

## Gender Differences in Academic Burnout Among Economics Education Students

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### Abstract

The study objective was to ascertain gender differences in academic burnout among Economics Education undergraduate students in South-East Nigeria. The study employed a cross-sectional research design. Respondents were a convenience sample of 550 Economics Education students from federal universities in the area of study. A self-report burnout questionnaire was used for data collection. Mean, standard deviation and t-test were used for analysis of data. The outcome of the study revealed that there is no significant mean difference in academic burnout among male and female undergraduate students in Economics Education. Thus, government through higher education regulatory bodies should intensify efforts in providing adequate facilities, good learning environment and manpower to encourage effective learning and reduce burnout symptoms among Economics Education students in South-East Nigeria.

**Keywords:** academic burnout, gender variation, students, economics education

### 1. Introduction

Economics Education is one of the social science education disciplines where students are enrolled to become teachers of Economics. The discipline is common among Nigerian universities where candidates are admitted into the faculty of education to study Economics education. Economics according to Eneasator (1996) is the branch of social science that deals with micro and macro levels of economic development. This means that Economics is the study interested in finding out the existing relationship in economic policies, expenditure, saving and wealth and allocation of scarce resources among others. Economics Education according to Becker (2001) is the branch of Economics that is concerned with two main areas of understanding; the current state of the economy, how to improve the economy, and new techniques of teaching and learning of Economics at various levels of educational institution. Becker further added that Economic Education is a product, process and science. Economics Education as a process engages her learners on the values and needed skills of becoming good educators. As a science, it means that it is an organized body of knowledge which is dependent on scientific proof and testing while as a product, it is concerned with skills or saleable attributes that would make a graduate of Economics Education employable at the labour market. Economics Education offers undergraduate students the functional and fundamental blocks for future financial success (Becker, 2000). The programme according to Nwadiani (2000) aims at producing skilled Economics graduate teachers with critical thinking and economic analytical skills for the effective implementation of Economics curriculum at secondary schools and to analyse and evaluate economic policies and development. Blaug (1972) stated that the introduction of Economics Education enables the discipline to produce sound Economics graduates who are properly informed with the principles of Economics and its applications in the classroom for teaching and learning purposes. This implies that Economics Education is aimed at producing graduate teachers who can employ essential teaching methods in instilling sound Economics knowledge and skills among their students. However, Nwadiani (1992) pointed out that the major challenge facing

the functionality of Economics Education is the nature of Economics learning environment, educational direction, resources allocation and control.

Students of Economics Education are exposed to a training scheme that enables them to get adjusted in facing labour market demand upon graduation. However, the nature of academic programme of a tertiary institution may expose students to academic burnout. Obradović, Pantić and Latas (2009) reported that students react differently in their learning environment because of different background that individual students are coming from and body makeup which defines action and reaction differently among individuals. Schaufeli, Martinez, Marques-Pinto, Salanova and Bakker (2002) opined that the academic pursuit of students is physically and emotionally demanding making students susceptible to burnout. Accordingly, the authors stated that academic burnout is the feelings of exhaustion coming from schoolwork, low desire to face academic task and wrong perception about academic task. Therefore, burnout studies in student population could be a key to understanding students' behaviours and influencing their future relationship with their alma mater (Neuman, 1990).

Academic burnout according to Oyoo, Mwaura and Kinai (2018) is an everyday challenge in the learning environment which negatively affects students' soundness, logicity and efficiency. The major symptoms of academic burnout are emotional exhaustion, cynicism and academic inefficiency (Schaufeli, Martinez, Marques-Pinto, Salanova, & Bakker, 2002). Emotional exhaustion is the result of the educational struggle of students in the academic environment while the frustration of students in the learning environment is known as cynicism which occurs as the inability to cope (Winga, Agak, & Ayere, 2016). Akbay and Akbay (2016) observed that academic burnout leads to students' poor academic performance. Norez (2017) asserted that burnout is a situation that can affect students in their learning environment. Academic burnout is a situation which comes from the regular loss of learners' learning resources and ability (Melamed, Shirom, Toker, Berliner & Shapira, 2006). Schaufeli and Enzmann (1998) believed that students can be faced with academic burnout when they are influenced by chronic strain.

The consequences of burnout are emotional tiredness, sleeplessness, memory disturbance, anxiety and depression (Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998; Grossi, Perski, Ekstedt, Johansson, Lindström, & Holm, 2005). Thus, inadequate sleep is an outcome of academic burnout among students (Ekstedt, Söderström, Åkerstedt, Nilsson, Søndergaard, & Perski, 2006). Increased case of sickness among students is as a result of severe burnout (Toppinen-Tanner, Ojajärvi, Väänänen, Kalimo, & Jäppinen, 2005). According to Maslach and Jackson (1981), academic burnout is in three folds; depersonalization, exhaustion and poor personal accomplishment. Students' burnout according to Schaufeli et al. in Zhang, Gan and Chfam (2007) is the tiredness resulting from an educational task, psychological tiredness, and poor attitude to educational task and inability of students to reproduce what has been taught. Students' academic burnout is a concerned area in higher education because it stimulates students' primary behaviours (Yang, 2004). The fundamental cause of academic burnout can be best described with internal and external factors. The internal factors comprise of the emotional or psychological state of an individual while external factors consist of environmental factors including lack of resources in managing or taking academic responsibilities (Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004).

