Time Perspectives and Career Anxiety among Vietnamese teacher education undergraduates

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between time perspectives – present fatalistic, present hedonistic, and future – and career anxiety among 354 Vietnamese teacher education undergraduates (68.4% female). The findings show that present fatalistic and present hedonistic time perspectives are positively correlated with career anxiety and its dimensions, while a future time perspective (FTP) is negatively correlated with career anxiety. The study also highlights that lower socioeconomic status (SES) is linked to higher present fatalistic, lower present hedonistic, and variations in career ambiguity. The results suggest that promoting a future-oriented mindset may help reduce career anxiety. Additionally, the study emphasizes the significant role of employment pressure as a key source of career-related stress, underscoring the importance of integrating stress management and coping strategies into career development programs. Furthermore, notable differences in time perspectives and career ambiguity across SES groups highlight the need for targeted interventions. The study concludes with a discussion of its implications and limitations.

KEYWORDS: Career anxiety; Present fatalistic; Present hedonistic; Future time perspective; Teacher education; Socioeconomic status.

1. Introduction

In Vietnam, the teaching job market is characterized by low turnover rates, contributing to a stable yet highly competitive employment landscape. Once teachers secure a position, they often remain in their roles for extended periods, creating job security but also limiting the availability of new openings for recent graduates (Tran & Moskovsky, 2024). This lack of mobility presents challenges for aspiring teachers, as fewer opportunities arise in the field (Vujicic et al., 2011).

Teacher education programs in Vietnam primarily focus on developing pedagogical skills, often neglecting the social and emotional competencies necessary for managing stress and building resilience (Dung & Zsolnai, 2022). Combined with economic instability and the financial pressures of pursuing higher education, this lack of preparation exacerbates career anxiety among students entering the workforce.

Career anxiety refers to the distress individuals feel when navigating career development and job prospects (Pisarik et al., 2017). For college students, it is associated with negative outcomes, such as poor mental health, reduced well-being, and impaired decision-making (Dieringer et al., 2017; Mahmud et al., 2021; Müceldili et al., 2023; Qian et al., 2023). Research links career anxiety to a heightened risk of becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) and reduced self-efficacy, career exploration, and job satisfaction (Deer et al., 2018; Nauta, 2007; Park et al., 2017; Parola & Marcionetti, 2022; Sadler et al., 2014).

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) offers a framework for examining career anxiety among teacher education undergraduates. SCCT posits that self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and personal goals interact with environmental factors to shape career development (Lent et al., 1994). For teacher education students, low self-efficacy regarding teaching abilities or negative outcome expectations about employment

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prospects may heighten career anxiety. SCCT also accounts for contextual supports and barriers, such as socioeconomic conditions, which significantly impact career decisions and related anxiety (Brown & Lent, 2019; Lent et al., 2000).

Understanding the factors contributing to career anxiety is crucial for addressing the stressors students face during their transition to the workforce. By examining its dimensions – career ambiguity, lack of information, employment pressure, and external conflict (Choi et al., 2011) – interventions can be tailored to reduce career-related stress and foster greater resilience and confidence in students.

1.1 Time perspectives and Career anxiety among Teacher Education Undergraduates

Time Perspectives

Time perspectives refer to how individuals psychologically perceive and orient themselves toward time, encompassing past, present, and future orientations (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999). These perspectives significantly influence attitudes and behaviors. For instance, individuals with a present hedonistic perspective prioritize immediate pleasures and may engage in risk-taking without considering future consequences (Stolarski et al., 2015; Zhang et al., 2013; Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999). In contrast, those with a present fatalistic orientation often feel powerless and resigned, believing their actions have little impact on their future (Stolarski et al., 2015; Zhang et al., 2013; Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999). Conversely, a future-oriented perspective reflects motivation to plan and achieve long-term goals, promoting behaviors aligned with future success (Cheng & Nguyen, 2022; Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999).

Time perspectives and Career anxiety among Teacher Education Undergraduates

Research suggests that time perspectives profoundly affect career-related attitudes and behaviors, including planning, decision-making, and resilience (Eren, 2017; Horstmanshof & Zimitat, 2007; King, 2016; Kvasková & Almenara, 2021; Taber, 2012; Zimbardo & Boyd, 2008). Among teacher education undergraduates, present fatalistic and present hedonistic perspectives are positively associated with career anxiety, as these orientations contribute to feelings of indecision, lack of control, and uncertainty about career paths (Rönnlund et al., 2019).

