

The Mediating Role Of Professional Efficacy Between Perceived Social Support And Academic Burnout Among Females' Students In Saudi Arabia

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate the mediating role professional efficacy on the relationship between social support and academic burnout among females' students in Saudi Arabian Universities. In fact, there are some studies touched this area; however, the mediating effect professional efficacy between social support and academic burnout of females' students not been searched well. Therefore, this study is focused on addressing the burnout among females' students by using social support and professional efficacy as predictors. This study followed the quantitative methods by using the administrated questionnaire for collecting the data. Regarding this, 298 respondents participated in the study. The Structural Equation modeling (ESM) technique (AMOS) was used for analyzing the data. The results showed that there is a negative relationship between perceived social support and academic burnout. However, social support has a positive impact on professional efficacy. Further, the results also showed that professional efficacy played a significant mediator between social support and academic burnout. Finally, the implications of this study considered as a competitive advantage for policymakers who are going to foster the findings of this study in future.

Keywords: *Perceived Social Support, Professional Efficacy, Academic Burnout.*

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Introduction

In the last two decades, there are many countries that have focused on the industry of education which has led to the great increase of the number of academic institutions, more specifically the universities. Although, universities administration needs to pay attention to some issues that may affect the students' deviant behavior such as academic burnout. The phenomenon of burnout among students is considered as a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, negative cynical attitude, and low personal accomplishment towards continued studying and he/she is engaging in the feeling of inadequacy as student (Andrade et al., 2023; Salmela-Aro et al., 2022). Moreover, the term of burnout is used tremendously in explain the people psychological situation in the job/profession, however, less been studied in the field of academia more specifically with university's students (Cheng et al., 2020; Salmela-Aro et al., 2022). Thus, we found a variety of definitions regarding the concept of burnout which is attributed to the employees' levels and functions in the organization. However, the instruments that measure the role of burnout are almost the same, which formed from three subscales as exhaustion, cynicism, and professional efficacy (Cheng et al., 2020; Gu et al., 2023). Therefore, this study is focusing on reducing the side-effects of academic burnout among universities' students in Saudi Arabia by using a social support as predictor for addressing that phenomenon. Also, the study is targeting to find out the role of mediating effect of professional efficacy on the relationship between social support and academic burnout.

Literature review

Social support and academic burnout

Social support is considered as a social and psychological protective factor, which helping individuals to reduce their stress (Kim & Lee, 2022). Because stress has negative effects on human's physical and mental health. Besides that, stress also is triggering the burnout among individuals (Liu & Cao, 2022). In support, the previous evidence revealed that social support as a resource has significant effect on reducing the consequences of burnout among employees at workplace or students in schools (Hatamian & Sepehri Nezhad, 2018; Sayadpour et al., 2020; Sayyadpour et al., 2022; Ye et al., 2021). For example, Sayadpour and colleagues (2020) studied the relationship between social support and academic burnout for 407 students in Tehran Azad University. The results indicated a direct effect social support on academic burnout (Sayadpour et al., 2020). Similarly, Hatamian and others (2018) investigated the effect of social support on academic burnout for 125 nursing students in Razi University of Kermanshah in Iran. Their findings revealed that there is a significant and negative relationship between social support and academic burnout (Hatamian & Sepehri Nezhad, 2018). In different context, Kim and Lee (2022) examined the relationship between social support and academic burnout among 158 students in China. The results of the path analysis showed that social support can reduce academic burnout (Kim & Lee, 2022). Relating to this, Ye et al (2021) have reached to the same conclusion which is social support has negative association with academic burnout (Ye et al., 2021).

On the other hand, some studies found that social support does not have a direct or significant relationship with academic burnout. In support, Transiana and others (2021) found that perceived social support did not significantly influenced to academic burnout among 103 students from Indonesia (Transiana et al., 2021). In similar vein, Lie and Cao (2022) studied the effect of social support on academic burnout for 817 medical students in China. The results indicated that social support did not directly affect academic burnout, however, through mediating variable such as resilience (Liu & Cao, 2022).

