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Evidence of Academic Self Efficacy, Perceived Teacher Support, Age and Gender as Predictors of School Burnout

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The study was a cross-sectional ex post facto survey that involved 300 undergraduates randomly selected from a public university in southwest Nigeria. The sample comprised 143 males and 157 females, whose ages ranged between 14 years and 34 years (Mean = 22.55; SD = 3.37). Data were collected with a questionnaire made up of four sections that measured the variables of interest in the study. Demographic variables measured were age, sex, and, level of study. Standardized scales that measured school burnout, general self-efficacy perceived teacher support were used to administered on participants.

Result showed significant joint influence of academic self efficacy, perceived teacher support, gender and age on school burnout. Academic self efficacy and perceived teacher support had significant independent influence on school burnout.

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Result showed significant joint influence of academic self efficacy, perceived teacher support, gender and age on school burnout. Academic self efficacy and perceived teacher support had significant independent influence on school burnout.

The results of the study were discussed in line with the findings. Teacher behaviour that promotes strong relationship and fosters a feeling of capability in students was recommended.

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I. Introduction

There is a growing trend towards deepening school academic curriculum with a view to equipping students with cognitive and vocational skills that are relevant to the needs of modern society. The trend can be seen in the periodic review of academic curriculum to incorporate new courses that can address evolving social, economic and business challenges, and expanding scope of existing courses beyond traditional topics. Although functional education is desirable and should be encouraged, unless it is systematically implemented, there is a high likelihood for students who are supposed to benefit from such innovations to experience school burnout.

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Burnout is a term mostly applied in organisational setting, and refers to a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion that may result from long-term involvement in work situations that are emotionally demanding (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996). Burnout may be viewed as a syndrome that incorporates emotive breakdown and sense of depersonalization, decreased effectiveness at work, and a poor evaluation of one's performance. Conceptually similar to job/work burnout, school burnout is also three-dimensional consisting of exhaustion due to academic demands, pessimism and detached attitude toward one's school/studies, and feelings of inadequacy/incompetency as a student (Kiuru, Aunola, Nurmi, & Salmela-Aro, in press; Salmela-Aro & Näätänen, 2005; Schaufeli, Martínez, Pinto, Salanova, & Bakker, 2002). Put simply therefore, school burnout may be construed as a chronic school-related stress syndrome presenting as fatigue, experiences of cynicism about school and a sense of inadequacy as a scholar.

Previously, the research community had believed that burnout was strictly a 'job-related' condition (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996; Schaufeli, Maslach, & Marek, 1993) that affected only workers, and sustained a perception which promoted the idea that persons not directly involved in economic-oriented activities could not experience burnout. However, emerging evidence from studies with samples drawn from student population has shown that students can, and indeed, do experience burnout, (Balogun, Pellegrini, Miller, & Katz, 1999; Cushman & West, 2006; Hu & Schaufeli, 2009; Jia, Rowlinson, Kvan, Lingard, & Yip, 2009; Santen, Holt, Kemp, & Hemphill, 2010; Schorn & Buchwald, 2007). Findings from these studies suggested that burnout may be a psychological phenomenon related to any activity involving exertion of mental and physical effort in pursuit of a goal of which academic pursuit is one.

Although studying to earn a degree at the tertiary institution may not be considered an economic endeavor ('paid economic activity') in the strict sense of the word, however when viewed from a psychological perspective, engagement in scholastic endeavor may qualify as work. This is because core scholastic activities involve lectures, research work, term papers,

group projects, field trips/excursions, and examinations, all of which involve certain degree of physical, emotional, and mental exertion. The demanding nature of these undertakings may lead to feelings of emotional and physical exhaustion, negative evaluation of one's ability to cope, and consequently academic-related burnout among students.

Findings from past research establish motivation for empirically studying school burnout among undergraduates in the contemporary era. One, findings have shown high levels of burnout in a significant percentage of college student population (Jacobs & Dodd, 2003; Salmela-Aro & Näätänen, 2005); two, significant relationship has been established between academic performance and measures of burnout in college students (Jacobs & Dodd, 2003); three, a myriad of mental and psychological health issues such as depression has been linked to burnout (Glass & Mc Night, 1996); four, burnout can interfere with relationship among students, and between other members of the academic community such as faculty, and finally, burnout can affect students enthusiasm towards education, and this has serious implication for their employability. When the individual and interactive effects of these motivations on the individual and societal levels of analysis are aggregated, the case for studying burnout among students is compelling.