In contrast, a strong future time perspective (FTP) is negatively correlated with career anxiety. Future-oriented students often demonstrate higher levels of goal-setting, resilience, and self-efficacy, which help mitigate career-related stress (Boo et al., 2021). For instance, King (2016) found that future-oriented students tend to be more engaged and confident in

pursuing career goals, reducing their vulnerability to anxiety.

These findings highlight the importance of fostering a balanced time perspective to alleviate career anxiety. Encouraging students to adopt a more future-focused outlook may not only improve their mental well-being but also enhance their professional preparedness and resilience.

1.2 Socioeconomic Status and Time Perspectives among Teacher Education Undergraduates

Socioeconomic Status and Time Perspectives

Individuals' socioeconomic status (SES) significantly shapes their time perspectives. Those from lower SES backgrounds often adopt a present-oriented perspective, prioritizing immediate needs over long-term planning due to economic constraints and perceived lack of mobility (Adams, 2009; Bak & Yi, 2020; Guthrie et al., 2009). In contrast, higher SES individuals are more likely to adopt a future-oriented perspective, which is associated with greater planning, foresight, and goal-setting behaviors (Adams, 2009; Fieulaine & Apostolidis, 2015; Guthrie et al., 2009).

For teacher education undergraduates, SES may influence the adoption of specific time perspectives and their associated outcomes. Lower SES students, with a stronger focus on present concerns, may face heightened career anxiety due to limited resources and fewer opportunities. Conversely, higher SES students, with greater access to resources, may experience less anxiety and be better positioned to pursue long-term career goals.

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Low-SES students often face additional barriers to academic and career success, including financial instability, limited access to career resources, and higher levels of stress and anxiety (Jury et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2019; Ortiz-Hernández et al., 2007; Poon, 2020). These challenges contribute to greater career anxiety, which can hinder their professional aspirations and increase their risk of becoming NEET (Mac-Ginty et al., 2024; Titus, 2006; Vine et al., 2012). By contrast, high-SES students tend to have more career opportunities and access to resources, reducing their career anxiety and enabling them to pursue ambitious career paths (Dar & Getz, 2007).

Understanding these disparities among SES groups underscores the importance of providing targeted support for low-SES students, such as emotional regulation strategies, career counseling, and financial aid programs, to help them overcome these obstacles and build successful teaching careers.

In conclusion, this study aims to explore career anxiety among teacher education undergraduates, emphasizing its relationship with time perspectives and the influence

of socioeconomic disparities. Based on the findings, interventions designed to foster a balanced time perspective and provide targeted support for low-SES students could help reduce career anxiety, enhance resilience, and build professional confidence. These efforts are crucial for developing a capable and confident teaching workforce equipped to navigate personal and professional challenges effectively.

Research purposes

SCCT and existing research suggests the crucial role of present fatalistic, present hedonistic, FTP, and career anxiety among teacher education undergraduates Additionally, the role of SES in shaping time perspectives and career anxiety varies among these students. Therefore, the primary research questions of this study are as follows:

RQ1: To what extent do time perspectives and career anxiety, including its various dimensions, of teacher education undergraduates? How do these factors link?

RQ2: How do time perspectives and career anxiety differ among teacher education undergraduates from various SES groups?

RQ3: How can educational policies and practices be adapted to address career anxiety equitably across different SES levels among teacher education undergraduates?

2. Procedures and methods

2.1 Participants

An anonymous questionnaire was distributed to 354 Vietnamese teacher education undergraduates, of whom 68.4% were female. Participants were randomly selected and voluntarily completed an online survey via Google Forms. They were informed about the voluntary nature of their participation and their right to withdraw at any time. The survey took approximately 8-10 minutes to complete.

2.2 Research Design

In addition to demographic information such as gender, age, and SES (categorized as low, medium, or high SES), two additional scales were included to explore the research questions. The questionnaire was translated from English to Vietnamese following a standard translation process.

Time Perspectives scale: The shortened version of the Short Zimbardo Time Perspective Inventory-15 (Zhang et al., 2013) was used, including three dimensions of time perspectives: present fatalism (e.g., "Often luck pays off better than hard work."), present hedonism (e.g., "I make decisions on the spur of the moment."), and FTP (e.g., "I complete projects on time by making steady progress."). The items were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, with higher scores indicating a stronger orientation towards time. The Cronbach's alpha for the three dimensions are 0.70; 0.73; and 0.89, respectively.