Therefore, the major prior evidence showed that the negative association between social support and academic burnout among students, in contrast, some other studies were not found neither positive nor negative relationship between social support and academic burnout. Related to this, and based on stated evidence, we propose that;

H1: Perceived social support dimensions (parents, teachers, classroom mates, friends, and university) negatively affect academic burnout of university students.

Social support and professional efficacy

Professional efficacy is called originally as professional accomplishment. It refers to a type of self-evaluation of individual's self-efficacy, competence, and productivity (Beer, 2021; Maslach, 1998), but it can also encompass both the social and nonsocial aspects of occupational accomplishments. In other words, self-efficacy is an aspect of individual knowledge to improve personal abilities, like self- confidence, adaptability, cognitive capacity, intelligence and the capacity to act in stressful situations (Firdausi et al., 2023). In association with the environmental factors, social support can make individuals think more positively about difficult situations in facing and overcoming challenges. So the previous studies showed that social support has a positive effect on professional efficacy or self-efficacy. According to Leahy-Warren and colleagues investigated the relationships between social support, maternal parental self-efficacy in Ireland. The results showed that social support has a significant impact on maternal parental self-efficacy (Leah-Warren et al., 2012). In addition, Chan (2018) studied the relationships between social support and career self-efficacy of 703 Taiwanese college athletes. The result showed that social support has a positive relationship with the employee career self-efficacy (Chan, 2018). In support, social support is predicting the professional efficacy, self-confidence and motivation which are key to avoiding academic burnout (Firdausi et al., 2023; Gündüz, 2012). Therefore, and based on the evidence mentioned above, we hypothesize that;

H2: Perceived social support dimensions (parents, teachers, classroom mates, friends, and university) positively affect professional efficacy.

Professional Efficacy and academic burnout

There are several factors that may reduce academic burnout among students such as professional efficacy (Yuniar & Pratiwi, 2023). In the past, professional efficacy was including as a dimension of burnout. However, recently, it is found that professional efficacy is predicting employee burnout. this because evidence has been accumulating that professional efficacy is a divergent factor from burnout syndrome (Beer, 2021). In support, Smetackova (2017) has examined the connection between burnout syndrome and self- efficacy among 2394 teachers at Czech grammar schools. The result indicated that there is a significant connection between teachers' self-efficacy and burnout. furthermore, the author found also there is a significant difference in the teachers affecting by burnout syndrome when they are low or high in self-efficacy in their profession at schools (Smetackova, 2017). Another study in Turkey, Gündüz (2012) has investigated the relationship between profession efficacy and academic burnout among 194 schools counselors. The results revealed that there is a significant relationship between counselors self-efficacy and academic burnout (Gündüz, 2012). So based on the evidence mentioned, we proposed that;

H3: Professional efficacy has negatively affected academic burnout of university students.

The mediating effect of professional efficacy

Professional efficacy is considered as an important resource that help students to avoid the negative impact of burnout syndrome. This evidence is proven practically in literature (Firdausi

et al., 2023; Gündüz, 2012). According to conservation of resource (COR) theory, individual when gain some resources that will help him/her to avoid other resources (Hobfoll et al., 2018). So in this case, when students are become more self-efficient about their study, they will gain more ability to avoid the effect of burnout. Therefore, we propose that professional efficacy can play a significant mediator on the relationship between social support and academic burnout due to the theory and practice. First, based on the theory of Baron and Kenny (1986) says when the direct relationship is providing consistent results among scholarly work, then it will be possible to add a mediating variable (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Second, the previous results showed that there is a connection between social support and professional efficacy and also there is relationship between professional efficacy and burnout (Leah-Warren et al., 2012; Smetackova, 2017; Yuniar & Pratiwi, 2023). Hence, and due to the above mentioned evidence we can hypothesize that;

Professional efficacy has a mediating effect on the relationship between social support and academic burnout.

