

The External and Internal Factors of Academic Burnout

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ABSTRACT

Academic burn-out is a common phenomenon among students. Because of the long-term academic pressure and burden, students feel exhausted, lose enthusiasm for their studies and activities, and hold a negative attitude towards learning. This study aimed to research academic burn-out and summarize the influencing factors of academic burn-out. The present study divides the influencing factors into external factors and internal factors. External factors include school factors (learning pressure, teaching environment, interpersonal relationship), family factors (parenting style, parental support, family economic status). Internal factors include personality, self-esteem, and attribution style. This paper combs the relationship between these factors and academic burn-out as well as some influencing mechanisms. In the field of academic burn-out, there is a complex correlation between various factors, and few studies have taken comprehensive consideration of internal and external factors and explored the influence mechanism of these factors in-depth. In the future, studies in this field should be strengthened, and prevention and intervention methods should be worked out based on these influencing factors.

Keywords: Academic burn-out, Impact factors, External factors, Internal factors.

1. INTRODUCTION

The study of academic burn-out has been a research hotspot recently because the learning burn-out of college students is a widespread phenomenon. College students are the national high-tech talent and reserve force of a country, and their comprehensive quality and learning condition are directly related to the development and improvement of a country. However, many college students lack learning interest and motivation with a confused state. Existing researches showed that increasing tendency of college students' learning burn-out [1]. Therefore, it is urgent to modify the phenomenon.

The concept of "burn-out" was first put forward by Freudenberger in 1974, which refers to the negative and unfulfilling emotions experienced by a person after being frustrated at work [2]. Leiter and Maslach divided burn-out into three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, lack of individuality (depersonalization), and low sense of personal achievement; emotional exhaustion is manifested as loss of enthusiasm for work; lack of individuality is manifested as being in a state of insensitivity; however,

they make mostly negative evaluations of others; low personal achievement is manifested as negative evaluations of their work value and significance [3].

Afterward, some scholars applied this concept to the field of learning. Meier and Schmeck defined learning burn-out as a phenomenon in which students suffer from the exhaustion of energy, loss of enthusiasm for schoolwork and activities, indifference and alienation from classmates, and negative attitude towards their studies due to the long-term pressure and burden of schoolwork [4]. Branko Slivar referred to the burn-out behavior of students under long-term pressure from schools, teachers, and classmates as learning burn-out, which is often manifested by great learning pressure, little sense of achievement in learning, and little active participation in student activities [5]. Some evidence indicated that people with academic burn-out may lack interest in academic issues and class activities, incapability for attending academic classes and acquiring academic issues, sense of meaninglessness in academic issues [6].

Previous researches indicated the negative consequences of academic burn-out: it was negatively related to college students' psychological health, and positively associated with depression [7]. In addition, school burn-out was negatively related to concurrent GPA and academic success, and students reported low cognitive performance when they rated high academic burn-out [8]. Therefore, it is crucial to develop academic burn-out. The review focused on external and internal factors of academic burn-out, and it supported a detailed explanation of academic burn-out and appealed to researchers for future study in this field.

2. METHOD

Computerized research of the literature has been done through the Web of Science and EBSCO search engine including online databases like Taylor & Francis, Science Direct, Elsevier, and so on. The searching progress was between May 2021 and July 2021 by using the terms "burn-out" "academic burn-out" "attributional style" "attribution" "college students", phrases like "internal factors of academic burn-out" "external factors of academic burn-out". These terms were chosen to limit the retrieved articles to how attributional style influences academic burn-out among college students.

Journals were chosen under the peer-review process. Meanwhile, studies that considered burn-out as an independent and dependent variable were included. Also, studies that investigated the probable mediators of burn-out were searched and included.

3. THE IMPACT FACTORS OF ACADEMIC BURN-OUT

For the affecting factors of academic burn-out, academic burn-out may be caused by school factors including learning pressure, teaching environment, interpersonal relationship, and family factors like parenting styles, parental support, and socioeconomic status of the family. In addition to external factors, academic burn-out may also be influenced by internal factors, such as personality and self-esteem.