Career Anxiety scale: This scale was adapted and revised from the Korean Stress Inventory (Choi et al., 2011). It consists of four subscales: career ambiguity (e.g., "I am anxious because I do not know what my aptitude is."), lacking information (e.g., "I am concerned that I do not have enough information on the job I want."), employment pressure (e.g., "I am worried that I might not get the job I want"), and external conflict (e.g., "I am worried that the job I want will not provide a reliable income."). Responses were measured on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with higher scores indicating greater anxiety in the respective areas. Cronbach's alpha for the overall career anxiety scale and the four subscales are 0.96, 0.89, 0.91, 0.95, and 0.90, respectively.

2.3 Data analysis

Descriptive statistics and Pearson's correlations were provided, with no issues of multicollinearity or outliers detected. A one-way ANOVA analysis using SPSS was conducted to examine potential differences in time perspectives among SES groups, career anxiety, and the career anxiety subscales.

3. Results

The results of the descriptive statistics and Pearson correlations between variables are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 - Descriptive Statistics and Pearson correlations.

	Mean	SD	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Age	20.6	0.7							
(1) Present fatalistic	3.6	1.0	-						
(2) Present hedonistic	3.4	0.9	.44**	-					
(3) Future time perspective	1.8	0.9	-.38**	-.57**	-				
(4) Career ambiguity	2.8	1.1	.19**	.28**	-.16**	-			
(5) Lacking information	2.9	1.1	.25**	.22**	-.14*	.75**	-		
(6) Employment pressure	3.4	1.2	.22**	.17**	-.19**	.66**	.78**	-	
(7) External conflict	2.7	1.2	.29**	.22**	-.18**	.71**	.75**	.68**	-
(8) Career anxiety	3.0	1.0	.27**	.25**	-.18**	.87**	.92**	.88**	.89**

Note: **$p < .01$; *$p < .05$

The results showed that present fatalistic is positively and significantly linked to present hedonistic ($r = .44$, $p < .01$) but negatively linked to FTP ($r = -.38$, $p < .01$).

Present fatalistic were found positively and significantly linked to career anxiety ($r = .27$, $p < .01$) and its four dimensions ($r = .19$, $r = .25$, $r = .22$, and $r = .29$; $ps < .01$). Similarly, present hedonistic were found positively and significantly linked to career anxiety ($r = .25$, $p < .01$) and its four dimensions ($r = .28$, $r = .22$, $r = .17$, and $r = .22$; $ps < .01$). However, FTP was also negatively linked to career anxiety ($r = -.18$, $p < .01$) and its four dimensions ($r = -.16$, $p < .01$; $r = -.14$, $p < .05$; $r = -.19$, $p < .01$; and $r = -.18$; $p < .01$).

Figure 1 presents a series of violin plots of examined variables.

Note: present fatalistic = present fatalistic time perspective; present hedonistic = present hedonistic time perspective; future = future time perspective; ambitious = career ambiguity; information = lack of information; pressure = employment pressure; conflict = external conflict.
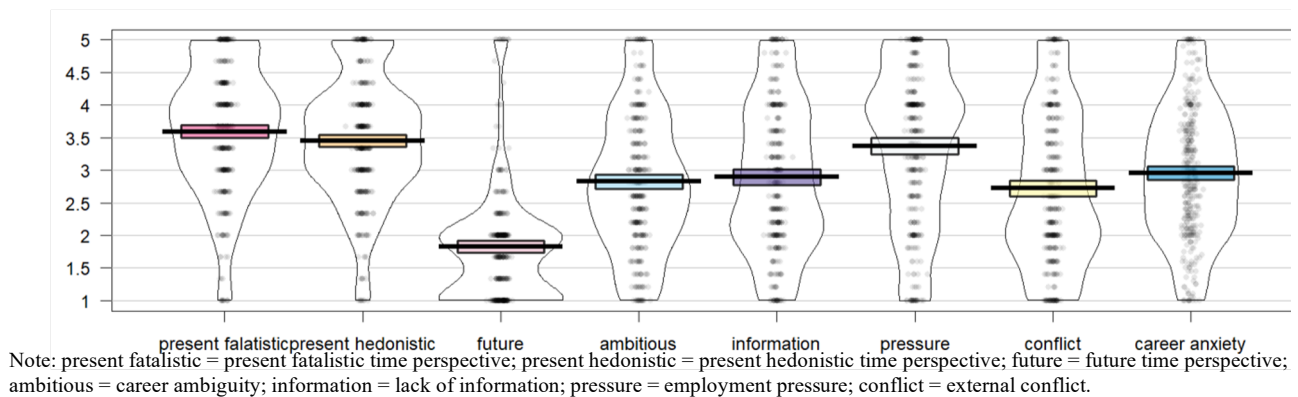
Figure 1 - Distribution of Examined Variables.

