

The Relationship between School Burnout, Gender and Academic Achievement amongst Secondary School Students in Kisumu East Subcounty Kenya

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Abstract

School burnout reduces productivity and creativity and is related to low goal progress which subsequently leads to delay in studies and low educational aspirations. The purpose of this study was to investigate the prevalence of school burnout and its relationship with gender and academic achievement. The objectives of the study were to: Establish school burnout levels, determine gender differences in school burnout and Determine differences amongst high and low academic achievers in school burnout. The study was guided by Work Burnout theory. A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The study population consisted of 4500 students. A sample size of 450 was selected based on Nkpa's formula. Stratified random sampling technique was used. Questionnaires and document analysis guide were used for data collection. Reliability was computed using Cronbach's alpha: for school burnout, it was 0.8. Face and content validity were ascertained by experts in the Department of Educational Psychology the author respectively. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics as well as inferential statistics. There were significant gender differences in cynicism with females reporting higher levels than males. Low achievers reported more school burnout. The study may be useful to teachers, counselors, administrators and parents who may be able to assist students reduce burnout. This research is also important for policy. The government may enforce school holidays devoid of tuition. It is recommended that programs be developed that create awareness and encourage students' to reduce school burnout.

Keywords: school burnout, academic achievement, gender, high achievers and low achievers

INTRODUCTION

Studies conducted on maladjustment as a discrepancy between the students' internal resources for school work and his or her own demands or those of other people like teachers, peers, and parents for academic success are few (Kiuru, et al. 2009). Salmela-Aro, et al. (2008) conducted a study in which they described school maladjustment as school burnout. Even fewer are studies on school burnout (Schaufeli, et al. 2002). Burnout, is a work-related disorder, that has been applied in the school context. The few studies that have been conducted on school burnout are in the Nordic countries where it has been established that there is fierce competition for slots in colleges accompanied with a lot of stress and anxiety. There is need to find out more on school burnout in sub-Saharan Africa and more so in Kenya where competition for slots in educational institutions is very high.

In Kenya, competition begins at a lower level of education, right from primary school. Students begin to compete for the few places in National schools which are considered as tickets to join the university as government sponsored students. Because of the high

levels of poverty in Nyanza, government sponsorship at the university is the only hope for some of the students (Republic of Kenya 2006). Kenya is the country where most tuition takes place according to a study by Paviot et al. (2005). Nzomo, et al. (2001) revealed that 74.4% of the pupils in Nyanza province take extra tuition, making Nyanza province one of the areas where tuition is pervasive. This can be confirmed by Ahawo (2010) in a study carried out in Kisumu East Subcounty in which she reiterates that teachers have high workload and a congested curriculum. The foregoing studies in Kisumu East Subcounty are strong pointers for the need to investigate school burnout.

Statement of the Problem

School burnout is a phenomenon that reduces productivity and creativity and is related to low goal progress which subsequently leads to delay in studies and low educational aspirations. There may exist a vicious cycle as weak students are taught for long hours without weekends nor holidays in order to improve their performance. This may lead to school burnout amongst some of the students. Due to the stressful

nature of academic studies amongst students, analyzing school burnout becomes pertinent. The current study was guided by the following objectives:-

1. Establish school burnout levels.
2. Determine gender differences in school burnout.
3. Determine differences amongst high and low academic achievers in school burnout.

The work burnout theory was developed by (Maslach, Jackson & Leiter 1996). Their definition was adopted to school burnout as

School related exhaustion can be defined as school-related feelings of strain, particularly chronic fatigue resulting from overtaxing school work. School-related cynicism, in turn is manifested in an indifferent or a distal attitude towards school work in general, a loss of interest in one's academic work and not seeing it as meaningful. Lack of school-related efficacy refers to diminished feelings of competence as well as less successful achievement, and lack of accomplishment both in one's schoolwork and in school as a whole. (Salmela Aro et al. 2009)

Research studies show that exhaustion and cynicism are the main constituents of burnout with professional efficacy playing a lesser role. Since absorption (Engagement) is not considered the opposite of professional inefficacy, the two instruments must be used independently (Schaufeli and Bakker 2003)

Salmela-Aro, et al. (2008) conducted a study on the role of educational track in adolescents' school burnout. The participants were 658 ninth graders who filled in questionnaires twice during their final term of comprehensive school and once after the transition to post comprehensive schooling. They used latent growth curve modeling to analyze their data. They found that on both academic and vocational tracks girls experienced a higher level of exhaustion, cynicism and inadequacy than boys.

Vasalampi, Salmela-Aro and Nurmi (2009) in their study on adolescents' self concordance, school engagement and burnout, used a sample of 763 participants who were measured thrice. They were first measured in the second grade of upper secondary school, in the third grade of upper secondary school and one year later. For girls, having a high goal progress predicted a high level of school engagement and low level of school burnout. High levels of school engagement and burnout, in turn had subsequent outcomes after the school transition. School engagement predicted success in the educational transition after upper secondary school, whereas school

burnout predicted delay in studies and low educational aspirations after upper secondary school. These results remained significant even when Grade Point Average (GPA) was controlled for. For boys, self concordant achievement related goal contributed to goal effort which in turn was related to goal progress.