There are personal and social factors that are predictive of burnout. One personal variable that may predict school burnout is academic self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is defined as the belief that an individual can do something successfully (Woolfolk, 2004). It generally makes reference to an individual's "subjective belief about their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performance" (Bandura, 1977b). People with high self-efficacy tend to analyze situations to ascertain the requirements for success, and develop strategies that may guarantee success. They also tend to keep striving and maintain high level of motivation until they have attained full accomplishment of their set goals.

Some early studies have linked self-efficacy with scholastic success (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Ross, 1998), and motivation (Multon, Brown & Lent, 1991). Highly efficacious students' generally belief in their capacity to attain their academic goals. Such belief would reflect in their cognition and behavioural tendencies manifesting as positive attitude towards school work, requesting for assistance from teachers, and preparing well for examinations. Academic responsible behaviours such as these would reduce the likelihood of experiencing academic stress which in turn may decrease the likelihood of burnout (Schaufeli, et al. 1993).

An empirical study using sample drawn from college students found that self-efficacy was negatively associated with depersonalization and emotional exhaustion (Evers, Brouwers, & Tomic, 2002). The same study also showed that self efficacy had positive relationship with decreased personal accomplishments. The findings signify that highly efficacious students were more likelihood to believe that they would do well academically. They were also less likely to experience feelings of detachment and emotional exhaustion as a result of academic work. Interestingly, the positive relationship between self-efficacy and decreased personal accomplishment was an indication that efficacious students experienced a higher sense of accomplishment with their current performance.

Owing to the strong positive association between self-efficacy and self esteem, studies were designed to explore how both factors related to academic success. One of such studies was conducted in the United States among secondary school students and found a significant relationship between self–esteem and academic achievement for seventh-graders (Alves-Martins., Peixoto, Gouveia-Pereira, Amaral, & Pedro, 2002). Similarly, the result of a longitudinal study that tested the interrelationships among self esteem, self-concept and academic achievement among seventh-graders showed that self-concept beliefs predicted later achievement (Trautwein et al. 2006). After analyzing data obtained from the National Educational Longitudinal Study, Ross & Broh (2000) noted that a sense of personal control was found to be related to self-efficacy (Schunk, 1995; Pajares, 1996), which in turn predicted subsequent academic achievement. These findings are significant because they suggest that self-concept and self esteem may moderate the relationship between self-efficacy and academic achievement. It may also help in explaining the buffering effect of self-efficacy against school burnout.

The availability of social support within the school community is another factor that may influence school burnout. Social support is defined as the existence or availability of people on whom one can depend on for care and love (Sarason, Levine, Basham, & Sarason, 1983). Perceived availability of support is believed to give people the confidence that they can deal with stress as well as a feeling that others care for them. One form of social support network in school setting that may influence school burnout is perceived teacher support. Teacher support is a critical psycho-social resource that can help students cope with stress and may serve as a remedy against burnout.

Investigation of the relationship between teacher support and academic burnout is considered critical because students tend to engage in intense relationships with teaching staff throughout the duration of their studies in school. Students view their teachers as learning resources, mentors, and may also depend on them for psychological support to successfully meander the challenges posed by the complex nature of life in school. Therefore, it is natural for them to seek

assistance with academic issues, and other personal challenges from teachers. Based on their evaluation of teacher behaviour as demonstrated by teachers' sensitivity to their feelings and willingness to assist, students who perceive their teachers as supportive are more likely to report lower level of school burnout (Naami, 2009).

Related to this are studies which found that teacher disposition influences development of positive sense of self among students (Helm, 2007). Additional studies have equally confirmed the significance of teacher support on students' academic engagement (Garcia-Reid, Reid, & Peterson, 2005). Support for the positive influence of teacher support in reducing school burn was provided by Salmela-Aro, Kiuru, Pietikainen & Jokela (2008) who found a negative relationship between faculty climate, availability of positive motivation from teachers and academic burnout. In a study that highlighted the importance of teacher support in promoting academic achievement, Gregory & Weinstein (2004) found that student-perceived teacher connection was the factor most closely associated with growth in achievement from 8th to 12th grade. The finding suggests that the quality of student-teacher interaction at secondary school may have significant implication for performance in college.