The present hedonistic time perspective variable displays a relatively symmetrical violin plot, suggesting a balanced distribution of values around the median. This indicates that individuals with a present hedonistic time perspective tend to place similar levels of importance on present enjoyment, with some variation in the responses.

Similarly, the present fatalistic time perspective also shows a balanced or slightly leaning tendency toward fatalistic thinking. The wide distribution reflects a range of views, suggesting that individuals may hold different levels of fatalistic attitudes toward the present, with some showing more concern than others.

In contrast, the FTP variable has a very narrow violin plot, reflecting low variability and a concentration of values around a specific point. This suggests that future-oriented thinking is less prominent or of less concern for most individuals.

Moreover, a paired samples t-test showed that the mean score of FTP is significantly lower than mean score of present fatalistic and present hedonistic ($ps < .001$). It indicates that, compared to present-oriented perspectives, future concerns are less widespread or less influential in this sample.

Regarding career anxiety variable and its dimensions, the figure reveals several dimensions of concern regarding one's career, each with different characteristics. The career ambiguity dimension has a wide distribution with a slightly higher median, indicating variability in career motivation and goal-setting among individuals. Some individuals exhibit greater career ambition, while others show less concern or motivation.

The lack of information dimension of career anxiety has a central median with moderate variability. This suggests that most individuals feel relatively neutral or slightly positive about the information available to them, though some variation exists in how well-informed individuals feel about their career paths.

The employment pressure dimension of career anxiety shows a fairly symmetric distribution around a central tendency. This implies moderate pressure regarding career concerns, with no extreme consensus. Most individuals report feeling a moderate amount of pressure without any overwhelming sense of urgency or stress.

Finally, the external conflict dimension of career anxiety displays a lower median with moderate variability. This suggests that while most individuals do not perceive high levels of conflict in their careers, there is some variation, with a few individuals experiencing more significant conflict or uncertainty.

Additionally, a paired samples t-test revealed that the mean scores for career anxiety was significantly higher than the mean scores for career ambiguity ($p < .001$), lack of information ($p < .011$), and external conflict ($p < .001$). However, the mean scores for employment pressure were significantly higher than those for career anxiety ($p < .001$).

In summary, career anxiety demonstrates a relatively higher median and broader distribution compared to its dimensions, with employment pressure standing out as a particularly prominent concern. This suggests that career-related anxiety is prevalent, with employment pressure being a notable source of stress.

A one-way between-participant Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted to examine the differences among SES group on examined variables. Because the Levene's tests are not significant, the assumption of homogeneity of variances is met.

It revealed that there was a significant difference on present fatalistic ($F(2, 351) = 18.56, p < .001, \eta^2 = .10$), present hedonistic ($F(2, 351) = 12.08, p < .001, \eta^2 = .06$), and dimension career ambiguity ($F(2, 351) = 3.52, p = .031, \eta^2 = .02$) among the three SES groups.

Pairwise comparisons among the means were conducted using a Bonferroni to control for inflated type I error. Participants in the low SES group reported significantly higher present fatalistic ($M = 4.1; SD = 0.6$) than participants in the medium and high SES groups ($M = 3.5; SD = 1.0; M = 3.4; SD = 1.1$, respectively). However, participants in the low SES group reported significantly lower present hedonistic ($M = 3.0; SD = $

1.0) than participants in the medium and high SES groups (M = 3.6; SD = 0.9; M = 3.6; SD = 0.9, respectively). Similarly, participants in the low SES group reported significantly lower career ambiguity (M = 2.6; SD = 0.9) than participants in the medium SES group (M = 2.9; SD = 1.1). All other pairwise comparisons were not statistically significant.