Conservation of Resource (COR) Theory

There are different types of resources which have been indicated by the theory of COR in the seminal work of Hobfoll and his colleagues (Hobfoll et al., 2018). For example, at university the students need the teachers, colleagues, friends, and peers' support, while, at home he/she needs the support of his/her parents, and family in general. According to Hobfoll, when individual gains a resource will loss other resource (Hobfoll, 2001). This means, when a student gains the beauty of social support with all dimensions will loss his/her intention to burnout. Moreover, in line with the COR theory, social support is a conditional resource which mitigate and reduce the negative mental problems such as anxiety, strain, stress, or depression by improving the student's mind throughout the self-respect, self-perception, and self-efficacy (Ye et al., 2021). Therefore, the model of this study is posed based on the COR theory's assumptions. However, little research studied the role of COR assumptions for explaining the effect of social support on academic burnout consequences among university students.

Model of the Study

The model of this study is formed from three hypotheses for providing more specification for the phenomena under study.

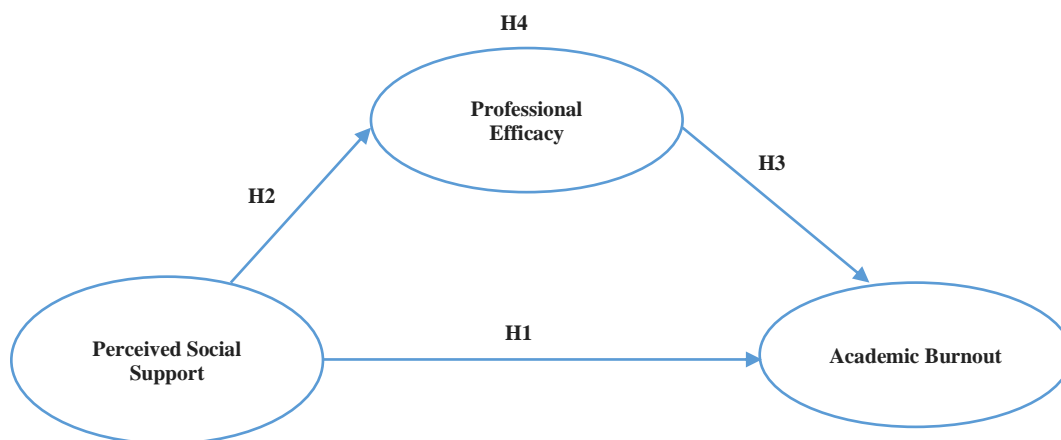


Figure 1: The model of the study

Methodology

Participants

The data employed in this study were collected from students in the university located in Saudi Arabia during the middle of the semester (October 2023). We expected to collect data from 200 samples (students) by referring the sample size rule of thumb according to Krejcie and Morgan (1970) and Cohen (1969) table of minimum samples size, this because the number of population around 1000. However, we managed to collect 298 questionnaires which were interesting for increasing the degree of accuracy and statistical power for expected results. The study participants are female students who are studying in King Khalid University in KSA. The numbers of subjects were two hundred and ninety-eight 298 (100%) females' students from different classes in business studies.

Measures

The questionnaire's items for measurement were administrated in Saudi Arabia. The technique of back-to-back translation has been applied to the questionnaire's items because the language of respondents is not English. And this is technique is recommended in literature for achieving a proper results (Brislin, 1970). While the final draft of items after verified by scholars have been allocated to the respondents. Moreover, the constructs' measures were specified in detail as follows.

Social Support

Social support was measured with the five dimensions (parents, teachers, classmates, close friends, people in my university) allocated into 60 items. Social Support Rating Scale (SSRS) developed by Malecki and his colleagues (C. K. Malecki et al., 2014). The SSRS is the most used and reliable tool for social support assessment in Gulf Arabic countries, more specifically in KSA where well applied in many previous studies there and in the worldwide as well. Further, the overall Cronbach's alpha was ranged between 0.94 – 0.98 (C. Malecki & Demaray, 2006; C. K. Malecki et al., 2014). Some examples of items were: "My parents show they are proud of me; my parents understand me".