3.1. External factors

Burn-out is a stress-related disorder that may result from prolonged exposure to chronic stress without recovery [9]. The study load mainly comes from the study pressure, which refers to the feeling when the learning task is too heavy to exceed one's ability. Slivar believed that subject diversity, external evaluation, and pressure behavior (getting the best grades or being the best student in the class) have become common in various schools [5]. In the process of learning, students would show emotional exhaustion due to academic pressure, tend depersonalization, and feel little progress [10].

There is a consensus on the relationship between stress and academic burn-out. Many studies have shown that academic stress is negatively correlated with academic burn-out, and academic stress has a significant positive predictive effect on academic burn-out, that is, students with academic stress perception have higher academic burn-out [11-14]. In particular, academic pressure was considered to be a major source of stress for students in Asian countries [15].

In addition to learning pressure, students' perceived teaching environment was also related to academic burn-out. The classroom discussion atmosphere was significantly related to the level of academic burn-out. Students who believed that the classroom atmosphere is conducive to the transmission of their views and that the teacher takes into account the views of students had lower levels of academic burn-out [16]. The level of academic burn-out varied according to their views of the classroom evaluation environment. There was a negative correlation between students' learning-oriented perception (the process of effort is more important) and the level of academic burn-out, while there was a positive correlation between students' performance-oriented perception (the result is more important) and the level of academic burn-out [17]. Shih's study also showed that the learning environment and academic burn-out level was significantly influenced by the structured will, when students perceived higher levels of classroom structure, namely the teacher provided clear expectations and direction, with the guiding framework of learning activities, students were more likely to adopt positive coping styles, also showed lower levels of academic burn-out [15].

Slivar suggested lack of proper interpersonal relationships was also one of the external factors that affected academic burn-out, and most of these events were caused by the following events: peer rejection (conflict relations with their peers), teachers for teen accused (one or more individual teacher to student's negative emotions) or school internal unrest and disputes [5].

Many studies proved a negative correlation between teacher support and school burn-out, and teacher emotional support had a negative predictive effect on students' academic burn-out levels [18-21]. A meta-analysis showed that students who felt emotional support from their teachers were more likely than their peers to adapt to burn-out [22].

A similar relationship existed between peer relationships and academic burn-out. Perceived peer support could alleviate students' academic burn-out. Students with a higher level of peer support had a significantly lower level of emotional exhaustion. High peer support might motivated students to actively cope when learning difficulties arise, so they felt less burn-out [15]. Bai et al. also found that peer support was negatively correlated with academic burn-out, and adolescents who

have experienced uncivilized behaviors in school were more likely to have a higher degree of academic burn-out [23].

In addition to school factors, family factors can also affect academic burn-out. Studies had found that positive parenting styles could reduce learning burn-out, while negative punishment styles could significantly improve learning burn-out [24]. Shin et al. believed that over-protective and lack of caring parenting style would accelerate the generation of learning burn-out [25]. In China, parents of low burn-out students showed more emotional warmth and understanding. In contrast, parents of high burn-out students showed more punishment and harshness, refusal and denial, excessive interference, and protection [26]. A recent study showed that authoritative parenting and parental involvement (knowledge and skills) predicted higher academic engagement and less burn-out in adolescents after two months and that fathers played an important role in adolescents' academic engagement [27].

Parental support was also an important factor. Rae and Sonja found that parental support was negatively correlated with emotional exhaustion and other factors of burn-out [28] and that parental support was a significant predictor of the four dimensions of burn-out (exhaustion, disrespect, vitality, and commitment) [29]. Virtanen et al. further found that family support for learning is negatively correlated with school burn-out [30]. Students believed that family support for learning (often interpreted as a promoter of emotional engagement) played a key role in environmental adaptation. Parental support may prevent or eliminate academic burn-out by activating an individual's internal perception (such as life satisfaction). In addition, parental care could also be used as an external aid to directly alleviate academic burn-out [31].