In summary, SES groups differed significantly in present fatalistic, present hedonistic, and career ambiguity.

Table 2 - Descriptive Statistics across SES groups.

	Low SES		Medium SES		High SES		One-way ANOVA results
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
(1) Present fatalistic	4.1	0.6	3.5	1.0	3.4	1.1	$F (2, 351) = 18.56$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .10$
(2) Present hedonistic	3.0	1.0	3.6	0.9	3.6	0.9	$F (2, 351) = 12.08$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .06$
(3) Future time perspective (FTP)	2.0	1.0	1.8	0.8	1.8	0.9	$F (2, 351) = 1.93$, $p = .146$
(4) Career ambiguity	2.6	0.9	2.9	1.1	2.9	1.0	$F (2, 351) = 3.52$, $p = .031$, $\eta^2 = .02$
(5) Lacking information	3.0	1.1	2.9	1.1	2.9	1.2	$F (2, 351) = 0.21$, $p = .810$
(6) Employment pressure	3.4	1.2	3.4	1.2	3.3	1.3	$F (2, 351) = 0.32$, $p = .725$
(7) External conflict	2.8	1.2	2.7	1.2	3.4	1.1	$F (2, 351) = 0.21$, $p = .810$
(8) Career anxiety	2.9	1.0	3.0	1.0	3.6	0.9	$F (2, 351) = 0.07$, $p = .934$

4. Discussion and Conclusions

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between time perspectives (present fatalistic, present hedonistic, and future) and career anxiety among teacher education undergraduates. The study reveals that present fatalistic and present hedonistic time perspectives were positively and significantly correlated with career anxiety and its dimensions, while future time perspective (FTP) showed a negative correlation, indicating that present-oriented thinking increases career anxiety, whereas future-oriented thinking reduces it. Low-SES students tend to exhibit higher levels of present fatalistic time perspectives and lower levels of present hedonistic time perspectives, with some differences in career anxiety dimensions, such as career ambiguity.

The study found that among Vietnamese teacher education undergraduates, present hedonistic and present fatalistic time perspectives are common, suggesting that many focus on immediate experiences but with differing emphasis. FTP is less prominent, indicating that most individuals are not highly concerned with long-term planning or future goals.

In terms of career anxiety, there is considerable variability across its dimensions. Career ambition shows a wide spread, suggesting differences in motivation and goal-setting. The results also suggests that career-related anxiety is prevalent, with employment pressure being a notable source of stress. This aligns with the context in Vietnam, where teacher employment opportunities are limited and primarily reliant on passing competitive recruitment exams (Tran & Moskovsky, 2024; Vietnamese Government, 2012).

Consistent with previous research (e.g., Barnett et al., 2020; Hanna et al., 2023; King, 2016; Rönnlund et al., 2019; Zimbardo & Boyd, 2008; Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999), individuals with higher present fatalistic and present hedonistic time perspectives tend to exhibit lower FTP. These findings reflect an inverse relationship between focusing on the present – whether through a sense of resignation or a desire for immediate gratification – and adopting a future-oriented mindset.

Furthermore, both present fatalistic and present hedonistic perspectives are positively associated with career anxiety, indicating that individuals who either feel powerless over their circumstances or prioritize short-term pleasure are more likely to experience heightened concerns about their careers. In contrast, a strong FTP is negatively linked to career anxiety, suggesting that individuals with a clear focus on long-term goals and aspirations are less prone to career-related stress.

These findings align with Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), which emphasizes the influence of self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and goals on career development (Lent et al., 1994). The negative relationship between FTP and career anxiety suggests that future-oriented students may possess stronger teaching self-efficacy and positive outcome expectations, facilitating goal-setting and persistence. Conversely, present-oriented perspectives correlate with lower career-related self-efficacy and negative outcome expectations, resulting in heightened anxiety.

The results revealed significant differences in present fatalistic, present hedonistic, and career ambiguity, highlight the distinct psychological and career-related attitudes across different SES groups.

