since they perceive academic functioning in a personalised and, therefore, subjective manner. While some participants associated academic competence purely with academic results, others had a more inclusive idea of the concept. This is in line with the distinction made in Chapter 2, which states that the individual interpretation of academic competence can be viewed from a percentage or a holistic perspective.

Some of the participants stated that passing instead of failing is proof of academic competence. They believed that the student with the highest academic results will also be the one with the highest academic competence. Authors like Lopez (2009) also view academic results as a fair indication of academic competence. The regard for a percentage view might have been a

result of the high priority placed on Grade 12 final results in South Africa (Fraser & Killen, 2003). The participants further regarded succeeding in the outcomes of the modules as a measurement of academic competence.

Other participants believed that academic competence is more than cognitive competence. They therefore held a more inclusive or holistic view, where academic competence is defined as the manner in which students are able to handle the challenges at university level. One participant stated, "I also think it has to do with your ability to cope with ... or ... bring forth what is expected of you." It therefore seems that students who are able to take responsibility for attending class, handing in assignments, and ensuring understanding of the modules are more likely to achieve academic competence. The combination of attitudes, skills, and strengths that Van Schalkwyk et al. (2009) refer to seems to be relevant to the present population. Taking responsibility for other areas of development, like participation in extra-mural activities that are offered by the university, was also indicated as important in the broadening of skills. This exposure is emphasised by Reason et al. (2006) as a way to acquire knowledge, political awareness, and increased community involvement.

Another participant voiced an opinion in line with the holistic view on academic competence, stating that simply achieving good grades is not sufficient to be academically competent. He said, "I think the problem with that comes in with interpreting the textbook, because someone can give you information, but for you to take the information and apply it practically is something else." It further became apparent that, in high school, many of the participants achieved by simply "parroting" the work. One of the challenges that university presents is that the information provided has to be interpreted and applied. The participants believed that students who are able to digest and integrate new information rather than simply repeating it will be better equipped to handle the challenges of their future careers. In accordance, Ho and Hau (2008) state that successful students are able to *understand* course material, rather than simply memorising it. The participants in the present study thus acknowledged that they need to adapt the study practices from their past in order to be efficiently equipped for future opportunities.

5.2.1.2 Aspects related to academic competence

Through the discussions, a few themes emerged regarding the aspects related to participants' academic competence. Many of the themes were related to the model of Reason et al. (2006), and will be discussed accordingly.

a)   Social aspects

As a theme, social relationships stood out as a significant contributor to academic competence. Interaction with significant others played an important role in how academic competence was viewed by the participants. While spending time with other people can potentially decrease the focus on academic activities, participants also shared how these relationships resulted in greater motivation to apply themselves to their studies. In the model by Reason et al. (2006), the social sphere that contributes to academic competence is limited to peers. In the current population familial and communal experiences were also regarded as contributing aspects. Social expectations, norms, and encouragement thus impact how participants engage with their studies. In accordance, Holman and Zimbardo (2009) state that time perspective should be regarded as a flexible concept that forms, and is formed by, the social and cultural spheres in which individuals live.

According to the developmental theory of Erikson (1982), young adults (such as the students in the present population) focus their energy on establishing intimacy by forming significant relationships and connections with others. It was therefore expected that the participants in the present study would place a lot of value on their friendships with fellow students. The participants seemed to have high regard for the opinions of their friends. The peer group's ideas on the difficulty of a subject and the amount of time needed for a specific module impact on the effort invested in academic work. Friends are often turned to for advice regarding the uncertainties associated with the first year of study. One participant explained how she discussed an upcoming test with a friend, who stated that it was not necessary to study much. The participant felt hurt when the friend studied in secret and achieved better results. The peer

group thus impacts on individual students' classroom and curricular activities (Reason et al., 2006).

LeCroy and Krysik (2008) explain that peer influence depends on the perspectives that friends have regarding academic competence. Some of the participants experienced support from their friends. One participant mentioned, "... I'm constantly surrounded by academic people, and my environment stimulates me all the time." Another participant explained how his friends' positive attitudes towards studying affected him:

That motivates me to study, because the people around me are studying. And they ask: 'How did you write, how was the test?' For me, that motivates me, because I want to go back and say I really did well...

Many of the participants expressed their fear of staying behind when their peers become more successful; "...and no one wants to be a failure," said one participant. The participants associated being left behind with not being important anymore.

One participant who had failed a module explained the negative experience she had in repeating the module:
I think repeating is the hardest thing. Your friends are no longer in the class, and now you're thinking: 'I'm left behind. I'm the tail,' and you feel ... your friends are moving on... and when you get left behind you just don't matter.

Students' developmental stage will predispose them to engaging in activities that enhance connections with their peers – sometimes to the detriment of their academic careers (Faye & Sharpe, 2008). Lack of peer support has also been associated with poorer academic outcomes (Zhang et al., 2009). The model designed by Reason et al. (2006) also emphasises the importance of the peer group as it relates to the development of many new competencies. While this model emphasises the positive contributions of the peer environment, the participants in the present study also expressed friends as having a distinctly negative impact on academic competence. The peer group could thus distract students from spending time on their academic work.

The participants in the present study showed appreciation for their fellow students assisting them when needed in performing academically. The participants expressed the close relationship experienced with the student population. It was claimed that a better understanding is achieved when students can share ideas and listen to the opinions of others. This also makes the studying experience more enjoyable. Participants are thus able to utilise social relationships to receive greater support for, and derive enjoyment from, their studies. Reason et al. (2006) also encourage this type of involvement in curricular experiences, as well as in classroom and out-of-class environments, as it adds to students' overall development.

The model by Reason et al. (2006) does not focus on students' family life as a potential contributor to academic competence. It could, however, be considered under the pre-university characteristics, as part of the sociodemographic traits, which include the race, financial status, and education of the family (Terenzini et al, 1995). The participants did not emphasise the sociodemographic concepts nearly as much as the social interaction with their families and how this impacts on study practices.

A family theme was especially strongly associated with motivation. Many of the participants appreciated the sacrifices that their parents had to make in order to have them attend university. They are therefore motivated to make their parents proud and not shame the family. One participant said: "I have a single parent,... and so I see how much she sacrifices just for me to be here, let alone do everything better than I'm doing... that motivates me to study really hard."

The positive attitudes and loyalty expressed towards their families create the desire in participants to please their families. Many participants viewed themselves as a role model for the younger children in their families. They saw it as their duty to show younger family members that it is possible to achieve success at university level.

In the words of a participant:

I'm the first generation in my family to come to varsity, and that's a big deal, and I can't disappoint them. They're looking up at me. My aunts and uncles are telling my cousins: 'Look at your cousin, she's at varsity.'

Research on first-generation students has mostly focused on the financial challenges and lack of support, and how this limits the achievement of academic competence (Jama et al., 2008). The participants in the present study were, however, able to view this status as a motivating factor.

On the negative side, however, aiming to please their families can also cause students to register for modules that their parents advised them to take. A participant mentioned, "It's like your parents tell you to study medicine; maybe you're not very good in sciences, but just because your parents pay it, then you study that. Then you won't work as hard as you're supposed to." A high regard for parental opinions can therefore decrease a student's ability to make informed and responsible module choices. A lack of personal choice in modules decreases students' motivation to perform academically. Astin (1993) argues that students' academic competence can be compromised if their individual needs are not met by the chosen modules.

Furthermore, family responsibilities also distract the participants from their studies. One of the participants explained, "… I'm staying at home. It's like I'm in the middle. So each and every day when I come to school, you have to think about others first." Another participant elaborated by saying the following about her life at home: "Sometimes they say: 'Wash dishes, cook this, cook that,' and if you tell them about your studies, they will say: 'No we've been there, done that.'" It appears that the lives of students who are living with their families present different challenges than those of students who live on campus or nearby. In this regard, it seems that families of first generation Black African students are often unsure about the support required by first-year students (Jama et al., 2008).

The greater societal impact on academic competence is another factor that is not accounted for by the model of Reason et al. (2006). How the participants in the present study defined

themselves within their communities seemed to impact on their thinking about studies. Throughout the focus groups sessions, several references were made to the idea of a communal culture, which is often associated with traditional African ideas. The establishment of previously constructed social identities would account for the incorporation of cultural beliefs into their current academic environment (Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009). If an individual is strongly socialised within the specific culture, adherence to cultural expectations will also be strong. The way in which academic competence is defined, encouraged, and supported thus depends on the set of cultural behaviours, values, and beliefs present in the communities (Phan, 2009).

A communal perspective was closely associated with the responsibility that participants felt toward their families, as was discussed previously. Furthermore, even though the participants regarded their communities as lovable and interconnected, they also experienced pressure to accept and adapt to the community's status quo. One participant said: "…as a Black community, we are very close. But there's always that thing ...'I don't like her success.' " The participants from more rural areas recognised that peers from their hometowns are often envious, and therefore don't want to see them achieve success.

