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The Study of Academic Burnout in Students with High and Low Level Of Self-Efficacy

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to study the academic burnout in university students with high-low level of self-efficacy. Therefore, 120 students in AllameTabatabaei University completed academic burnout and self-efficacy questionnaires. Those students, whose scores were one standard deviation higher than the mean, had high self-efficacy but one standard deviation lower than the mean had low self-efficacy. Data was analyzed by T-test. The results showed there are negative relationships among self-efficacy, academic burnout variables and its components (academic exhaustion, academic uninterested and academic inefficacy).

Keywords: self-efficacy; academic burnout; academic exhaustion; academic uninterested; academic inefficacy

1. Introduction

Burnout is often described as a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Maslach, Jackson, & Letter, 1996). Maslach et al. (1996) identify

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emotional exhaustion as the key aspect of burnout whereas Pines and Aronson (1981) include physical exhaustion characterized by low energy and chronic fatigue.

Emotional exhaustion, which refers to feelings of being depleted of one's emotional resources, is regarded as the basic individual stress component of the syndrome. Depersonalization, referring to negative, cynical, or excessively detached responses to other people at work, represents the interpersonal component of burnout. Finally, reduced personal accomplishment refers to feelings of decline in one's competence and productivity, and to one's lowered sense of efficacy, representing the self-evaluation component of burnout (Maslach, 1998).

Burnout is always more likely when there is a major mismatch between the nature of the job and the nature of the person who does the job. The major factors of burnout include work overload, lack of control, lack of reward, lack of community, value conflict, and lack of fairness, which are obvious indications that the person and the job are mismatched (Maslach & Leiter, 1997).

Burnout may lead to mental distress in the form of anxiety, depression, frustration, hostility or fear. Prior research has shown that burnout can lead to lower commitment, higher turnover, absenteeism, reduced productivity, low morale, and lower human consideration (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993; Maslach & Pines, 1977; Maslach, 1978).

In recent years, the number of studies about burnout has increased spectacularly and the study of burnout has been extended to almost every job, and even to non-occupational samples, for example students (Balogun, Helgemo, Pellegrini, & Hoeberlein, 1996; Chang, Rand, & Strunk, 2000; Fimian, Fastenau, Tashner, & Cross, 1989; Gold, Bachelor, & Michael, 1989; MartÃñez, Marques, Salanova, & Lopez da Silva, 2002; McCarthy, Pretty, & Catano, 1990; Schaufeli, Salanova, GonzÃ¡lez-RomÃ¡, & Bakker, 2002; Yang, 2004).

Yang (2004) define student burnout thus: “students in the learning process, because of course stress, course load or other psychological factors, display a state of emotional exhaustion, a tendency to depersonalization, and a feeling of low personal accomplishment.”

Although, formally speaking, students are neither employed nor do they hold jobs, from a psychological perspective their core activities can be considered "work". Thus, they are engaged in structured, coercive activities (e.g. attending classes, completing assignments) that are directed towards a specific goal (i.e. passing exams). Hence, being a work-related phenomenon, burnout may also exist in students, where it manifests itself by feeling exhausted because of study demands, having a cynical and detached attitude towards one's study, and feeling incompetent as a student (see also McCarthy et al., 1990; Meier & Schmeck, 1985). In a similar vein, several studies on stress in academic life have considered students as a kind of employee as well (e.g. Chambel & Curral, 2005).

Pines et al. (1981) examined and compared burnout in nurses, counselors, educators, and undergraduate students and found that students ranked in the middle to upper levels of the burnout scale. This indicates that students have some degree of burnout during their school learning period. Based on prior research, the syndrome of student burnout is similar to that in service employees. Student burnout can lead to higher absenteeism, lower motivation to do required course work, higher percentage dropout and so on (Meier & Schmeck, 1985; Ramist, 1981).

There is a number of researches in the area of work related burnout, especially on teacher burnout, burnout among nurses, doctors, managers etc. but very few studies were done on academic burnout of students.