The current study sought to find out whether girls who are in high school experience more school burnout than boys using a cross-sectional approach. The girls that were assessed by Salmela-Aro et al. (2008) come from the developed countries thus a cultural perspective of school burnout amongst girls and boys in developing countries is a new contribution of this study to the literature.

Salmela-Aro, et al. (2008) in their study on the role of educational track in school burnout hypothesized that students taking the academic track which constitutes the high achievers would experience more burnout whilst students taking the vocational track who were low achievers would experience less burnout.

The Finnish education system is such that at the age of 7, children move to comprehensive schools where they remain for 9 years. Thereafter, 55% of the adolescents enter senior high schools, 37% vocational schools, 2% attend voluntary 10th grade and 6% exit formal education. Considering the 55% entering senior high schools as high achievers, the results at the mean level showed that adolescents on an academic track experienced more overall exhaustion than their counterparts on a vocational track. For cynicism the results at the mean level showed that adolescents on a vocational track experienced a higher initial level than those on an academic track. For those on an academic track the level of cynicism increased across time. The results at the mean level showed that adolescents on a vocational track experienced higher initial levels of inadequacy than adolescents on an academic track. However with time the level of inadequacy increased for those on the academic track and decreased for those on the vocational track (Salmela-Aro, et al. 2008)

Kiuru, Aunola, Nurmi, Leskinen and Salmela-Aro, (2008) found that high academic achievement was associated with a decrease in school burnout while Salmela-Aro, Kiuru, Pietikainen, and Jokela (2008) found that students with lower Grade Point Average (GPA) experienced higher levels of school burnout. The current study sought to compare burnout levels of high achievers and low achievers doing one educational curriculum using a cross-sectional approach.

METHODOLOGY

Population, Sample and Sampling Techniques

The study population comprised of Form Four students in Kisumu East Subcounty. The target population was 4500 students. This comprised of 2650 boys and 1850 girls (Kisumu East Subcounty Education Office 2012) A sample constituting 10 % of the target population according to Nkpa (1997) was used giving a total of 450 students. Out of these 265 were boys and 185 were girls.

The School Burnout Inventory Subscale

The scale consists of three dimensions which are:-

- Exhaustion due to school demands (e.g. I feel overwhelmed by my schoolwork)
- Cynical and detached attitude towards one’s school (e.g. I feel that I am losing interest in my work and
- Feelings of inadequacy as a student.(e.g. I often have feelings of inadequacy in my school work)

Reliability for the scale in the present study was 0.70 for overall school burnout, 0.50 for exhaustion 0.50 for

Table 1 School Burnout

| | Exhaustion | Cynicism | Reduced Efficacy | Burnout |
|------|------------|----------|------------------|---------|
| Mean | 3.71 | 2.47 | 3.15 | 3.11 |
| S.D | 1.09 | 1.10 | 1.05 | .82 |

Table 1 shows that exhaustion, is the most experienced component of the burnout syndrome, followed by reduced efficacy and cynicism. Indeed the respondents

Table 2 Percentage School Burnout

| Scale | | Percentage |
|---------------|-----------------|------------|
| 0 – 2 | No burnout | 11.8 |
| 2.1 – 3 | Low Burnout | 34.9 |
| 3.1 – 4 | Average Burnout | 40 |
| 4.1 and above | High Burnout | 13.3 |

Table 2 shows that only 11.8% of the students experienced no burnout. The percentage of students experiencing higher than average burnout as well as high burnout constitute half the population. Given the nature of burnout educationists ought to be concerned. According to Salmela Aro et al. (2008) high levels of school burnout as was demonstrated by the respondents is detrimental to the school environment. The Ministry of Education needs to enforce the school holiday policy and as well as school hours.

cynicism and 0.30 for reduced efficacy. The author also ascertained content validity based on literature.

The data was made up of 390 students in form 4. Their mean age was 18.38 years with a standard deviation of 1.078. The number of boys was 230 whereas girls were 160. The students were drawn from boarding and day schools. In KCPE boys attained a significantly higher mean score than girls. The exam was marked out of a possible 500 marks. In KCSE boys still had a significantly higher mean score than girls. The exam was marked out of a possible 12 points.

Limitations of the study

The findings may not be generalized to other classes because data was collected amongst for fours only. Strong conclusions may not be drawn because correlation studies do not measure cause and effect relationships.

RESULTS

were fourth years who were scheduled to sit for exams in the next four months. Hence it is expected that they would be working extra hard. (Ahawo 2010)

Objective 2 was to determine gender differences in school burnout. It was addressed using independent samples t test and the results are displayed in Table 3.