One participant said:
Back home, people talk… They are waiting for you to fail. You want to prove them wrong. But it's hard to juggle this fun life we have here and still remember that someone out there is waiting for you to fail so that you can come back home.

On the other hand, one participant stated the following: "That pushes me hard. If someone is ... wanting me to fail, then I get encouraged to do my best." The fear of failure was thus considered a further motivational factor for many of the participants. One mentioned, "I won't be able to sit back and see other succeeding and I'm failing…"

b)   Organisational aspects

According to the model of Reason et al. (2006), the organisational culture and environments of universities have a significant impact on the academic experiences of students.

It is therefore concerning that the participants mentioned experiencing a lack of communication between the university authorities and the students. It appears that participants often left felt unsupported and confused, especially due to poor communication between lecturers and students. The university's organisational and logistical problems were blamed for poor performance in tests and examinations. A lack of communication with higher levels of the institutional hierarchy can cause dissatisfaction with the general academic milieu, since students feel uninvolved (Astin, 1993).

c)   Economic difficulties

The acquisition of academic competence is accompanied by many financial sacrifices (Jama et al., 2008). Not having the financial means to live as a student added to the anxiety experienced by the participants in the present study. Especially students who live far away from home who suddenly had to cope with the costs of living by themselves experienced difficulties. Economic challenges slot into the model by Reason et al. (2006) as sociodemographic traits under the pre-university characteristics. It is thus one of the contributors established before admission, and continues to impact on student learning and persistence.

One participant mentioned:
...not everyone is financially able to be here... it's very difficult when you have to study and... can't focus well... you have to understand that your parents can't always give you money. So when you come and write a test, your head is everywhere, because you're trying to think of your next meal...

The participants also mentioned the social and material handicap that Van Schalkwyk et al. (2009) refer to as limiting the process of overcoming previous imbalances. However, it seems that for the current population, financial stress is not only a detrimental factor in their drive to accomplish academic competence. The participants were aware that the consequences of failing are particularly dire for those who struggle financially. Since many of the students are dependent on bursaries or family funds, failing would mean the end of their higher education careers. One participant said: "... I get motivated by my bursary to study. If I don't study enough, it's going to

be declined. Because of the social background that I have, I have to study." Altbach et al. (2009) also state the importance of academic competence as a means of achieving greater financial prosperity. The participants stated that freeing themselves from poverty also acts as a motivational factor, because they are familiar with the life that they do not want. Another participant made the following statement: "People with money come here with a 'don't care' attitude, because they have support from family. A person like me... I have to work for myself and build my own future."

5.2.1.3 The unique challenges of the first-year experience

The model proposed by Reason et al. (2006) provides a way of understanding the aspects contributing to academic competence for the general student population. The current population was however, chosen to specifically explore the experiences of the first-year of study, which has been highlighted by much recent literature. It seems that first-year students experience social and practical challenges that are unique to this population, and which impact on their academic competence (Van Schalkwyk et al., 2009). Through the group discussions in the present study, it became clear that challenges associated with the first year of study often drive the participants to achieve academic competence.

The participants agreed that first-year students do not know how to cope with all the novelties of higher education. It is especially the new experiences associated with city life that distract the students from applying themselves to their studies. One of the participants said: "... most students who attend school here are maybe from small places... So they are trying to explore and see the place and all that, and they find school boring." The sudden freedom and lack of authority figures are thus viewed as detrimental to a focus on academic work.

One participant explained it as follows:
In high school, you have teachers the whole day. You have somebody that tells you, you have to work, do your homework, but at university it's different. The lecturer will tell you to do your work, but it's not his business.

It thus seems that first-year students are easily distracted from studying, and that they don't consider the possibility of failing. The participants stated that students need to experiment with ways to cope with the challenges of being a first-year student before the examinations start, in order to avoid failing. Cuseo (2005) also states that first-year students should be supported in developing the necessary cognitive and non-cognitive competencies to achieve success.

Together with being free and independent, first-year students also have to cope with other responsibilities on their own.

One participant said:

Now you're alone and you don't know what to buy when it comes to food or groceries, for example. You don't know how to manage money… You don't know how not to go to parties, because you've never been to parties and now you want to party.

This quote illustrates the problems associated with a life transition that is serious enough to impact on participants' academic functioning (Crissman Ishler, 2005). The academic identity of students, which includes cognitive and behavioural habits, is usually established in the first year of study. It is therefore important for universities to assist students in adapting the most effective habits of studying from the outset (Cuseo, 2005).

According to the participants, first-year students' previous academic frame of reference does not prepare them for what is required at university level. The knowledge and skills that students obtain throughout high school are often insufficient for higher education. Fraser and Killen (2005) also focus attention on the fact that first-year students are exposed to subjects and teaching methods that differ greatly from those in high school. The participants agreed that the integration of new knowledge is enhanced when it is related to previously acquired knowledge. One participant used the example of not having Biology at school and therefore finding certain Psychology modules rather foreign. She said: "…it comes as a challenge to me… and I have to adapt… and I don't have that background, I don't have that anchor from high school…" Especially the previously disadvantaged high schools are often unable to provide their learners with the competencies to survive at higher education level (Van Schalkwyk et al., 2009).

Students can therefore not rely on the knowledge they acquired in the past, and are forced to utilise the resources in their new environments to build resources for coping with future adjustments.

One participant highlighted an identity component of the first-year experience by saying that, "You come to varsity and they tell you it's difficult; a lot changes… you are told it's difficult, but if you know who you are and you know what you want in life, it becomes easier to make decisions." According to Faye and Sharpe (2008), students are often in a process of identity exploration. During this time, students will question who they are and what they want to become in the future (Sigelman & Ryder, 2009). With regards to literature on student experiences, identity is generally regarded as personal beliefs about the self in relation to others, and the expression of these relationships (Torres et al., 2009). This further highlights the importance of social interactions in the developmental phase in which students find themselves. Students are thus forced to question previous beliefs and establish a value set that would guide their lives as adults.

5.2.1.4 Striking a balance

Due to all the new situations encountered at higher education institutions, first-year students often struggle to balance the requirements of the different settings. All the challenges that are unique to the first-year contribute to students feeling overwhelmed and a consequent inability to effectively allocate attention and energy. Finding a balance between the time spend on academic work and social or other responsibilities seems to be one of the key difficulties.

One participant mentioned:
… you don't only go to the university that you're at, … there's also the university of life. At the same time, you experience things outside from school, and …you have to be able to juggle or balance all.

The model of Reason et al. (2006) also emphasises the importance of students engaging in both classroom and out-of class experiences in attaining academic competence. The participants

in the present study, however, seemed unsure how to divide their time effectively in order to ensure their own holistic development.

In order to address the challenge of leading a balanced life, participants stated that they had to learn to prioritise. One participant said: "It's about putting first things first; balancing work and play." The principle of self-discipline also emerged during the conversations. Participants claimed that keeping goals in mind helped them to discipline themselves in order to spend enough time studying. The discipline to commit to study practices is related to the skills that Trautwein et al. (2009) propose as defining concepts within the holistic perspective on academic competence. The participants in the present study further considered this stage of their lives as the best opportunity to study, and acknowledged that it should be their top priority. It thus appears that students are able to envision the potential advantages of the activities in which they could engage.

Managing one's time is another strategy that was mentioned as helping the participants to strike the needed balance. One participant said: "So it's about when to do what and knowing when to stop and knowing when to start again. It's about time management." Scheduling times to study and then engaging in a pleasant activity as a reward seems to be a shared strategy, evident from the following statement: "I can plan to start studying, but it also helps me to know when I can chill and when I can socialise and do whatever." Padawer et al. (2007) also acknowledge the importance of planning in order to achieve academic goals.

5.2.2 Time perspective

The aim of the qualitative phase of the study was further to elicit first-year students' understanding of time perspective – especially as it pertains to the higher education environment. The participants elaborated on the topic by sharing their individual experiences. A greater understanding of each time frame became apparent through this process. The associated concepts mentioned in Chapter 3 formed part of the way that participants conceptualise time perspective.

5.2.2.1 Past time frame

There were two lines of thinking with regards to thoughts about the past, which became apparent throughout the focus group sessions. On the one hand, some participants felt that one should not be too concerned with the past, but rather focus on what is changeable in the present and the future. On the other hand, some participants believed that the past plays an important role in either shaping or motivating individuals. These differing views are closely aligned with the distinction that Zimbardo and Boyd (1999) make between a past-positive and past-negative time frame.

One participant said the following about a negative orientation towards the past:
...that's why 1 generally just don't like to put my past into my future... I should strive to push myself further. I want to go to places where I wasn't before. So, in order for me to do that, I need to let go of what I know.