Similarly, according to data from National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, students who had robust, warm relationship with teachers were found to exhibit lower rates of emotional distress, suicidal ideation, suicidal behavior, violence, substance abuse, and early sexual activity (Resnick et al., 1997). The finding is a confirmation of the positive role that teacher support can play in assisting students complete their programs, and also limit their involvement in risky behaviours in order to escape life's difficulties.

Also, fair treatment and support have been found to be key factors protecting from burnout in the work context (Maslach & Leiter, 2000). In the school context, positive motivation as a pedagogical goal by teachers, including fairness, encouragement toward pupils, and pupil-teacher bonding (Crosnoe, Johnson, & Elder, 2004) on the one hand, and the availability of support from school on the other (Aunola, Leskinen, & Nurmi, 2006) are believed to serve as protective factors against school burnout. The finding implies that a supportive school environment (provision of conducive learning environment, and other facilities) and interest in students' academic progress may protect against burnout.

Salmela-Aro et al. (2008) found that positive motivation received from teachers typical of the school was related to a low level of school-related burnout in a sample of upper secondary school students in Finland. They also found that in school that promoted intergenerational pupil-teacher bonding, students reported low level of school burnout. The authors reported that negative school climate related to burnout.

The association between adolescents" school burnout and parents' work burnout was the focus of a study conducted in Finland. The finding showed that school burnout was more likely among children of parents who themselves were suffering from burnout (Academy of Finland). The finding highlighted the role of parents in promoting or ameliorating academic burnout among their children and bringing to the fore, the need for parents to effectively manage work burnout.

The studies reviewed showed that a supportive environment at home and school are significant in the investigation of school burnout. When students perceive that they can rely on significant others such as teachers for scholastic guidance, academic mentoring, and to clarify personal issues, they are more likely to feel competent about achieving their academic goals. Hence, it is argued that perceived teacher support will be negatively related to school burnout.

Although gender difference is believed to be common in every sphere of human endeavor, Beer & Beer (1992) maintained that this may not be the case with the experience of burnout. The authors found that men and women were comparable in their experience of burnout, explaining that the outcome may be as a result of differences in the perception of stressors among both sexes. Other studies noted that differences only existed in the dimension of burnout experienced by males and females. The finding that female tend to be higher on emotional exhaustion, while males were higher on depersonalization (Purvanova & Muros, 2010; Smit, 2007) provided further support for the finding.

Lee, Puig, Lea & Lee (2013) explored age differences in academic burnout among Korean adolescents', and reported that all four sub-scales of academic burnout (exhaustion, antipathy, cynicism, and inefficacy) were positively related with age. This signified that academic burnout was more likely to occur among older students. Also, the authors observed a progressive increase in stress with subsequent school transitions for most students, suggesting that burnout increased as learning demand increased also. However, other studies which examined this relationship have found non-significant influence of age on burnout. One such study was conducted by Bianch, & Schonfeld (2014), and involved 5575 participants who supplied personal information such as age and job tenure while they completed burnout measure. Among their findings, the authors reported that age and job tenure did not predict burnout.

II. Hypotheses

i. Academic self efficacy, perceived teacher support, gender, and age will have significant independent

and joint influence on school burnout among undergraduates.

ii. Male undergraduates will be significantly higher on school burnout than female undergraduates

iii. Age will significantly predict school burnout among undergraduates

III. Method

a) Design and participants

The design of the study was a cross-sectional ex post facto survey. A total of three hundred (300) respondents comprising 143 males and 157 females, whose age ranged between 14 years and 34 years (Mean = 22.55; SD = 3.37). Participants were randomly selected among undergraduates in a public university in southwest Nigeria. The geographical location of the university which is situated one hour drive from the capital city, and the inadequacy of facilities such as accommodation, electricity, and other amenities all make learning a daunting task.