The table shows that exhaustion is the most experienced element of the school burnout scale, followed by reduced efficacy and cynicism. It also shows that girls experienced significantly higher amounts of cynicism, than boys. It is possible that girls in Kisumu East Subcounty have given up because they have been performing poorly (Muganda-Onyando and Omondi, 2008).

Table 3: Gender Differences in School Burnout

| | Sex | M | SD | T | Df | Sig. (two tailed) |
|------------------|-------|------|------|--------|-----|-------------------|
| Exhaustion | Boys | 3.98 | 1.34 | .647 | 388 | .518 |
| | Girls | 3.89 | 1.35 | | | |
| Cynicism | Boys | 2.38 | 1.04 | -1.990 | 388 | .047* |
| | Girls | 2.61 | 1.06 | | | |
| Reduced Efficacy | Boys | 3.17 | 1.05 | .382 | 388 | .703 |
| | Girls | 3.13 | 1.17 | | | |
| School Burnout | Boys | 3.18 | .835 | -.351 | 388 | .726 |
| | Girls | 3.21 | .934 | | | |

*P <.05

This is a likely explanation for the significant mean difference in cynicism between boys and girls. The fact that there were no significant differences in school burnout between boys and girls except in cynicism is to some extent similar to Salmela-Aro et al. (2008) who found that girls experienced higher levels of cynicism than boys. The authors also found that girls experienced higher levels of exhaustion and inadequacy than did boys. Salmela-Aro et al. (2008) results are interesting because on average the girls in her sample had higher achievement scores and yet experienced more school burnout than boys.

This finding was attributed to the characteristics of girls whereby although they achieve better in school, some of them also worry about their performance more than boys. Vasalampi et al. (2009) also found significant

differences in school burnout between boys and girls. The results of the present study on the other hand are in agreement with Konert (1997) who found that there were no significant differences in male and female teachers' burnout. Even though these were teachers and not students, burnout is one and the same thing. Stoeber and Rennet (2008) also failed to find any significant differences in burnout between male and female teachers.

Differences amongst high and low academic achievers in school burnout

The third objective was to determine differences among high achievers and low achievers, in school burnout. It was addressed using independent samples t test and the results are displayed in Table 4.

Table 4: Differences in School Burnout among high and low Academic Achievers.

| Elements of School Burnout | Level of Achievement | M | SD | t | df | Sig. (2 tailed) |
|----------------------------|----------------------|------|------|--------|-----|-----------------|
| Exhaustion | High Achievers | 3.88 | 1.29 | -1.145 | 388 | .253 |
| | Low Achievers | 4.04 | 1.42 | | | |
| Cynicism | High Achievers | 2.20 | 1.07 | -5.805 | 388 | .000* |
| | Low Achievers | 2.84 | 1.05 | | | |
| Reduced Efficacy | High Achievers | 3.04 | 1.06 | -2.350 | 388 | .019* |
| | Low Achievers | 3.30 | 1.02 | | | |
| Burnout | High Achievers | 3.04 | .834 | -3.953 | 388 | .000* |
| | Low Achievers | 3.39 | .889 | | | |

* p < .05

Table 4 shows that there was no significant difference in exhaustion, between the high achievers and low achievers. However there were significant differences in cynicism, reduced efficacy, and burnout. Specifically low achievers experienced more cynicism, than high achievers and more reduced efficacy, than high achievers. Higher levels of school burnout were also reported by low achievers than high achievers. Thus low achievers no longer feel capable, are not motivated,

have lost interest in their studies and are experiencing school burnout.

This result is in contrast to Salmela –Aro et al. (2008) who found that adolescents taking the academic track were more exhausted than those taking the vocational track. This brings us to the realization that for the current study regardless of whether they were high achievers or low achievers each of them experienced higher levels of exhaustion than cynicism or reduced efficacy. This may be attributed to the fact that this was

a final year class that was relentlessly preparing for exams hence the feeling of being overwhelmed by studies, leading to exhaustion. Out of the components of school burnout the most experienced was exhaustion. The result on cynicism is in contrast to Salmela-Aro et al. (2008) study which showed that cynicism increased over time. In Sweden, after comprehensive school, students join post comprehensive schools which are equivalent to high schools. Here, they either join the academic track or vocational track. The high achievers joined the academic track while the low achievers joined the vocational track. In their study, the high achievers who were on the academic track reported higher levels of exhaustion when compared to the low achievers on the vocational track. This finding indicates that the academic track is what results into exhaustion. In the current study where both high achievers and low achievers were subjected to the same conditions academically both groups reported high exhaustion levels. For the current study however significant differences were reported in cynicism, reduced efficacy and burnout with low achievers experiencing higher levels of all the three components than high achievers. This result is in agreement with Kiuru et al. (2008) and Salmela-Aro et al. (2008) who both found that low academic achievers experienced more school burnout.

The implication of this finding to practice is that educators and other stakeholders need to be aware that students get exhausted. An exhausted mind needs rest and hence the need for school holidays, devoid of holiday tuition.

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