The students also indicated that they experience the past as something that may prevent them from being open-minded and embracing new ideas. One participant stated: "What happened in my past is in my past. I don't want it to affect my future." Failures in the past also seem to impact on participants' confidence and motivation to attain success, evident from the following statement: "For me, whenever I face... failure... it's like all the failures come back in a way,... and you have no hope for the next semester." Another participant stated that past negative experiences can accumulate to a point where it is impossible to ignore it any longer: "When reality hits, it hits harder than before. Because when you start to remember all those [sic] stuff, it's hard to deal with it then and there." Negative interpretations about the past can contribute to a negative view of the future (Liniauskaité & Kairys, 2009).

With regards to a more positive outlook on the past, one participant said: "...at times, what has happened in our past helps us to be ... stronger in the present moment." Some also believed that the past shapes individuals, and forms the "core essential values that make up who you are." Another participant stated: "I think the past influences your future. Your past makes you the person you are now and what you're going to be in the future." It is clear that, in these cases, the

participants were able to integrate the positive experiences from their pasts with their identity in the present, which seems to have had a positive effect on their self-esteem (Holman & Zimbardo, 2009).

When discussing previous challenges, one participant said: "I beat all those challenges then, so I can beat what I have now, and sometimes I think that if I didn't have the anchor... then I wouldn't be able to stand my ground now." In this participant's view, challenges act as a motivator. It is clear that the confidence gained from previous success has become the activating force of further persistence with regards to challenges (Ryan & Deci, 2000b). The participants also stated that they wouldn't be working as diligently if they had not experienced the hardships they had to face previously.

Another participant agreed with this statement by sharing her own experience:

... I really cannot have any motivation, because my mother will complain, but she will still pay. I think it's a little hard to get motivated, because everybody around me is successful and whenever I want something I get it. So I'm a little spoiled."

Many of the participants held a balanced view, where they were able to take from the past that which is positive without being limited to previous experiences. A participant summarised this view as follows:

...your past shapes you into the kind of person you're going to be, but it doesn't have to define you. Just because I come from a difficult background does not mean my circumstances have to define me and that I have to feel sorry for myself. Yes, it's important to know where I come from, ... but it shouldn't be a dictating factor to where I am now."

Another participant mentioned that, ".... if it's positive, you should take that attitude with you." This is also an indication of how participants deal with the hardships of economic difficulties from their past.

In accordance with the past-positive time frame, individuals are able to nostalgically draw on the experiences they had in their family environment and positively apply these in their present situations (Liniauskaité & Kairys, 2009). This time frame is further associated with receiving a great deal of support from long-standing relationships, as well as greater involvement with significant others (Holman & Zimbardo, 2009). Tinto (2006) agrees that, for many students, being connected to their family, a community, or a congregation is essential in their persistence at higher education institutions.

In conclusion, some participants aim to avoid previous experiences, because they do not want to be reminded of past failures and limitations. Negative past experiences cause individuals to decrease their expectations in order to be more realistic about their ability and performance outcomes (Rand, 2009). Other participants emphasised past events as important in shaping their identities. Meaningful family relationships, together with the challenges experienced in the past, assisted participants in being more motivated.

5.2.2.2 Present time frame

One participant said: "I don't really think of tomorrow because I'm living right now." He further preferred not to think of the future in order to stay in "a positive state of mind." The participants stated that having future dreams that are not attained can be a very negative experience. One participant said that, to combat such an experience, "I even settle even in my dreams. The thing is, I don't want to be disappointed, I don't like being let down, being a failure." Standards and, therefore, expectations are lowered in order to prevent future disappointment and optimism and positive expectations are thus decreased.

It can be concluded that some participants are so engaged with the present moment that they fail to consider the future outcomes of their actions. Hedonistic experiences often delayed the participants' investment in their academic work. On the other hand, not focusing on the future lessened the anxiety felt by some participants. The thinking patterns associated with the present-fatalistic time frame appear to be very detrimental to participants' motivation to study.

Participants who tend to focus on the present are also less likely to apply learning goals, which would be beneficial to their long-term career development.

5.2.2.3 Future time frame

The participants differed with regards to the intensity of their future-orientated thinking. Some participants gave a very clear indication of how they saw themselves in five years' time. Other participants had a less clear picture of their future selves, and seemed to consider achieving aims as a less urgent matter. According to Zimbardo and Boyd (1999), clear ideas about future goals lead individuals to investing greater effort into present activities that are related to desired outcomes.

One participant made a clear link between a future time frame and motivation by saying: "I put my dream on my wall and I look at it every morning, and that motivates me." Svinicki (2004) states that motivation increases individuals' focus in order to achieve high standards. Another participant in the present study said: "If you know where you want to be in life, you're going to be motivated to work harder." Realising that a dream will not be achieved without hard work also appeared to motivate the participants.

On the other hand, focusing on the future by making plans and then not achieving them has a disappointing impact. One participant said: "When you think about this future, you get this image about the future, but it won't really turn out like that. Now that's disappointing when you think about this future and plans, and not half of them work out." Some students thus experience more anxiety when focusing on the future, which limits their ability to focus efficiently in the present.

In conclusion, it was found that imagining a prospective future career and prosperous life motivates many of the participants to study hard in the present. Setting goals also appears to assist participants in applying themselves to their studies. A sense of industry is experienced when participants acknowledge their own power in shaping their future. There are, however, a few reasons that would explain an avoidance of future thinking. For some participants, thinking

about the future provokes anxiety and prevents them from studying effectively. Also, setting goals and not realising them is not conducive to greater motivation. There also appears to be a difference between intellectual motivation and practice. Participants could admit the potential value of having goals and preparing themselves, but sometimes found it difficult to apply this in practice. The unique challenges and needs of the specific population might also limit application of these ideas.

5.2.3 Associations between academic competence and time perspective

During the analysis of the focus groups and individual interviews, it became clear that the students' orientation to time has an impact on their engagement in academic activities. The relationship between the two concepts will be discussed as it pertains to the past, present, and future time frames.

5.2.3.1 Past time frame

Some participants were able to learn valuable lessons from previous negative experiences and incorporate these into the presence to avoid the same mistakes. The past-negative time frame can thus be positively incorporated to inform present decisions.

A participant shared the negative effect that friends previously had on her academic competence:
"Then, when I got to Grade 11 and 12, I had many friends, so we were not really into books... So when I came here I told myself ...'No more friends.' Okay, I can have one or two, but spend my time more on books than on socialising."

It became clear that participants compare current experiences with past experiences in order to set a frame of reference to handle present situations. Therefore, failing easy modules will lower their expectations to succeed in more difficult modules. Within the past-negative time frame, low expectations of success are thus often cultivated, which is not conducive to increased academic competence. Rather, students who expect positive outcomes are more likely to invest

greater effort in their academic ventures, thereby ensuring better results (Stupnisky et al., 2008). The lack of optimistic expectations provides a hypothesis for the negative correlation found between academic competence and the past-negative time frame. Participants with a past-negative time frame will not expect high academic results, which could impact on their engagement in academic activities.

It did, however, appear that participants understand the potential negative effect of adopting a past-negative time frame. Participants indicated that they avoid thinking about previous academic failures, as this decreases motivation. One participant mentioned: "… if I'm studying and I start thinking about all these things or a certain thing… I just end up telling myself that I won't be able to study… and that's when I start procrastinating…"

It seems that, in most cases, the participants were able to suppress negative past experiences and adopt a more optimistic attitude that would benefit their academic work. Taking on a more optimistic perspective offers individuals a way of freeing themselves from the detrimental thinking associated with this time frame (Boniwell & Zimbardo, 2004). Engaging with the more optimistic thoughts associated with a past-positive time frame provided the participants with increased motivation to study.

5.2.3.2 Present time frame

Some participants perceived themselves as having little control over their studies, which is characteristic of a present-fatalistic time frame, since individual responsibility is minimised. The university's organisational or other logistical problems are then blamed for poor performance. A few of the participants also mentioned that they, at times, struggle to study, because they don't believe that working harder truly will have an impact on their academic functioning, evident from the following statement: "… what happens, happens. You become this person that feels 'if it's meant to be, it will be without putting any effort in.'" This quote illustrates the importance placed on fate instead of focusing on the individual's impact (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999).

Many of the participants regarded friends as the biggest distracting factor from their academic work. It has been shown that individuals with a preference for the present-hedonistic time frame have greater social companionship (Holman & Zimbardo, 2009). Participants in the present study find it very hard to reject an offer to socialise, since it would imply that they are not committed to their friends or that they are being a "nerd" or a "bore." A significant dilemma is thus the urge to socialise with friends while still finding time to study. Difficulty is experienced in declining present temptations for the sake of focusing on future academic success (Liniauskaité & Kairys, 2009). The fact that the participants were not thinking about the long-term effect of pursuing present pleasures is a characteristic associated with a present-hedonistic time frame. One participant mentioned that the idea of failing creates fear, but does not increase motivation, since the impact will only become a reality after failing. Although failing is something that should be avoided, it is not always experienced as imminent enough to change present behaviour.