IV. Instruments

Material for data collection was a questionnaire comprising four sections. Age, sex, and, level of study were the demographic information measured in the study.

a) School burnout

This was measured with school burnout scale developed by Salmela –Aro, Kiuru, Leskinen & Nurmi (2009). The 9-item scale is divided into three subscales that measured components of school burnout in higher education. Four of the items measured exhaustion, 2 measured cynicism while three measured sense of inadequacy as a student. Items on the scale are rated on a 6-point Likert format with options that ranged between completely disagree (1) to completely agree (6). Scores in the scale are interpreted such that those above the mean indicated high school burnout, while scores below the mean indicated low school burnout. The Cronbach Alpha of the scale in this study is .64.

b) Self-efficacy scale

Academic Self-efficacy was measured with the General Self-Efficacy Scale (Jerusalem & Schwarzer, 1981) because self efficacy is a personal attribute that can generalize to other areas of life. It is a 10-item psychometric scale designed to assess a person's optimistic self-beliefs to cope with a variety of difficult demands in life (such as academic challenges). Items on the scale had options that ranged from, not at all true (1), to exactly true (4). Respondents who indicated exactly true to positive statements were scored 4, and those who indicated not at all true scored 1. Scores were summated and averaged to determine the mean score. High scores above the mean indicated high self-efficacy, while scores below the mean indicated low self-efficacy. The Cronbach Alpha of .60 was established for the scale in the present study.

c) Perceived Teacher Support scale

This was measured with 12 items extracted from Harvard University and the Tripod Project for School Improvement Measures of Effective Teaching (Ferguson, 2012). The 12 items evaluated the extent to which students felt teaching method adopted by the teacher enhanced learning. Items on the scale were rated on a 5point Likert format with options that ranged from strongly agree (5), to strongly disagree (5). Scores above the mean is interpreted as an indication of high teacher support, while scores below the mean signified low teacher support.

V. Procedure

Questionnaires were distributed to a random sample of undergraduates in a state-government managed university. Two strategies were adopted in the distribution of the questionnaires. In the first strategy, simple balloting was used to randomly select students during lecture with the permission of the lecturer in the class during that period. The second method involved random distribution of questionnaires to students who were resting at the Relaxation Centre (RC) on campus. In both cases, only those who gave oral consent to participate were given the study material to complete. It took less than 10minutes to complete a pack of questionnaire. Three hundred and forty-seven (347) questionnaires were distributed in all, however only 300 were eventually found usable for further analysis, thus given a response rate of more than 86%.

VI. Results

Table 2 : Multiple Regression predicting school burnout from gender, age, academic self efficacy and perceived teacher support

Predictors	*β*	*t*	*p*	*R*	R^2	*F*	*p*
Gender	-.01	-.16	>.05				
Age	-.04	-.70	>.05	.22	.05	2.43	<.05
ASE	-.16	-2.80	<.05				
PTS	.12	2.21	<.05				

ASE = academic self efficacy; PTS = perceived teacher support

Table 1 indicated that sex, age, ASE and PTS predicted school burnout F (4, 294) = 2.43; p <.05 and jointly accounted for 5% of the variation in school burnout. ASE (β = -.16, t = -2.80; p<.05) and PTS (β = .12, t = 2.21; p<.05) had significant independent influence on school burnout. ASE had negative relationship with school burnout indicating that school burnout decreased with higher ASE. Similarly, the result showed positive relationship between PTS and school burnout, such that favourable PTS led to increased school burnout. However, gender and age respectively had no significant independent influence on school burnout. The hypothesis was partially confirmed.

Table 2 : Summary of t-test of independence showing the influence of gender and age on school burnout

School burnout	*N*	*Mean*	*SD*	*df*	*t*	*p*
Male	143	28.27	6.76			
Female	157	28.07	7.06	298	.25	>.05
Age	*N*	*Mean*	*SD*	*df*	*t*	*p*
Old	134	28.02	7.28			
Young	164	28.26	6.65	296	-.29	>.05

Table 2 indicated that gender had no significant influence on school burnout, t (298) = .25; p >.05. The result showed that male and female undergraduates alike were comparable on school burnout. Also, there was no significant influence of age on school burnout, t (296) = -.29; p >.05. This signified that old and young undergraduates were comparable on school burnout. Therefore, hypotheses 2 and 3 were not supported.