Perceived parental support by children may be an underlying psychological process that explains the link between parental practice and adolescent learning outcomes [27], also a key factor that explains the link between parenting styles and adolescent learning outcomes [32].

Socioeconomic status was also a factor of academic burn-out. In particular, students from families of low socioeconomic status tended to have a negative attitude towards learning [33, 34], while students with high socioeconomic status were more enthusiastic and energetic during the learning process [35]. In China, socioeconomic status could significantly predict academic burn-out, and adolescents from families with low socioeconomic status were more likely to suffer from learning burn-out [36]. A recent study found that the life attitudes of students of different socioeconomic statuses have different effects on academic burn-out, and the indirect effect of social support on academic burn-out through life satisfaction will increase with the improvement of social and economic status [31]. However, a study with a sample of junior high school students in

Finland showed that family socioeconomic status was not associated with the profiles of academic burn-out, suggesting that in this particular sample in Finland, students from different socioeconomic backgrounds were provided with equal educational opportunities [30].

3.2. Internal factors

Conjointly, the concept of burn-out recognized the significance of personality, which referred to an internal factor of burn-out [2]. In general, people with high burn-out syndrome were mainly characterized by being more introverted, sensitive, empathic, humanistic, and anxious [37]. Lots of studies investigated the relationship between personality and burn-out. For example, Maslach and Jackson highlighted the importance of personality on burn-out [38]. Meanwhile, Jacobs and Dodd found that personality was the most reliable predictor of burn-out among college students, and they emphasized neuroticism has the strongest influence on burn-out; negative temperament related to neuroticism reflects feelings of prolonged stress and nervousness, and people experience negative emotions to cause emotional exhaustion [39]. More precisely, Huebner and Mills indicated how personality affects three dimensions of burn-out: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment [40]. As a result, agreeableness and extraversion significantly affected depersonalization; conscientiousness and extraversion significantly affected personal accomplishment. Participants with higher burn-out showed a tendency to be less conscientious and persevering (low conscientiousness), more competing, and egocentric (low agreeableness), and more introverted (low extraversion); especially, persons scoring high on neuroticism who relied on ineffective strategies (such as hostile reactions, passivity, self-blame) tended to show a higher level of burn-out. Therefore, personality was an efficient predictor of burn-out.

Similarly, self-esteem was another personal factor in the appearance of burn-out [41]. Self-esteem is an overall evaluation of an individual's self-worth and self-confidence. It represents the feeling of being able to successfully solve life challenges; lower self-esteem predicted more mental and physical illness, and students with lower self-esteem tended to have more negative emotions and lower self-esteem academic performance [42]. Lee et al. collected 345 students and investigated students with negative attitudes toward themselves exhibited a higher level of academic burn-out [43]. Meanwhile, Molero Jurado et al. used cluster analysis, and they found three groups of people with low, medium, and high self-esteem; however, they found out low self-esteem had a significantly positive relationship with demotivation of work, which was a function of burn-out [44]. More clearly, Dahlin et al. examined the relationship between burn-out and self-esteem among college students through a cross-sectional study with 342 samples, and they found

out performance-based self-esteem was significantly correlated to the two burn-out dimensions, exhaustion, and disengagement; students were valuable to be exhausted and develop burn-out if they have low self-esteem [45]. Thus, low self-esteem was a crucial factor of burn-out.

In addition, attribution was another factor of burn-out; lots of researches have discovered the relationship between attribution and burn-out [46-48]. To evaluate the relationship between attributions and academic burn-out, there were three dimensions of the attributional style were assessed, which are the locus of control, stability, and controllability; the locus of control measured that students attributed academic success and failure to internal or external factors; the stability expressed that students attributed academic success and failure were stable or unstable, which emphasized they could change in the future or not; the controllability tested the factors of academic performance were under their control or not [49].