A present time frame also relates to the type of goals that participants set for themselves. Some participants wanted to pass their modules, others wanted to receive a degree, while still others wanted to receive the best possible academic results in order to obtain higher qualifications or additional bursaries. This relates to the distinction that Snyder et al. (2002) makes between learning and performance goals. A performance goal has a much stronger present time focus, while learning goals are more focused on the future. Illustrating a performance goal, one participant said that keeping up with his friends' academic records was an important aim. His friends would check up on him after a test, and he didn't want to disappoint them. Although performance goals might have less impact on academic competence in the long run, they could result in favourable short-term academic results.

5.2.3.3 Future time frame

Most participants discussed academic competence as a way of preparing themselves for future careers, which indicated a future time frame. Participants acknowledged the importance of keeping the future in mind in order to stay motivated to study in the present moment. The following quote illustrates this: "...for me it's all about my future. It's not what happens in the

present... because if I don't study, which means the present, I may be out of school; then I won't have a great future..." Another participant added that "...the knowledge I have now will carry me through the next coming years. And then I will at least have a background of something and something to refer back to." The participants regarded the university experience as a way of gaining knowledge that would be utilised in their future lives. It is thus clear that the participants are able to keep future outcomes in mind in order to increase motivation for study practices in the present (McInerney, 2004).

Furthermore, for most of the participants, motivation is an intrinsic experience, as is evident from the following statement: "I think I'm more motivated because... I'm the one who must make [a] great future for myself". It is clear that this participant believed that the effort invested in academic careers will add to the achievement of future goals (Liu et al., 2009). Believing in one's dreams and goals was cited as an important influence on the degree of motivation experienced by participants. When asked why she aimed for distinctions instead of only passing the modules, one participant answered: "I think it's to show that I understand what I'm doing... it's also for setting good records for myself..." This participant therefore displayed intrinsic motivation, which allows her to experience control over her academic functioning (Fraser & Killen, 2003).

According to Padawer et al. (2007), planning ahead and setting goals will motivate individuals to work towards their aims. Throughout the focus group sessions and individual interviews, it became apparent that participants experience greater motivation to study if they have goals in mind, which is clear from the following statement: "First of all, it's all about achieving my goals... then about making [a] great future for myself." Most of these goals were associated with where participants would like to see themselves in the future. Goals assist participants to push themselves to achieve academic competence. The goals seemed to be closely related to the participants' realisation that they need to take responsibility for their own financial needs as they enter adulthood. Passing modules and receiving a degree are linked to the aim of achieving eventual independence. This type of industry is also unlike the characteristics of a past-negative attitude, which was found to be negatively correlated with academic competence.

Some participants also associated a focus on the future with negative emotions of anxiety, related to uncertainty. While a few of the participants were able to embrace this anxiety as a motivator to study harder, others found it difficult to concentrate while being under pressure. Anxiety experienced in the present is not conducive to achieving academic competence (Gjesme, 1983). The fact that focusing on the future creates further stress might cause participants to avoid such a focus. The attempt to avoid this anxiety might explain the insignificant correlation found between academic competence and the future time frame for the current population.

5.3   Conclusion

The quantitative and qualitative phases of the study were focused on addressing both Research Question One and Two. In this chapter, the results obtained for both phases were discussed in relation to the findings from previous studies. The quantitative and qualitative results were further combined in order to provide a clearer and more in-depth understanding of the variables in question. Emerging themes could thus be discussed with premeditation of the quantitative results. In Chapter 6, the most significant qualitative findings will be provided, together with the limitations for the current study and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 6

MOST PROMINENT FINDINGS, LIMITATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this, the concluding chapter, a summary of the most significant findings will be provided. The limitations of the current research project will be stated in order to acknowledge areas compromising the conclusions made. Recommendations for future studies will also be stated to guide further research in the area of academic competence and time perspective.

6.1   Summary of most significant qualitative findings

The academic results of the current sample were found to be unsatisfactory, with many of the respondents having failed modules. However, being able to apply knowledge and skills in the labour force is not necessarily related to good academic results. In the more holistic view of Trautwein et al. (2009), success at university level is dependent on a student's effort to apply pre-attained skills. The student with the best academic results is therefore not always the best equipped to apply the competencies. The participants also highlighted the difference between merely repeating academic material and truly understanding and integrating new knowledge. Some of the participants expressed a desire to prepare themselves for future careers, and not necessarily to maintain a good academic record.

Even though many studies indicate the correlation between a future time frame and academic competence, Boniwell and Zimbardo (2004) concluded that only adhering to a future time frame is not necessarily conducive to general wellbeing. Through the conversations in the present study, it appeared that the respondents could make a conscious choice to adhere to present social and emotional needs, which demands a lesser focus on the future. Academic competence was not necessarily compromised, however. The participants seemed to recognise the importance of nurturing an academic career as well as leading a balanced lifestyle. The discussions showed that participants often avoid future time thinking in order to decrease their anxieties about the future. It also appeared that the participants acknowledge the value of a future time frame without exclusively adhering to this time frame.

The participants in the current sample seemed able to apply different time frames, depending on the demands of the situation. Accordingly, Zimbardo and Boyd (1999) state that overemphasising one time frame might become a rigid pattern, which has negative influences on the individual. In the discussions that took place, it further became apparent that participants can utilise various time frames as motivational forces in their academic work. With the past-positive time frame in mind, participants are encouraged by their families' sacrifices and the consequent need to make them proud. The past-negative time frame is negatively correlated with academic competence, but participants also shared that they learned from previous negative events. They could thus act to ensure that such situations are not replicated. Participants engaging in a present-hedonistic time frame value social interactions, and are motivated by relationships with significant others. A variety of good study practices are associated with a future time frame, which include planning study times, setting goals, having a clear future idea, and motivating oneself beyond present temptations.

It seems that the influence of social relationships play a very significant role in the participants' engagement with academic practices. Past relationships are kept in mind when participants operate in the present. Achieving good academic results is often an effort to make families proud or show appreciation for their sacrifices. Participants further look to peers for guidance and motivation to study. Allowing a focus on the present enables participants to engage in social relationships and develop holistically, instead of rigidly focusing on achieving future goals. The focus on time thus guides social behaviour by informing the focus of energy (Holman & Zimbardo, 2009).

The participants mentioned challenges unique to the population that limit the achievement of academic competence. As a previously disadvantaged group, the participants' families were often ill equipped to provide adequate support. Therefore, participants often experienced financial constraints in their quest to obtain academic competence. As newcomers to higher education, participants were further confused about how to structure their lives. With all the new freedom and responsibilities experienced, participants were unsure how to strike a balance between work and play. They also had no past experiences that could be applied to inform

current practices. However, it did appear that the participants displayed resilience through their ability to turn these challenges into motivational forces.

6.2   Limitations of the study

The first limitation of the research at hand is the conceptual definition of academic competence used for the quantitative phase of the study. It was established in Chapter 2 that 'academic competence' can be viewed as a broad term that refers to grades, academic development, as well as personal growth and skill acquisition (Van Schalkwyk et al., 2009). Using only academic results provides a limited view of students' ability to implement the knowledge and skills obtained throughout their academic careers (Ngidi, 2007). Other valuable skills, such as critical thinking, verbal fluency, and integrative ability, may also add to efficient academic functioning. Not considering these skills in the quantitative phase of the study also posed practical difficulties in measuring the concept from a more holistic perspective. Although these ideas could not be implemented in the statistical measures, the qualitative phase of the study allowed broader definitions of academic competence.

In the present study, academic competence was operationalised as the average score of the final academic results that students obtained for all their first-year modules during both semesters of 2011.This is not necessarily the most accurate measure, since modules have varying levels of difficulty. Furthermore, not all the participants had registered for the same modules. The different bell curves of the various module averages could thus have had a skewing effect when comparing the average academic scores obtained by students.

It was stated throughout the study that academic competence is a complex concept to study (Ngidi, 2007; Reason et al., 2006; Trautwein et al., 2009). Focusing exclusively on one aspect, such as time perspective, when attempting to predict academic competence might therefore not provide a meaningful variance (which explains the insignificant findings regarding the prediction of variance in academic competence). In order to explain a more significant amount of variance in academic competence, it would thus be necessary to incorporate more variables. In this regard, Reason et al. (2006) indicate that there are many influences on the academic competence, such as

pre-university characteristics, organisational influences, peer relations, and individual experiences.

The ZTPI was designed and adapted for an American population (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999). Consequently, the ZTPI was adapted by researchers to make it more applicable to populations in various foreign countries (Liniauskaité & Kairys, 2009). This indicates the necessity of changing items to reflect the time experiences of a specific population. The fact that time perspective is strongly influenced by the larger society (Holman & Zimbardo, 2009) further increased potential cultural bias in using the ZTPI for the current population. Also, since English (the language used in the ZTPI) was the first language of only a small group of the sample, comprehension might have been compromised. There is thus a possibility that the results from the ZTPI do not provide an accurate picture of the participants' time perspective.