In the past decade or so, researchers have utilized the self-efficacy theory to explain the burnout phenomenon (Schaufeli, Maslach & Marek, 1993). Bandura (1977a) adopted the SCT (social cognitive theory) to explain the concept of self-efficacy. Bandura (1977b) defined self-efficacy as “people’s judgment of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances”. It is recognized that self-efficacy is a strong predictor of subsequent task-specific performance, and the definitions of the construction ultimately refer to what a person perceives their capabilities to be, with regard to a specific task. Bandura (1977a) found that self-efficacy positively correlates with behavioural changes both vicariously and emotively. Once self-
efficacy had been formulated and established, it was shown to influence behavioural patterns as regards the magnitude of effort a performer would exert. Based on the concept of Bandura (1977a), efficacy expectations were determinants in choosing activities. On the other hand, self-efficacy is an important determinant of task motivated behaviour and subsequent performance.

Self-efficacy belief has received increasing attention in educational research, primarily in studies of academic motivation and self-regulation (Pintrich & Schunk, 1995). In this arena, self-efficacy researchers have focused on three areas. The first area has explored the link between efficacy beliefs and college major and career choices (Lent & Hackett, 1987). The second area suggests that efficacy beliefs of teachers are related to their instructional practices and to various student outcomes (Ashton & Webb, 1986). The third area has reported that students’ self-efficacy beliefs are correlated with their academic performances and achievements (Multon, Brown & Lent, 1991; Pajares, 1996; Schunk, 1989, 1991). Otherwise, Bandura (1977b) has also identified three major categories of experiences stimulated by efficacy beliefs: (1) choice behavior: people engage in tasks in which they feel competent and confident and avoid those in which they do not; (2) effort expenditure and persistence: how much effort people will expend on an activity, how long they will persevere when confronted with obstacles, and how resilient they will prove in the face of adverse situations—the higher the sense of self-efficacy, the greater the effort, persistence, and resilience; and (3) thought patterns and emotional reactions: efficacy beliefs also influence the amount of stress and anxiety individuals experience as they engage in a task and the level of accomplishment they realize. Self-efficacy has been shown to influence both goal level and goal commitment (Locke, Frderick, Lee & Bobko, 1984). Therefore, we concluded that the higher self-efficacy, the lower academic burnout.

2. Methodology

The present study was aimed to study academic burnout in students with high and low self-efficacy. In details, in line with self-efficacy theory which was described before, we hypothesized that self-efficacy has a significant negative effect on student burnout (H1) and its components (H2, H3, H4). In addition the relationship between academic burnout with high and low level of self-efficacy is different (H5).

2.1. Participants

The sample consisted of 120 students were selected randomly among Alame Tabatabaee University students. They completed academic burnout and self-efficacy questionnaires.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Breso's academic burnout questionnaire

This questionnaire was made by Breso and his colleagues (1997). It assesses 3 areas of academic exhaustion, academic uninterested and academic inefficacy and has 15 items. It is on a 5-point Lickert scale from completely agree to completely disagree. 5 items are for academic exhaustion (academic subjects are exhausted), 4 items for academic uninterested (I feel I do not have any interest in lesson content) and 6 items for academic inefficacy (I feel I cannot face with academic problems). The reliability of the questionnaire was calculated as 0/70, 0/82 and 0/75 by Breso and his colleagues. The researchers reported the validity of the questionnaire appropriate through confirmed factor analysis with Comparative Fit Index, Incremental Fit Index and Root-Mean-Square Error Approximation. In this research, the reliability of academic exhaustion was 0/79, academic uninterested was 0/82 and academic efficacy was 0/75.

2.2.2. Sherer’s self-efficacy questionnaire
It was made by Sherer and his colleagues (1982) with 17 items on a 4-point Lickert scale. The reliability of this scale was assessed 0.40-0.50 and its validity was acceptable in the way that concurrent validity of this scale with Bandura’s self-efficacy test was 0.72.

3. Results

The data was analyzed through descriptive and inferential statistics. Mean and standard deviation are in descriptive statistics but in inferential statistics, the data was analyzed through T-test.

In table 1, mean and standard deviation of research variables are mentioned.

Table 1. Mean and standard deviation of research variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research variables</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic burnout</td>
<td>40.87</td>
<td>10.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional exhaustion</td>
<td>13.877</td>
<td>4.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic uninterested</td>
<td>11.54</td>
<td>4.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic inefficacy</td>
<td>15.443</td>
<td>3.98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As it is seen in table 1, mean and standard deviation of scores in academic burnout are 40.87 and 10.44. The mean in emotional exhaustion, academic uninterested and academic inefficacy are 13.877, 11.54 and 15.443 and standard deviation are 4.26, 4.09 and 3.98. The results for self-efficacy beliefs are 61.52 and 1.074. It is important to be mentioned that those whose self-efficacy beliefs are one standard deviation higher than the mean have high self-efficacy and one standard deviation lower than standard deviation have lower self-efficacy.