Schmitz et al. defined locus of control as the level to which an individual perceives that he was able to control over a given event (internal), or whether he perceived it based on outside of his control (external) [50]. In their study, they indicated locus of control has a significant relationship with burn-out among 361 nurses in Germany. Nurses who believed that they had little control for their life would be more vulnerable to burn-out than nurses believing in personal control. Sünbül has collected 297 teachers from high schools, and he found out teachers with an external locus of control had more emotional exhaustion (which is one dimension of burn-out) than teachers with an internal locus of control; teachers had higher depersonalization (which is another dimension of burn-out) when they evaluated more external locus of control [51]. However, Gan investigated locus of control as the predictor of academic burn-out among 273 college students; they suggested locus of control has an insignificant relationship with academic burn-out [52]. Meanwhile, Singh et al. suggested internal locus of control indirectly affected academic burn-out among 264 students, which referred to an internal locus of control as an inner motivational mechanism for dealing with academic burn-out [53]. In general, even though the results of studies were different, locus of control could be a factor of burn-out.

Despite such progress, the prior research on the relations between attribution and academic burn-out only included locus of control. Further study should work on all three dimensions of attribution and their relationship with academic burn-out. Meanwhile, most studies about burn-out were under working conditions, so the further study should make more effort on college students, which is a severe issue in college.

It is theoretically important to study the research question, which can fill in the gap of previous studies to explore the effects of attributions through three

dimensions on academic burn-out among college students. In addition, the study also has important practical implications for educators and college students to enhance college students' learning efficiency and reduce academic burn-out by finding the attributional factors.

4. CONCLUSION

This research focused on the related researches on academic burn-out, combing the internal and external influencing factors and some influencing mechanisms of academic burn-out. External factors include school (learning pressure, teaching environment, interpersonal relationship) and family factors (parenting style, parental support, family economic status), where internal factors include personality, self-esteem, and attribution style.

In terms of school, academic pressure is the most important external factor. All studies have found that academic pressure is negatively correlated with academic burn-out, and academic pressure has a significant positive predictive effect on academic burn-out. There is a negative correlation between open classroom discussion atmosphere and students' evaluation and perception of the classroom environment and academic burn-out level in the teaching environment. In an interpersonal relationship, the support of teachers and peers is negatively correlated with academic burn-out and has a negative predictive effect.

In terms of family, the positive encouragement and warm understanding parenting style are negatively correlated with academic burn-out, and the negative parenting style will accelerate and improve the level of academic burn-out. Children's perceived parental support is also negatively correlated with all dimensions of academic burn-out and significantly predicts the level of academic burn-out. However, there are cultural differences in family economic status. In the Chinese and American backgrounds, family economic status is negatively correlated with academic burn-out, but the research based on Finland shows that economic and social status has nothing to do with the characteristics of academic burn-out.

In terms of internal factors, personality and self-esteem are the main factors to predict academic burn-out. Personality affects academic burn-out through low conscientiousness, low extraversion, low agreeableness, and high neuroticism. Lower self-esteem is significantly related to a higher level of exhaustion and disengagement, which are functions of academic burn-out.

An important limitation of this study is that it is a qualitative review and therefore there is a degree of subjective risk in interpreting the resulting data. Given the various internal and external factors of academic burn-out studied, it is difficult to make a statistical meta-analysis. Currently, there are few meta-analyses on academic burn-out, but it should be the target of future research.

Secondly, scholars have extensively examined the causative and consequential variables of learning burn-out and achieved fruitful results, but there are still some defects. The internal psychological activities of students and the external learning and living environment are very complex. Through the review and analysis, it can be learned that the reasons for learning burn-out are both external and internal factors, and there is a complex correlation between various factors. Most scholars only select a certain variable for research. Future research on academic burn-out should be combined with internal and external factors and in-depth exploration of how these factors affect academic burn-out.

Finally, although studies based on the influencing factors of learning burn-out have put forward a lot of suggested measures for the prevention and intervention of learning burn-out, literature retrieval has found that there are still few empirical studies on the intervention, and empirical studies on the intervention should be strengthened in the future [54].

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