A convenience sampling method was used to obtain participants for the quantitative phase of the study. Since the process was not random, the probability of the subjects being included in the research could not be calculated. The sampling might have been biased in the selection of participants, and the sample may therefore not necessarily be representative of the greater population. Generalising the quantitative results to the population should thus be done with care (Babbie & Mouton, 2003).

Further, social desirability could possibly have had an effect on the data obtained. Especially in the context of the focus groups, participants could have skewed their true perspectives on the variables in order to present as socially desirable (Berg, 2009). Feeling that their academic functioning was being judged could have made them present more favourably with regards to their commitment to their studies. Participants might therefore not have shared their true understanding of academic competence and time perspective, as they may have perceived this as embarrassing or too personal.

An interviewer bias could also have influenced the thread of discussions during the focus groups sessions and interviews. Instead of keeping an explorative stance, leading questions could have compromised achieving insight into the participants' true understanding. The researcher's

personal attitudes, values, and beliefs could therefore have impacted on the way that the data were written up or interpreted (Bless et al., 2006). In this regard, knowledge of existing literature findings could have further added to potential researcher bias.

6.3   Recommendations for future research

One recommendation for future research on the topic of academic competence is to measure the construct in a more holistic manner. The inclusion of multiple constructs might illuminate some of the complexity associated with this construct. A variety of factors on both organisational and personal level can therefore be combined in order to better explain the understanding of academic competence. Students' attitudes, commitment, skills, ability to apply knowledge, and critical thinking (Van Schalkwyk et al., 2009) are some of the factors that pertain to academic competence in a more holistic view.

A qualitative exploration of a wider range of variables would further allow for a more in-depth understanding of academic competence as it is perceived by the population. It could also be beneficial to use a purposive sampling technique to group participants with comparable academic results together. The themes that emerge from the different groups can then be compared. Through this process, the ideas of students who perform well academically can be compared to those who struggle.

The ZTPI might not have been the most accurate measure of time perspective for the current population. The lack of significant quantitative results that are contrary to previous research provides justification for this assumption. Another measurement of time perspective could thus be incorporated in future studies. Translating the ZTPI or creating an adapted version for the South African context may also be useful. Future exploration of the association between academic competence and time perspective could have a stronger focus on the incorporation of the different time frames. The emphasis should rather be on understanding the most efficient incorporation of time frames for different circumstances, as it relates to academic competence.

A few themes were highlighted by the qualitative findings, which could further assist in explaining the understanding of academic competence of the current population. One of the most

prominent and unique influences on academic experience that emerged through the focus group sessions and interviews was that of social relations. Greater insight into the value of these relationships might provide valuable insight into the adaption of first-year students. A motivational contribution could encourage higher education institutions to pay closer attention to social interactions and the effects thereof on academic competence. Efforts can further be made to obtain a clearer understanding of the unique challenges that first-year students face, as well as efforts that could combat such difficulties. The population's resilience, evident in their using challenges in a motivational manner, should also be explored further.

The results of the quantitative phase indicate that the present-fatalistic time frame is negatively related to academic competence. Future studies could focus on this specific construct as a limitation to academic competence. More qualitative data could also elicit students' perceptions on fatalistic attitudes and how these influence their academic ventures.

6.4   Conclusion

The study aimed to investigate the construct of time perspective as a predictor of academic competence and gain insight in participants' understanding of the two variables. A mixed-method design was utilised to investigate the research problems in an in-depth and conclusive manner. In the quantitative phase of the study, the ZTPI was used as a conceptualisation of time perspective, while the average results obtained by participants during 2011 were used as an indication of academic competence. A multiple regression analysis was conducted to establish the potential of time perspective to predict academic competence. The qualitative phase, on the other hand, focused on participants' subjective understanding of the association between time perspective and academic competence. Focus groups and individual interviews provided the data for this exploration. A thematic analysis was conducted in order to process the data and establish the most prominent ideas.

The academic results of the participants were found to be unsatisfactory, which justified the study as a means to gather insight into possible influences on academic competence. It seems that the specific population experienced many unique challenges that contributed to poor

academic competence. As Black Africans, many participants came from families of a poor socio-economic status, who are unsure about the extent of support needed by students. Furthermore, there are new responsibilities that first-year students have to manage, such as finances, family commitments, social obligations, and self-care. First-year students are also expected to adopt new skills and competencies to manage their academic load. A specific challenge appears to be finding the balance between studying, making time to socialise with other students, and developing into well-rounded individuals.

The results of the multiple regression analysis indicated that the past-negative time frame is the only time frame that is significantly correlated with academic competence. This is a negative correlation, which means that past-negative thinking is detrimental to the achievement of academic competence for the current population. The qualitative results also showed that participants who mentioned negative ideas toward the past are less hopeful and therefore less motivated to invest in their academic careers. Negative experiences in the past seem to have a persistent influence on students' engagement with academic practices in the present.

The insignificant relationship between academic competence and a future time frame was surprising, since previous literature on the topic indicated a significant correlations (Adelabu, 2007;Harber et al., 2003; McInerney, 2004; Mello & Worrell, 2006; Padawer et al., 2007; Peetsma et al., 2005). In the discussions conducted in the present study, most of the participants acknowledged the importance of a degree of focus on the future with regards to an academic career. However, a dominant focus on future thinking was avoided in an effort to decrease potential anxiety. The future time frame is thus not always experienced as conducive to the achievement of academic competence. It further became clear during the qualitative phase that participants are able to utilise all time frames as motivational forces in their orientation toward academic activities.

Through the focus group sessions and interviews, it became apparent that participants were able to switch between different orientations on time without adhering to a single one. The high correlations found between the different time frames justify such an assumption. It can therefore be concluded that participants are able to utilise all the time frames in a motivational manner to

enhance academic competence. It is especially within the social sphere that participants experience motivation through previous or current relationships with significant others. Sacrifices by families, commitment to do others proud, and a sense of joined learning are some of the motivational aspects that were mentioned. A sense of communal learning might enhance persistence in higher education. Further research on this specific relationship might therefore be beneficial.

REFERENCES

Abousselam, N.M. (2005). *The moderator effect of future time perspective in the relationship between self-efficacy and risky sexual behaviour.* (Unpublished Master's dissertation.) University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa.

Adelabu, D.H. (2007). Time perspective and school membership as correlated to academic achievement among African American adolescents. *Adolescence, 42*(167), 525-538. Retrieved from http://ukpmc.ac.uk/abstract/MED/18047236doi

Adelabu, D.H. (2008).Future time perspective, hope, and ethnic identity among African American adolescents. *Urban Education, 43*(3), 347-360.doi: 10.1177/0042085907311806

Afolabi, O.A., Ogunmwonyi, E., & Okediji, A. (2009). Influence of emotional intelligence and need for achievement on interpersonal relations and academic achievement of undergraduates. *Educational Research Quarterly, 33*(2), 15-29.Retrieved from http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/search/recordDetails.jsp?ERICExtSearch_Searc hValue_0=EJ877244&searchtype=keyword&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=no&_page Label=RecordDetails&accno=EJ877244&_nfls=false&source=ae

Akoojee, S.,& McGrath, S. (2004). Assessing the impact of globalization on South African education and training: A review of the evidence so far. *Globalisation, Societies and Education, 2*(1), 25-44. doi: 10.1080/14767720420001177032

Allan, A. (2008). *Law and ethics in psychology: An international perspective.* Somerset West, South Africa: Inter-Ed.

Altbach, P.G., Reisberg, L.,& Rumbley, L.E. (2009). Tracking a global academic revolution. Retrieved from http://www.unesco.org/tools/fileretrieve /2844977e.pdf

Amaratunga, D., Baldry, D., Sarshar, M., & Newton, R. (2002). Quantitative and qualitative research in the built environment: Application of "mixed" research approach. *Work Study, 51*(1), 17-31. doi: 10.1108/00438020210415488

Anderman, E.M.,& Wolters, C.A. (2006). Goals, values, and affect: Influences on student motivation. In P.A. Alexander & P.H. Wine (Eds.), *Handbook of Educational Psychology* (2nd ed., pp. 163-186). New York, NY: Lawrence Erlbum Associates.

Astin, A.W. (1993). *What matters in college: Four years revisited.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Baban, A. (2008).Reconceptualization of the division between quantitative and qualitative research methods. *Romanian Association for Cognitive Science, 12*(4), 337-343. Retrieved from http://www.ascred.ro/images/attach/02%20Editorial%20BABAN%202.pdf

Babbie, E.,& Mouton, J. (2003). *The practice of social research.* Cape Town, South Africa: Oxford Press.