Table 2. Correlation coefficient of research variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research variables</th>
<th>Academic Burnout</th>
<th>Emotional Exhaustion</th>
<th>Academic Uninterested</th>
<th>Academic Inefficacy</th>
<th>Self-efficacy Beliefs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Statistic</td>
<td>-0.629</td>
<td>-0.545</td>
<td>-0.489</td>
<td>-0.563</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig.</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As it is observed in table 2, there is a negative and significant relationship between self-efficacy beliefs with all the subscales of academic burnout, emotional exhaustion, and academic uninterested and academic inefficacy. The significance is 0.001. Therefore, all the above hypotheses are approved.
The results of T-test are in table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levin test to study the equality of variances</th>
<th>t-test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>sig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The assumption of variance equality of academic burnout</td>
<td>0/675 0/413 -7/320 113 0/000 -11/86121 162047</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The assumption of inequality of variance</td>
<td>-7/378 110/191 0/000 -11/86121 1/60762</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the results show, two groups with high and low self-efficacy have significant differences in academic burnout. Also, there is a negative relationship between academic burnout and high and low self-efficacy. In this assumption, significance is 0/001 and shows the null hypothesis “there is no relationship between academic burnout and high and low self-efficacy” is rejected.

4. Conclusion

As the results show that there is a negative and significant relationship between high self-efficacy, academic burnout and its components. These results are congruent with research literature and Bandura's self-efficacy theory. Some of prior researchers have shown the relationship between self-efficacy and burnout (Cherniss, 1992; Hallsten, 1993; Hobfoll and Freedy, 1993). They have explained those who do not have self-efficacy, become easily burnout and have less ability to adapt.

In short, self-efficacy beliefs affect individuals' selection, purposes, emotional reactions, effort, adjustment and resistance. Therefore, high self-efficacy helps create calmness when facing with hard assignments and activities. On the contrary, low self-efficacy leads to understand harder problems than what they really are, a kind of understanding leads to develop stress, depression and weak problem solving. They all help us understand why high self-efficacy prevents burnout. The significance of the relationship between academic exhaustion and self-efficacy with research literature is congruent. Academic exhaustion is because of exhausting of academic assignments, hard tasks and exhausted subjects. Bandura (1977a) mention that efficacy beliefs have effect on individuals’ pressure and anxiety when facing with assignments.

One of the preventive ways of academic exhaustion is challenging purpose selection which leads to develop attitude and exhausted decrease. Individuals with high self-efficacy select more challenging purposes which needs more effort. Individual with the selection of such purposes is following to develop self-efficacy beliefs in three dimensions of generality, strength and level. If this does not happen, self-efficacy decreases. Also, individuals who have high self-efficacy get their efficacy very soon after a failure and retreat and attribute this failure to less effort and imperfect knowledge and skills which are achievable. This attribution style prevents academic exhaustion.
Self-efficacy beliefs affect individual's thoughtful models and affective and sensory reactions. High self-efficacy helps in calmness feeling when facing with activities and homework. On the contrary, those who have low self-efficacy may understand the events harder and show depression, pressure and low insight about the best way to solve a problem (Azizi, 2010). The researches reveal that most of our affective mood has been affected by self-efficacy beliefs. General self-efficacy has positive correlation with optimism, self-esteem, internal control and achievement attitude. Individuals with high self-efficacy can better adapt themselves with life changing. To Bandura, we like things that we are good in and since individuals with high self-efficacy know themselves worthy remain enthusiastic. Based on research findings, self-efficacy has affective order in itself (Bandura, 1997). Some lessons and activities for students can lead to academic uninterested. Individuals with Self-efficacy can control their mood and emotion. Self-efficacy beliefs have been influenced by effort rate and time of facing with obstacles and unpleasant assignments. It means that if someone feels s/he can do homework, s/he tries a lot. Individuals with high self-efficacy may experience less academic inefficacy because of resistance in gaining the goals and suitable reaction against failure and the selection of appropriate strategies in facing academic assignments.

References