Through the lens of SCCT, SES-based differences reflect varying levels of contextual supports and barriers that directly impact self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations (Brown & Lent, 2019; Lent et al., 2000). Lower SES students face financial instability, limited access to career resources, and elevated stress levels (Jury et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2019; Mac-Ginty et al., 2024; Ortiz-Hernández et al., 2007; Poon, 2020; Titus, 2006; Vine et al., 2012), which may undermine their career-related self-efficacy. This is evidenced by higher levels of present fatalistic thinking in this group, indicating a perception that their lives are heavily influenced by external circumstances beyond their control. This fatalistic outlook, stemming from persistent economic and social challenges, reduces their sense of agency and constrains their ability to envision positive future outcomes. The lower levels of present hedonistic orientation observed likely reflect restricted access to leisure opportunities, while lower career ambiguity suggests narrower perceived career options due to economic constraints. These contextual factors collectively shape cognitive-personal variables within SCCT, leading to the observed differences in time

perspectives and career anxiety dimensions across SES groups.

Conversely, individuals from higher SES backgrounds benefit from greater financial stability and access to career resources, which enable them to pursue ambitious goals and maintain a more optimistic outlook on life (Dar & Getz, 2007). The abundance of opportunities available to this group fosters a future-oriented perspective, allowing them to set long-term goals and invest in personal and professional growth. Greater access to leisure activities and experiences also contributes to higher levels of present hedonistic thinking, as they are better positioned to enjoy and prioritize immediate pleasures without significant economic worries. High SES individuals are less likely to experience the constraints that define the career paths of their low SES counterparts, which can result in greater career ambiguity. However, this ambiguity may be viewed positively, reflecting the flexibility and range of options available to them, rather than a lack of clarity or direction.

Implications and Limitations

This study emphasizes the importance of addressing present and future time perspectives and career anxiety, with a focus on the need for personalized interventions to promote better career outcomes for teacher education undergraduate students.

The study reveals that individuals with present fatalistic or present hedonistic time perspectives are more likely to experience heightened career anxiety. This highlights the potential benefit of interventions that encourage a future-oriented mindset. By shifting individuals' focus toward long-term career planning and goal-setting, career counselors and educators can help reduce anxiety and improve overall career trajectories. Programs designed to promote time management skills, as well as mindset shifts from short-term concerns to future planning, could alleviate career anxiety and enhance individuals' career outcomes.

Career anxiety, particularly related to employment pressure, emerges as a significant source of stress. The study highlights the importance of targeted interventions to address this specific type of anxiety. For Vietnamese teacher undergraduates, exploring diverse career pathways – such as working in private schools, pursuing studies abroad, or becoming researchers – can provide valuable alternatives to the limited opportunities available in public schools. Effective career guidance is essential in helping individuals navigate these challenges and reduce anxiety tied to employment expectations. By emphasizing practical coping strategies, eduacators or counselors can better support individuals in managing job-related stress and building resilience in their career journeys.

Career counselors and educators should focus on promoting future-oriented thinking and long-term career planning. Programs designed to develop time management skills and shift mindsets from short-term concerns to future planning could significantly reduce anxiety and improve career outcomes. Additionally, practical coping strategies for managing job-related stress would help build resilience throughout students' career journeys.

Teacher education programs would do well to integrate interventions that help students shift from present-focused perspectives toward long-term career planning. Career counseling should emphasize goal-setting, time management, and diverse career opportunities beyond traditional teaching roles. Meanwhile, policymakers should consider alternative teacher employment models and enhanced financial aid programs to create a more equitable and resilient teacher workforce in Vietnam.

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. The sample size may not be fully representative of the broader population, and potential biases in self-reporting could affect the results. Moreover, the study did not conduct regression analysis to assess the strength and direction of the relationships between time perspectives, career anxiety, and other variables. Future research should aim to replicate these findings with larger, more diverse samples to validate the observed relationships. Longitudinal studies would offer a deeper understanding of how SES influences time perspectives and career anxiety over time, providing more comprehensive insights into the factors that shape career and life attitudes. Additionally, exploring other psychological variables and their interactions with SES could further enhance our understanding of the complex dynamics at play.

5. Conclusion

The study concludes that there are significant relationships among different time perspectives and between time perspectives and career anxiety among teacher education undergraduates. Specifically, focusing on immediate experiences (present fatalistic and present hedonistic perspectives) increases career anxiety, while long-term planning (future time perspective) reduces it. Additionally, low-SES students tend to have higher present fatalistic and lower present hedonistic perspectives, with notable differences in career anxiety dimensions, such as career ambiguity. These findings highlight the impact of socioeconomic status on time perspectives and career-related stress.

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