Barna, J.S., & Brott, P.E. (2011). How important is personal/social development to academic achievement? The elementary school counselor's perspective. *Professional School Counseling, 14*(3), 242-249. Retrieved from http://schoolcounselor.metapress.com/content/044367182131qj00/

Berg, B.L. (2009). Qualitative research methods for the social sciences (7th ed.). Harlow, UK: Pearson.

Bless, C., Higson-Smith, C., & Kagee, A. (2006). *Fundamentals of social research methods: An African perspective* (4th ed.). Cape Town, South Africa: Juta and Company, Ltd.

Boniwell, I., & Zimbardo, P.G. (2004). Balancing time perspective in pursuit of optimal functioning. In P.A. Linley & S. Joseph (Eds.), *Positive psychology in practice* (pp. 165-178). Hoboken, NY: Wiley.

Borrego, M., Douglas, E.P., & Amelink, C.T. (2009). Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed research methods in engineering education. *Journal of Engineering Education, 53*(1), 53-66.doi: 10.1080/03043791003703177

Boughey, C. (2004). Higher education in South Africa: Context, mission and legislation. In S. Gravett & H. Geyser (Eds.), *Teaching and learning in higher education* (pp. 1-21). Pretoria, South Africa: Van Schaik.

Campen, D. (2006). *An investigation of achievement goals and time perspective in community college students engaged in a first-year experience course.* (Unpublished Doctoral dissertation.) University of South Carolina, South Carolina.

Chang, E.C. (1998). Hope, problem-solving ability, and coping in a college student population: Some implications for theory and practice. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 54*(7), 953-962. doi:10.1002/(SICI)1097-4679(199811)

Chang, J., & Le, T.N. (2010). Multiculturalism as dimension of school climate: The impact on the academic achievement of Asian American and Hispanic youth. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, 16*(4), 485-492. doi: 10.1037/a0020654

Cheek, J., Onslow, M., & Cream, A. (2004). Beyond the divide: Comparing and contrasting aspects of qualitative and quantitative research approaches. *Advances in Speech-Language Pathology, 6*(3), 147-152. doi:org/10.1080/14417040412331282995

Compton, W. (2005). *An introduction to positive psychology.* Canada, CA: Thomson Wadsworth.

Council of Higher Education (CHE). (2007). *Review of higher education in South Africa: Selected themes.* Pretoria, South Africa: The Council on Higher Education.

Crissman Ishler, J.L. (2005). Today's first-year student. In M.L. Upcraft, J.N. Gardner & B.O. Barefoot (Eds.), *Challenging and supporting the first-year student: A handbook for improving the first year of college* (pp. 15-26). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Curry, L.A., Snyder, C.R., & Cook, D.L. (1997). Role of hope in academic and sport achievement. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 73*(6), 1257-1267.doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.73.6.1257

Cuseo, J. (2005). Academic-support strategies for promoting student retention & achievement during the first-year of college. Retrieved from http://www.ulster.zc.uk/star/resources/academic_support_strat_first_years.pdf

Denzin, N.K., & Lincoln, Y.S. (2005). Introduction: The discipline and practice of qualitative research. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed., pp. 1-32). California, CA: Sage Publications.

Department of Education (DoE). (1997). *Education White Paper 3: A programme for the transformation of Higher Education* (General Notice 1169 of 1997). Pretoria, South Africa: Government Printers.

Department of Education (DoE).(2001). *National plan for higher education.* Pretoria, South Africa: Government Printers.

Department of Education (DoE). (2005). *Student enrolment planning in public higher education.* Pretoria, South Africa: Government Printers.

De Volder, M.L., & Lens, W. (1982). Academic achievement and future time perspective as a cognitive-motivational concept. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 42*(3), 566-571. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.42.3.566

Diseth, A., & Kobbeltvedt, T. (2010). A mediation analysis of achievement motives, goals, learning strategies, and academic achievement. *British Journal of Educational Psychology, 80*(4), 671-687. doi: org/2F10.1348/2F000709910X492432

Douglas, L.J. (2010). Motivational beliefs and learning strategies as predictors of academic performance in college physics. *College Student Journal, 44*(4), 920-928. Retrieved from http://www.une.edu/cas/upload/NewsletterSpring2011.pdf

Eccles, J.S. (2005). Influences of parents' education on their children's educational attainments: The role of parent and child perceptions. *London Review of Education, 3*(3), 191-204. doi: org/10.1080/14748460500372309

Egan, G. (2007). *The skilled helper: A problem-management and opportunity-development approach to helping* (8[th]ed.). Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole Cengage Learning.

Erikson, E.H. (1982). *The life cycle completed: A review.* New York, NY: Norton.

Faye, C., & Sharpe, D. (2008). Academic motivation in university: The role of basic psychological needs and identity formation. *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science, 40*(4), 189–199. doi: 10.1037/a0012858

Ferreday, J., & Muir-Cochrane, E. (2006).Demonstrating rigor using thematic analysis: A hybrid approach of inductive and deductive coding and theme development. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 5*(1), 1-11. doi: org/10.1063/1.2011295

Fiske, E.B., & Ladd, H.F. (2004). *Elusive Equity: Education reform in post-apartheid South Africa.* Washington, WA: Brookings Institution Press.

Foley, D., & Valenzuela, A. (2005). Critical ethnography: The politics of collaboration. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed., pp. 217-234). California, CA: Sage Publications.

Foxcroft, C.,& Roodt, G. (2009). *Introduction to psychological assessment in the South African context* (3rded.). Cape Town, South Africa: Oxford University Press.

Fraser, W.J., & Killen, R. (2003). Factors influencing academic success or failure of first-year and senior university students: Do education students and lecturers perceive things differently? *South African Journal of Education, 23*(4), 254-260. Retrieved from http://repository.up.ac.za/handle/2263/4892?show=full

Fraser, W.J.,& Killen, R. (2005).The perceptions of students and lecturers of some factors influencing academic performance at two South African universities. *Perspectives in Education, 23*(1), 25-40. Retrieved from http://repository.up.ac.za/handle/2263/4887?show=full

Freeman, A., & Hrabowski, I.H. (2005). Fostering first-year success of underrepresented minorities. In M.L. Upcraft, J.N. Gardner & B.O. Barefoot (Eds.), *Challenging and supporting the first year student: A handbook for improving the first year of college* (pp. 125-140). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Gardner, J.N., Upcraft, M.L., & Barefoot, B.O. (2005).Principles of good practice for the first college year and summary of recommendations. In M.L. Upcraft, J.N Gardner, & B.O. Barefoot (Eds.), *Challenging and supporting the first-year student: A handbook for improving the first year of college* (pp. 515-525). San Francisco, CA: Wiley Imprint.

Geiser, S., & Santelices, M.V. (2007). Validity of high-school grades in predicting student success beyond the freshman year. *Research & Occasional Paper Series: CSHE, 6*(7), 1-35. Retrieved from http://cshe.berkeley.edu/publications/docs/ROPS.GEISER._SAT_6.13.07.pdf

Gjesme, T. (1983). On the concept of future time orientation: Considerations of some functions' and measurements' implications. *International Journal of Psychology, 18*(1), 443-461. doi: abs/10.1080/00207598308247493

Glaser, B. (1965). The constant comparative method of qualitative analysis. *Social Problems, 12*(4), 436-445. Retrieved from http://www.groundedtheory.com/gt-books.aspx.

Gregory, I. (2003). *Ethics in research.* London, England: Continuum.

Hagendorn, L.S. (2006). *How to define retention: A new look at an old problem.* Retrieved from http://honolulu.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/rrc/pdf/How_To_Define%20Retention

Hair, J.F., Black, W.C., Babin, B.J., & Anderson, R.E. (2010).*Multivariate data analysis* (7th ed.). New York, NY: Prentice Hall.

Harber, K.D., Zimbardo, P.G., & Boyd, J.N. (2003). Participant self-selection biases as a function of individual differences in time perspective. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology, 25*(3), 255-64. Retrieved from http://nwkpsych.rutgers.edu/~kharber/publications/Harber.et.al.2003./20Participant/20 Self-Selection/20Biases/20as/20a/20Function/20of/20Individual/20Differences /20in/20Time/20Perspective.pdfdoi

Ho, I.T., & Hau, K. (2008). Academic achievement in the Chinese context: The role of goals, strategies, and effort. *International Journal of Psychology, 43*(5), 892-897. doi: org/10.1080/00207590701836323doi

Holman, E.A. & Zimbardo, P.G. (2009). The social language of time: The time perspective-social network connection. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology, 31*(2), 136–147.doi: 10.1080/01973530902880415doi

Hopfer, C. (1997). Empowering adult education in Namibia and South Africa during and after apartheid. *International Review of Education, 43*(1), 43-59. Retrieved from http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/klu/revi/1997/00000043/00000001/00125612

Howell, D.C. (2004).*Fundamental statistics for the behavioral sciences* (5th ed.). Belmont, Australia: Brooks/Cole

Hoyt, W.T., Imel, Z.E., & Chan, F. (2008). Multiple regression and correlation techniques: Recent controversies and best practices. *Rehabilitation Psychology, 53*(3), 321-339. doi: 10.1037/a0013021

Hubbell, J.M. (2007). Towards a common measure(s) of student retention in community colleges. *Instructional Leadership Abstracts, 5*(5), 1-3. Retrieved from http://ncia.unl.edu/Oct07Abstract.pdf

Huysamen, G.K. (2001). *Introductory statistics and research design for the behavioural sciences.* Cape Town, South Africa: Human & Rossouw Academica.