Academic burnout

Construct of Students' academic burnout used to measure by the prominent scale of Maslach Burnout Inventory–Student Survey (MBI-SS) validated by Schaufeli and his colleagues since 2002 (Mohammed et al., 2019; Schaufeli et al., 2002). Schaufeli's scale consists of 15 items that are considered useful for measuring burnout in groups of students who are exhausted and stressed by learning demands. Moreover, the scale consists of three different dimensions (exhaustion, cynicism, and professional efficacy) which were expected to measure the burnout at workplace. However, there is strong argumentation among scholars about the dimension of professional efficacy which is not a main trigger for burnout this idea support by World Health Organization (Beer, 2021). Therefore, this study will measure students' burnout by two dimensions are exhaustion and cynicism, whereas professional efficacy was separated to work as a mediating variable to provide more interpretation for the relationship between social support and students' burnout. In line with the stated earlier, there are some examples for items: I feel emotionally drained by my studies, and I have become less interested in my studies since I enrollment at the university. The Cronbach's alpha ranged between 0.70 – 0.90.

Data analysis and results

Data has been prepared and cleaned in order to be ready for final analysis. Regarding the theory of testing, we conducted descriptive analysis for demographic data and Cronbach’s alpha for validating the items by using SPSS 23 which was 0.95 for 73 items. In other words, Internal consistency reliability (Cronbach’s alpha) exceeded 0.8 for all items which exceeded the threshold above 0.70. Then, we used AMOS 23, for running the two stages analysis based on Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) (Chin, 2010; F. Hair Jr et al., 2014; Hair et al., 2017); first, Confirmatory Factor analysis (CFA) which includes convergent and discriminant validity test for showing the reliability and validity of constructs under study. Next, the second test is called path analysis, this is mainly for hypotheses testing in order to come out with the results of the study based on the perception of samples.

Demographic Data

The demographic data of this study is focusing with female’s students were (n=298) 100%, and their ages between less than 20 years were (n=194) 65.1%, from 20 to 30 years were (n=102) 34.2%, and more than 30 were (n=2) 0.7%. Moreover, the students were studying in different levels of years; first year were (n=142) 47.7%, second year were (n=142) 47.7%, third year were (n=10) 3.4%, and fourth year were (n=4) 1.3% (see table no.1, for more details).

Table 1: Showing the Description of Sample

Items		Frequency	Percent%
Gender	Female only	298	100.0
	Less Than 20	194	65.1
Age	from 20-30	102	34.2
	More than 30	2	0.7
	Total	298	100.0
Year of Study	First Year	142	47.7
	Second Year	142	47.7
	Third Year	10	3.4
	Fourth Year	4	1.3
	Total	298	100.0

Reliability and validity analysis

According to (2010) Hair book, the test of constructs’ items reliability and validity is assessing by first; the CFA which consist Composite Reliability (CR), Average Variance Extracted (AVE), Maximum Shared squared Variance (MSV), and Maximum H Reliability (MaxR(H)). Next, Discriminant validity is also recommended for assessing the correlations among items in the construct itself and discriminant from other constructs in the model. Therefore, the results of reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity analysis are shown in Table 2. The composite reliability (CR) values for all items ranged from 0.768 to 0.943, which indicates good reliability of this study’s constructs convergent validity and discriminant validity were tested to verify the validity of all the items. As shown in Table 2, the values of both factor loading and average variance extracted (AVE) were higher than 0.5, which indicates the acceptable convergent validity of all items.

Meanwhile, all the items’ square root of AVE was higher than the Pearson correlation values in the off-diagonal constructs. Thus, the discriminant validity of the constructs was suitable,

and it gave us a green light to do farther analysis. In contrast, there are some items been deleted due to the low factor loading to improve the expected results.

Path analysis

Path analysis is considered as the second stage for assessing the model understudy by testing the direct and indirect relationship in the model. Accordingly, Table 3 shows the effect of social support on student burnout. This because, the statistical results showed the significant relationship between social support and student burnout ($\beta = -0.41$, $SE = 0.09$, $t = -4.664$, $p < 0.000$), in addition, social support has a statistical significant on professional efficacy as seen in the path analysis's Table ($\beta = 0.62$, $SE = 0.09$, $t = 6.778$, $p = 0.000$), finally, the relationship between professional efficacy and student burnout was statistically significant ($\beta = -0.34$, $SE = 0.07$, $t = -4.600$, $p = 0.000$). Moreover, according to Hu and Bentler (1999), the model fit indices were good; this is showing in the Table 5 as matching with the rule of thumbs for example RMSEA = 0.05 this is sound good because the cutoff points is should be less than 0.05, and other example is about P-closed/P-value is also should be less than 0.05, and in this model is 0.03.