VII. Discussion

The study explored academic self-efficacy, perceived teacher support, gender and age as factors of school burnout. Influenced by findings in extant literature reviewed, it was hypothesized that academic self-efficacy, perceived teacher support, gender and age would have significant independent and joint influence on school burnout. The result indicated significant joint influence of academic self-efficacy, perceived teacher support, gender and age on school burnout (<.05). At the level of independent influence to the variance in school burnout, the result showed that academic self-efficacy and perceived teacher support predicted burnout.

The finding showed significant negative influence of academic self-efficacy on school burnout with the negative beta sign indicating that as academic self-efficacy increased, school burnout decreased also. In addition, the finding showed that academic self-efficacy contributed the most to school burnout compared to the other predictors. The finding is consistent with previous studies (Evers, Brouwers, & Tomic, 2002; Ross, 1998; Schaufeli, et al. 1993) which indicated that efficacious students reported low level of school-related burnout compared to less efficacious students. Efficacious students exude a high sense of self-concept which may have led them to believe in their capacity to succeed in their academic undertaking. By believing in their ability to do well in school work, efficacious students might have made adequate preparations to overcome all obstacles that might stand between them and their goal. Such preparations include activities that reduced stress such as early preparations for examination, timely submission of all homework/assignments, and regular attendance in class. Similarly, efficacious students tend to have more social skills and are good at initiating interpersonal relationship. These skills might have enabled them to form beneficial relationship with more academically endowed students, and teachers who might have assisted to clarify difficult and unfamiliar concepts.

The finding showed that perceived teacher support had significant positive influence on school burnout, such that school burnout tended to increase with more favourable teacher support. The finding contradicted a large body of past research which reported that teacher support was an important buffer against school burnout (Crosnoe et al. Elder, 2004; Naami, 2009; Resnick et al., 1997; Salmela-Aro et al. 2008). The fact that the educational sector in developed countries is prioritized and adequately funded might have accounted for the negative relationship between teacher support and school burnout reported by past studies.

The present study was conducted in a developing country where education is poorly funded and basic learning facilities are lacking in most schools. Because the study was conducted in public a university tended to be poorly funded, it is not unlikely that lecturers could not offer the students the type of support they expected from them. This might account for higher level of burnout even when students actually received support from their lecturers. It might mean weak teacher-student support such that the support received was not congruent with students' most salient needs.

It was hypothesized that gender would significantly predict burnout among students. The finding showed no significant gender influence on school burnout. It showed that male and female students reported similar level on school burnout. Previous research found that male and female reported comparable level of burnout (Beer & Beer, 1992). A possible reason behind this finding might be similarity in

reaction to factors that precipitated school burnout. In addition, it is possible that both sexes might have had equal exposure to stressors that increased vulnerability to school burnout such as lectures, assignment, and examinations. As a result, their level of school burnout might be similar.

In this study, age did not have significant influence on school burnout. The finding indicated that students reported similar level of burnout irrespective of their age. The finding supported the research by Bianch, & Schonfeld (2014) who found that age did not predict burnout among participants cut across different age. Participants in this study were final year students, and might have developed a similar pattern of coping with stress.

VIII. Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings of this study contribute to our understanding of school burnout among students studying in public university that are poorly funded, and highlight the significance of academic self efficacy, and perceived teacher support in ameliorating burnout. Teacher behaviour that promotes strong relationship and fosters a feeling of capability in students is recommended.

IX. Limitation

The present study is not without some limitations. First, the findings were based on results collected from self-report questionnaires. Self-report questionnaires are notorious for social desirability bias. Second, rather than use pencil-paper test as was the case in this study, which allows for faking of responses, future studies might try utilizing objective measures for burnout, such as measurement of heart rate. Objective measures are less vulnerable to faking by respondents. Third, the study was cross-sectional, a factor that made it impossible to analyse any causal relations between the variables. Fourth, the study was carried out in one public university thus caution is advised in generalizing findings to other contexts such as to private schools which might differ in philosophy and school policy.

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