Jama, M.P., Mapesela, M.L.E., & Beylefeld, A.A. (2008).Theoretical perspectives on factors affecting the academic performance of students. *South African Journal of Higher Education, 22*(5), 992-1005. Retrieved from http://sajhe.org.za/volumes/volume-22-2008/volume-22-5.../file

Jansen, J.D., Herman, C., Matentjie, R.M., Pillay, V., Sehoole, C., & Weber, E. (2007). *Tracing and explaining change in higher education: The South African case.* Pretoria, South Africa: Council on Higher Education.

Johnson, R.B., & Onwuegbuzie, A.J. (2004). Mixed methods research: A research paradigm whose time has come. *Educational Researcher, 33*(7), 14—26. doi: 10.3102/0013189X033007014

Jonathan, R. (2006). *Academic freedom, institutional autonomy and public accountability in higher education: A framework for analysis of the 'state-sector' relationship in a democratic South Africa.* Pretoria, South Africa: Council on Higher Education.

Kairys, A. (2010). Correlations between time perspectives and personality traits indifferent age groups. *Bridges/Tiltai, 51*(2), 159-172. Retrieved from http://www.ku.lt/leidykla/leidiniai/tiltai/tiltai_2010_2(51).pdf

Kamberelis, G.K. & Dimitriadis, G. (2005). Focus groups: Strategic articulation of pedagogy, politics, and inquiry. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed., pp. 887-907). California, CA: Sage Publications.

Kauffman, D.F,. & Husman, J. (2004). Effects of time perspective on student motivation: Introduction to a special issue. *Educational Psychology Review, 16*(1), 1-7. doi: org/10.1023/B:EDPR.0000012342.37854.58

Keeve, A. (2010). Enkele voorspellers van akademiese sukses by driejaar- en vierjaarkurrikulum-studente. (Unpublished Master's dissertation.) University of the Free State, South Africa.

Kennett, D.J., & Reed, M.J. (2009). Factors influencing academic success and retention following a 1st-year post-secondary success course. *Educational Research and Evaluation, 15*(2), 153-166. doi: org/10.1080/13803610902804382

Lang, F.R. & Carstensen, L.L. (2002). Time counts: Future time perspective, goals, and social relationships. *Psychology and Aging, 17*(1), 125-139. doi: 10.1037//0882- 7974.17.1.125

Lawal, M. (2009). Reconciling methodological approaches of survey and focus group. *Nurse Researcher, 17*(1), 54-61.Retrieved from http://www.research.uwl.ac.uk/staffprofiles/view_profile.aspx?email=Muili.Lawal@uwl.ac.ukdoi

LeCroy, C.W.,& Krysik, J. (2008). Predictors of academic achievement and school attachment among Hispanic adolescents. *National Association of Social Workers, 30*(4), 197-209. doi: 10.1093/cs/30.4.197

Leondari, A. (2007). Future time perspective, possible selves, and academic achievement. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, 2007*(114), 17-26. doi: 10.1002/ace.253

Letseke, M., & Maile, S. (2008). *High university drop-out rates: A threat to South Africa's future* (HSRC Policy Brief). Pretoria, South Africa: HSRC.

Liniauskaité, A., & Kairys, A. (2009). The Lithuanian version of the Zimbardo Time Perspective Inventory (ZTPI). *Psichologija, 40*, 66-87. Retrieved from http://www.leidykla.eu/fileadmin/Psichologija/2009_40/66-87.pdf

Liu, K., Cheng, Y., Cheng, Y.,& Wu, Y. (2009). Longitudinal effects of educational expectations and achievement attributions on adolescents' academic achievements. *Adolescence, 44(176)*, 911-924. Retrieved from http://hrcak.srce.hr/index.php?show=clanak&id_clanak_jezik=114735

Lopez, S.J. (Ed.). (2009). *Encyclopaedia of Positive Psychology* (Vol. 1). Wet Sussex, UK: Blackwell.

Makgalemele, M. (2005). *The impact of English second language proficiency on the academic performance of educator trainees in the Faculty of Health and Social Sciences at Technikon Northern Gauteng.*(Unpublished Master's dissertation.) Tshwane University of Technology, South Africa.

Maree, K. (2009). *First steps in research*. Pretoria, South Africa: Van Schaik.

McInerney, D.M. (2004). A discussion of future time perspective. *Educational Psychology Review, 16*(2), 141-151.doi: 10.1023/B:EDPR.0000026610.18125.a3

Mcleod, J., & Cropley, A. (1989). *Fostering academic excellence.* Elmsford, New York: Pergamon Press.

Mello, Z.R., & Worrell, F.C. (2006). The relationship of time perspective to age, gender, and academic achievement among academically talented adolescents. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted, 29*(3), 271-289. Retrieved from http://psycnet.apa.org/psycinfo/2006-09519-002

Mokwena, M. (2007). African cosmology and psychology. In M. Visser (Ed.), *Contextualising Community Psychology in South Africa* (pp. 66-78). Pretoria, South Africa: Van Schaik.

Moser, J.M. (2008). Core academic competencies for master of public health students: One Health Department practitioner's perspective. *American Journal of Public Health, 98*(9), 1559-1561.doi:10.2105/AJPH.2007.117234

Neuman, W.L. (2011). *Social research methods: qualitative and quantitative approaches* (7th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson Education.

Ngidi, D.P. (2007). Students' and lecturers' perceptions of some factors influencing students' academic success or failure at a historically black university in South Africa. *South African Journal of Higher Education, 21*(4), 717-732. Retrieved from http://www.ajol.info/index.php/sajhe/article/view/25693

Nieuwenhuis, J. (2009). Qualitative research designs and data gathering techniques. In K. Maree (Ed.), *First steps in research* (pp. 69-97). Pretoria, South Africa: Van Schaik.

Onwuegbuzie, A.J. & Leech, N.L. (2005). Taking the "'Q'" out of research: Teaching research methodology courses without the divide between quantitative and

qualitative paradigms. *Quality & Quantity 39*(3), 267-296. doi: 10.1007/s11135-004-1670-0

Padawer, E.A., Jacobs-Lawson, J.M., Hershey, D.A., & Thomas, D.G. (2007). Demographic indicators as predictors of future time perspective. *Current Psychology, 26*(2), 102-108. doi: 10.1007/s12144-007-9008-4

Pallant, J. (2007). *SPSS Survival Manual.* Berkshire, England: McGraw Hill Open University Press.

Pandor, N. (2007). *Strategic plan: 2007-2011.* Pretoria, South Africa: Government Printers.

Parumasur, S. B. (2008). A contextual OD: Multicultural, multinational and international. In C. L. van Tonder & G. Roodt (Eds.), *Organisation development: Theory and practice* (pp. 327-351). Pretoria, South Africa: Van Schaik.

Patton, M.Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rded.). London, England: Sage.

Peetsma, T., Hascher, T., Van der Veen, I., & Roede, E. (2005). Relations between adolescents' self-evaluations, time perspectives, motivation for school and their achievement in different countries and at different ages. *European Journal of Psychology of Education 2*(3), 209-225. doi:10.1007/BF03173553

Phan, H.P. (2009). Amalgamation of future time orientation, epistemological beliefs, achievement goals and study strategies: Empirical evidence established. *British Journal of Educational Psychology, 79*(1), 155-173. doi: 10.1348/000709908X306864

Pienaar, G.E. & Bester, G. (1996). Time perspective and career choice. *South African Journal of Education,* 16(2), 88-93. Retrieved from http://etd.uovs.ac.za/ETD-db/theses/available/etd-08182011-103720/unrestricted/JoubertJA.pdf

Pitkethly, A., & Prosser, M. (2001). The first year experience project: A model for university-wide change. *Higher Education Research & Development, 20*(2), 185-198. doi: 10.1080/07294360120064420

Potgieter, M., Davidowitz, B., & Mathabatha, S.S. (2008). Preparedness for tertiary chemistry: Issues of placement and performance of academic development programmes. *Unisa Press, 22*(4), 861-876. Retrieved from http://repository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/9809/Potgieter_Preparedness(2008).pdf?sequence=1