Considering postulations from scholars, academic burnout may vary when viewed from a gender lens. Ronen and Pines (2008) asserted that there is a gender variation in burnout among men and women engineers as burnout is at a higher level in women than men. Weckwerth and Flynn (2006) reported that males had lower academic burnout than their female counterparts. However, Maccacaro et al. (2011) in a study of 1604 respondents found that males had a higher level of burnout than females. Male dentist students were reported to have a high score when compared with female dentist students (Te-Brake et al., 2003). There is increasing number of studies on student burnout in different disciplines (e.g. Pavlakis & Kaitelidou, 2012; Skodova, Lajciakova, & Banovcinova, 2017; Stoliker & Lafreniere, 2015; Yang & Farn, 2005). In Nigeria, most of the student burnout studies have been interventional in approach while the cross-sectional studies have been limited to students in other disciplines (e.g. Ezenwaji et al., 2019; Igbokwe et al., 2019; Nwefuru, et al. 2018; Ogbuanya et al., 2018). Hence, the research main purpose was to ascertain gender differences in academic burnout among Economics Education students in federal universities in South-East Nigeria. In a specific term, the research seeks to investigate the mean difference in academic burnout among male and female Economics Education students in federal universities in South-East Nigeria.

### *1.1 Research Question*

What is the mean difference in academic burnout among male and female Economics Education students enrolled in federal universities in South-East Nigeria?

### 1.2 Hypothesis

The hypothesis below was raised and tested at 0.05 probability level.

There is no significant mean difference in academic burnout among male and female students enrolled in Economics Education programme in federal universities in South-East Nigeria.

## 2. Method

This cross-sectional research was carried out in federal universities in South-East, Nigeria. Economics Education undergraduate students in South-East Nigeria were the study population. The study respondents were a convenience sample of 650 Economics Education undergraduate students from five federal universities in the study area. Both male and female Economics Education undergraduate students were included in the study. Data was collected using Oldenburg Burnout Inventory-Student (OLBI-S) of sixteen items (Ries, Xanthopoulou, & Tsaousis, 2015) which has two subscales (exhaustion and disengagement). The internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) of the inventory was 0.76 for the exhaustion subscale and 0.73 for the disengagement subscale. The inventory was used for data collection with the assistance of three research assistants. The copies of the inventory were distributed to the respondents and retrieved immediately after filling. Mean, standard deviation and t-test were used to analyze the data collected. The hypothesis was tested at .05 probability level.

## 3. Results

### Research Question

What is the mean difference in academic burnout among male and female Economics Education students enrolled in federal universities in South-East Nigeria?

Table 1. Mean difference in academic burnout among male and female students enrolled in economics education programme

Gender		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Exhaustion	Male	313	2.65	0.36
	Female	337	2.64	0.35
Disengagement	Male	313	3.02	0.38
	Female	337	3.01	0.37

Result in Table 1 showed that male Economics education students had a mean exhaustion score of 2.65 with a standard deviation of 0.36 while female Economics education students had a mean exhaustion score of 2.64 with a standard deviation of 0.35. For disengagement, male Economics Education students had 3.02 with a standard deviation of 0.38 while female students had a mean disengagement score of 3.01 with a standard deviation of 0.37.

### Hypothesis

There is no significant mean difference in academic burnout among male and female students enrolled in Economics Education programme in federal universities in South-East Nigeria.

Table 2. Independent samples test of significant mean difference in academic burnout among male and female students enrolled in economics education programme in Federal Universities in South-East Nigeria

Gender	N	M±SD	t	Df	Sig.	Mean Difference	95% CI
Male	313	2.84±0.37	.214	648	0.16	.00659	-.048, .061
Female	337	2.83±0.36					

M±SD=Mean, Standard Deviation; N=Number of Respondents, CI=Confidence Interval.

Result in Table 2 showed that there is no significant mean difference in academic burnout among male and female students enrolled in Economics Education programmes in federal universities in South-East Nigeria,  $t(648) = .214$ ,  $p = 0.16$ , 95%CI = -.048,.061. Therefore, the null hypothesis was not rejected.

#### 4. Discussion

The study investigated gender differences in academic burnout among Economics Education students in federal universities in South-East Nigeria. The results showed that there is no significant gender difference in academic burnout among Economics Education students. The findings of Adekola (2012) also agreed that there is no burnout difference between males and females. However, Te-Brake et al. (2003) reported that male undergraduate students score more on the depersonalization compare to female students while no gender variation was found on emotional exhaustion and personal accomplishment. Purvanova and Muros (2010) reported that slightly, females were found to be more emotionally exhausted than males; somewhat, males were found to be more depersonalized than females. In the other hand, Maccacaro et al. (2011) reported that male students score more on burnout than in female students. Weckwerth and Flynn (2006) revealed that male students score significantly higher than female students on the burnout index of depersonalization while female students scored low on personal accomplishment than male students. Nowack and Hanson (2003), and McCarthy, Pretty and Catano (2006) reported that burnout negatively predicts the performance of students of tertiary institutions. Stewart, Lam, Betson, Wong and Wong (1999) reported that academic task of learning among students in most cases turn out to burnout. Thus, government through higher education regulatory bodies should intensify efforts in providing adequate facilities, good learning environment and manpower to encourage effective learning and reduce burnout symptoms among Economic Education students in South-East Nigeria.

#### 5. Conclusion

It is concluded that there is no gender differences in academic burnout among university students enrolled in Economics Education programme in South-East Nigeria. Thus, government through higher education regulatory bodies should intensify efforts in providing adequate facilities, good learning environment and manpower to encourage effective learning and reduce burnout symptoms among Economic Education students in South-East Nigeria.

#### Competing Interests Statement

The authors declare that there are no competing or potential conflicts of interest.

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