Table 2: Showing the Convergent Reliability and Discriminant Validity

Variables	CR	AVE	MSV	MaxR(H)	Exhaust	Cynic	Prof Efficacy	People	Teacher	Class mates	Parents	Friends
Exhaustion	0.768	0.529	0.884	0.804	0.727							
Cynicism	0.863	0.615	0.884	0.888	0.940***	0.784						
Professional Efficacy	0.768	0.528	0.361	0.793	-0.386***	-0.504***	0.727					
People in University	0.925	0.608	0.547	0.903	-0.318***	-0.345***	0.413***	0.78				
Teachers	0.937	0.553	0.361	0.939	-0.442***	-0.414***	0.601***	0.588***	0.743			
Class mates	0.943	0.602	0.711	0.947	-0.301***	-0.272***	0.444***	0.740***	0.539***	0.776		
Parents	0.958	0.657	0.253	0.962	-0.299***	-0.324***	0.468***	0.433***	0.438***	0.503***	0.811	
Friends	0.943	0.627	0.711	0.949	-0.293***	-0.219***	0.375***	0.698***	0.448***	0.843***	0.396***	0.792

Note: Composite Reliability (CR), Average Variance Extracted (AVE), Maximum Shared Squared Variance (MSV), and Maximum H Reliability (MaxR(H))

Table 3: Showing Structural Path Model (Hypotheses testing)

Structural Path	Estimate	S.E.	T- value	P- Value	Supported
H1: Social Support--->Student Burnout	-0.409	0.088	-4.664	***	Yes
H2: Social Support--->Professional Efficacy	0.623	0.092	6.778	***	Yes
H3: Professional Efficacy--->Student Burnout	-0.34	0.074	-4.600	***	yes

Notes: *** = 0.000 significant; Estimate = standardized beta estimate; SE = standard error; LCI = lower confidence interval; UCI = upper confidence interval; T- Value = > 1.645; P- Value = < 0.05.

Table 4: Showing the result of Mediating effect of professional efficacy

Mediation analysis	Direct effect	Indirect effect	Total effect	Confidence intervals		p-value	Supported
				Lower	Upper		
H4: Social Support→professional Efficacy→ Student Burnout	-.107 (***)	-.186	-.293	-.408	-.118	.002	Yes

Note: ***= p < 0.000

Table 5: Showing the Structural Model’s Fit Indices

Fit indices	x2/df	GFI	AGFI	NFI	TLI	RMSEA	P-Value
Result	1.734	0.975	0.948	0.974	0.981	0.05	0.03
Threshold	<3.0	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9	<0.05	<0.05