Préau, M., Apostolidis, T., Francois, C., Rafel, F., & Spire, B. (2007). Time perspective and quality of life among HIV-infected patients in the context of HAART. *AIDS Care, 19*(4), 449-458. doi:10.1080/09540120601017464

Rabinovich, A., Morton, T., & Postm, T. (2010). Time perspective and attitude-behaviour consistency in future-oriented behaviours. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 49*(3), 69-89. doi:10.1348/014466608X401875

Rand, K.L. (2009). Hope and optimism: Latent structures and influences on grade expectancy and academic performance. *Journal of Personality, 77*(1), 231-260. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-6494.2008.00544.x

Reason, R.D., Terenzini, P.T., & Domingo, R.J. (2006). First things first: Developing academic competence in the first year of college. *Research in Higher Education, 47*(2), 149-175. doi: 10.1007/s11162-005-8884-4

Rosenbaum, M. & Cohen, E. (1999).Equalitarian marriages, spousal support, resourcefulness and psychological distress among Israeli working women. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 54*(1), 102-113. doi: org/10.1006/jvbe.1998.1644

Ruthick, A.M., Smyth, J.M., Lopoo, L.M., & Dusek, J.B. (2009). Great expectations: The biasing effects of reported child behavior problems on educational expectancies and subsequent academic achievement. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, 28*(3), 392-413. doi: 10.1521/jscp.2009.28.3.392

Ryan, R.M., & Deci, E.L. (2000a). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations: Classic definitions and new directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 25*(1), 54-67. doi: 10.1006/ceps.1999.1020

Ryan, R.M. & Deci, E.L. (2000b). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist, 5*(1), 68-78. doi: *10.1037110003-066X.55.1.68*

Salkind, N.J. (2008). *Statistics for people who (think they) hate statistics* (3rded.). California, CA: Sage Publications.

Schreiner, L., & Hulme, E. (2009). Assessment of students' strengths: The first step to student success. In B. Leibowitz, A. van der Merwe, & S. Van Schalkwyk (Eds.), *Focus on first-year success: Perspectives emerging from South Arica and beyond* (pp. 69-78). Stellenbosch, South Africa: Sun Press.

Scott, I. (2009). First-year experience as terrain of failure or platform for development? Critical choices for higher education. In B. Leibowitz, A. van der Merwe, & S. Van Schalkwyk (Eds.), *Focus on first-year success: Perspectives emerging from South Africa and beyond* (pp. 17-35). Stellenbosch, South Africa: Sun Press.

Seijts, G.H. (1998). The importance of future time perspective in theories of work motivation. *Journal of Psychology, 132*(2), 154-168. doi: 10.1080/00223989809599156

Sigelman, C.K., & Ryder, E.A. (2009). *Life-span human development* (6thed.) Australia: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.

Simons, J., Vansteenkiste, M., Lens, W., & Lacante, M. (2004). Placing motivation and future time perspective theory in a temporal perspective. *Educational Psychology Review, 16*(2), 121-139. doi: 10.1023/B:EDPR.0000026609.94841.2f

Snyder, C.R. (2002). Hope theory: Rainbows in the mind. *Psychological Inquiry, 13*(4), 249-275. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/1448867?uid=3739368&uid=2129&uid=2134&uid=2&uid=70&uid=4&sid=21101165133163

Snyder, C.R., Irving, L., & Anderson, J.R. (1991). Hope and health: Measuring the will and the ways. In C.R. Snyder & D.R. Forsyth (Eds.), *Handbook of social and clinical psychology: The health perspective* (pp. 285-305). Elmsford, NY: Pergamon.

Snyder, C.R., Feldman, D.B., Shorey, H.S., & Rand, K.L. (2002). Hopeful choices: A school councelor's guide to hope theory. *Professional School Counseling, 5*(5), 298-299. Retrieved from http://www.johnhawkinslpc.com/PDF/Hope_Theory_for_School_Counselors.pdf

Soares, A.P., Guisande, M.A., Almeida, L.S., & Pa'ramo, M.F. (2009). Academic achievement in first-year Portuguese college students: The role of academic preparation and learning strategies. *International Journal of Psychology, 44*(3), 204–212.doi: 10.1080/00207590701700545

Stake, R.E. (2005). Qualitative case studies. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed.,pp. 443-466). California, CA: Sage Publications.

Stephen, D.F. (2007). English language proficiency as a likely predictor of academic performance of first year human resources management studies at Technikon Natal. (Unpublished Doctoral dissertation.) University of Johannesburg, South Africa.

Stroh, M. (2000).Qualitative interviewing.ln D. Burton (Ed.), *Research training for social scientists* (pp. 196-214). London, England: Sage.

Stupnisky, R.H., Renaud, R.D., Daniels, L.M., Haynes, T.L., & Perry, R.P. (2008). The interrelation of first-year college students' critical thinking disposition, perceived academic control, and academic achievement. *Research in Higher Education, 49*(6), 513-530. doi: 10.1007/s11162-008-9093-8

Su, R., Patrick, J.R., & Armstrong, 1. (2009). Men and things, women and people: A meta-analysis of sex differences in interests. *Psychological Bulletin, 135*(6), 859884. doi: 10.1037/a0017364

Svinicki, M.D. (2004). *Learning and motivation in the postsecondary classroom.* Bolton, MA: Anker Publishing Company.

Taylor, S.E., Peplau, L.A., & Sears, D.O. (2006). *International Edition: Social Psychology* (12[th]ed.). London, England: Prentice Education.

Teddlie C., & Tashakkori, A. (2009). *Foundations of mixed methods research: Integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches in the social and behavioural sciences.* California, CA: Sage.

Terenzini, P.T., Springer, L., Pascarella, E.T., & Nora, A. (1995). Academic and out-of class influences on students' intellectual orientations. *The Review of Higher Education, 19*(2), 23-44.

Thomas, O.N., Caldwell, C.H., Faison, N., & Jackson, J.S. (2009).Promoting academic achievement: The role of racial identity in buffering perceptions of teacher discrimination on academic achievement among African American and Caribbean black adolescents. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 101*(2), 420-431. doi: 10.1037/a0014578

Tinto, V. (1975). Dropout from higher education: A theoretical synthesis of recent research. *Review of Educational Research, 45*(1), 89-125. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/1170024?uid=3739368&uid=2129&uid=2134&uid=2&uid=70&uid=4&sid=21101165133163doi

Tinto, V. (2006). Research and practice of student retention: What next? *College Student Retention, 8*(1), 1-19. Retrieved from http://baywood.metapress.com/app/home/contribution.asp?referrer=parent&backto=issue,1,7;journal,26,52;linkingpublicationresults,1:300319,1

Torres, V., Jones, S.R., & Renn, K.A. (2009). Identity development theories in student affairs: Origins, current status, and new approaches. *Journal of College Student Development, 50*(6), 577-596. doi: 10.1353/csd.0.0102

Trautwein, U., Roberts, B.W., Schnyder, I. & Niggli, A. (2009). Different forces, same consequence: Conscientiousness and competence beliefs are independent predictors of academic effort and achievement. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 97*(6), 1115-1128. doi: 10.1037/a0017048

University of the Free State (UV).(2011). *Annual report to the minister of Education.* Retrieved from http://www.ufs.ac.za/dl/userfiles/Documents/00001/1002_eng.pdf

Valiente, C., Lemery-Chalfant, K., Swanson, J., & Reiser, M. (2008). Prediction of children's academic competence from their effortful control, relationships, and classroom participation. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 100*(1), 6777. doi: 10.1037/00220663.100.1.67

Vandenbos, G. (Ed.). (2007). *APA Dictionary of Psychology.* Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Van der Linde, G.J., Naudé, L., & Esterhuyze, K.G.F. (2010). Exploring the role of environmental quality and time perspective in the academic performance of Grade 12 learners. *Southern African Journal of Environmental Education, 27,* 102-113.

Van Schalkwyk, S., Leibowitz, B. & Van der Merwe, A. (2009). Introduction: Perspectives on the first-year experience. In B. Leibowitz, A. van der Merwe, & S. Van Schalkwyk (Eds.), *Focus on first-year success: Perspectives emerging from South Arica and beyond* (pp. 3-11). Stellenbosch, South Africa: Sun Press.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). Mind in society: The development of higher mental processes. Cambridge, MA:Harvard University Press.

Wigfield, A., & Eccles, J.S. (2000). Expectancy-value theory of achievement motivation. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 25*(1), 68-81. doi: 10.1006/ceps.1999.1015

Zhang, B., Zhao,J., & Yu, G. (2009). The Influence of concealing academic achievement on the self-esteem of adolescents with low achievement. *Social Behavior and Personality, 37*(6), 805-810. doi: org/10.2224/sbp.2009.37.6.805

Zimbardo, P.G., & Boyd, J.N. (1999). Putting time in perspective: A valid, reliable individual-differences metric. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 77*(6), 1271-1288. doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.77.6.1271