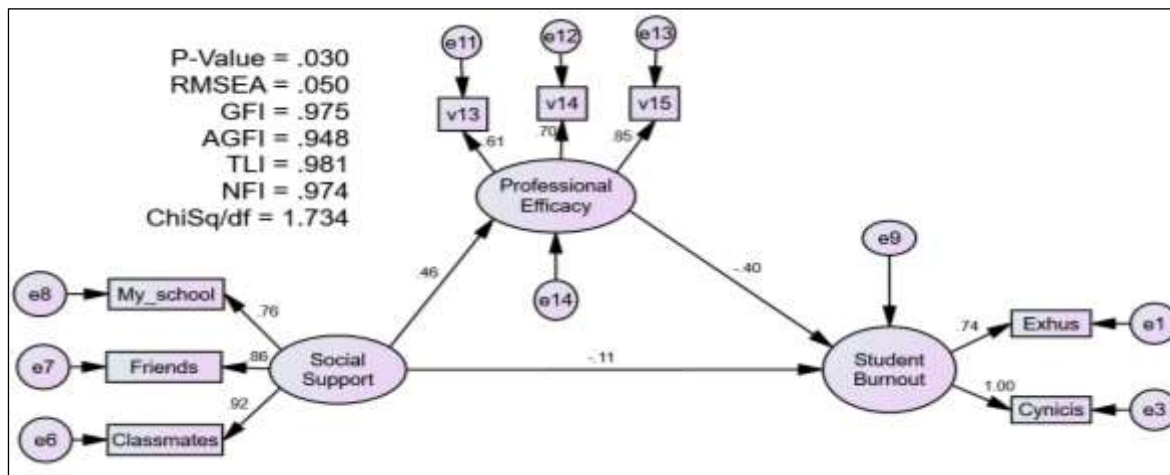


Figure 2: Structural Model

Therefore, the statistical results revealed that all hypotheses were significant and in line with the proposed one. In other words, H1 is supported the hypothesis was, social support has a negative effect on student burnout ($p = 0.000$, is less than 0.05), moreover, H2 is supported which is, there is a positive relationship between social support and professional efficacy ($P = 0.000$), the last one, the negative relationship between professional efficacy and student burnout was supported too ($p = 0.000$). Finally, the test of mediation effect of professional efficacy is showing that the significant mediation results due the statistical threshold is regarding the confidence intervals slots are in the same direction (i.e., Lower value = -0.408 & Upper = -0.118) and also the p -values was significant (i.e., 0.002) because it below 0.05 . Therefore, the professional efficacy mediates the relationship between social support and academic burnout. This means, when students have more self-efficient toward their study and classes they are less venerable or expose to be affect with burnout in academia. In other words, the presence of professional efficacy among students will assist them to avoid the academic burnout (see, Table 4).

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to study the mediating role of professional efficacy on the relationship between social support and academic burnout among females' students in KSA. The evidence showed that all of hypotheses of this study were supported. First, H1, the relationship between social support and student burnout, the statistical results confirmed that social support has a negative effect on student burnout. This results is in lined with previous work of (Malecki & Demaray, 2006; Ye et al., 2021) who found that social support is negatively affect burnout. Interestingly, the previous studies were found that all the social support dimensions (parents, teachers, friends, classmates, and people) have effect on student burnout, in contrast, in this study only three dimensions were supported (i.e., friends, classmates, and people at school), but the two dimensions (i.e., parents and teachers) were deleted due to the low factor loading. This shows that females' students are more affected by their university relationship through their networks and activities which are protecting them from engaging in the academic burnout. Second, H2, the relationship between social support and professional efficacy was supported. This means that social support has a positive effect on professional efficacy. In support, the previous scholarly work has shown the positive impact of social support on professional efficacy (Chan, 2018; Leah-Warren et al., 2012). Third, the third hypothesis, H3, is supported based on the statistical procedures which indicated that professional efficacy has negatively effect on student burnout. Hence, the prior evidences showed that there is a negative relationship between professional efficacy and burnout (Friedman, 2003; Gündüz, 2012). Finally, this study has confirmed the role of professional efficacy as a mediator variable between social support and academic burnout. This result is considered one of very rare studies that introduced professional efficacy as a mediator. This because the prior studies used it as a dimension of burnout (Gu et al., 2023) or as an outcome for burnout (Beer, 2021). However, we utilized as a mediation and the statistical results confirmed that. All in all, the results of this model are in line with some previous studies' results regardless of the dimensions of constructs beside provided an original contribution regarding introducing a professional efficacy as a mediator between social support and academic burnout in the field of academia.

Conclusion

The aim of this study is to investigate the mediating role of professional efficacy on the relationship between social support and academic burnout among females' students in KSA. The respondents who participated in the study were students in Saudi Universities. Further, the study relies on the quantitative approach for leading methodology of this study. The results

indicated that there are negative relationships between social support and professional efficacy on student burnout. However, there is a positive relationship between social support and professional efficacy. Further, the results also showed that professional efficacy played a significant mediator between social support and academic burnout. These findings are congruent with the previous studies as well as providing proper understanding for policy makers at universities in order to pay attention to the role of social support and professional efficacy for avoiding the consequences of academic burnout.

Limitations and future studies

One limitation of the study is the sample of the study. The participants in this study were females' students, although there are some aspects that related to male's student need to be presented in future studies. Another limitation is moderation variables; this study is focused on direct relationships and mediation variables; however, future studies may focus on finding the possible moderation effect on the academic burnout. Finally, this study uses quantitative methods, but future studies should attempt other methods such as qualitative approaches or mixed methods to make possible solutions and suggestions more reasonable.

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