

ACADEMIC BURNOUT AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN MONTENEGRO: PERFECTIONISM AND EMOTION REGULATION

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Abstract

Perfectionism and emotion regulation have been increasingly recognized as important psychological constructs related to academic burnout, a phenomenon that poses a growing challenge to students' well-being and academic functioning. The Burnout Assessment Tool (BAT), originally developed for occupational settings, has also been adapted for assessing academic burnout among university students (BAT-S). Within the Study Demands-Resources framework, academic burnout is conceptualized as a state of exhaustion characterized by extreme tiredness, reduced emotional and cognitive functioning, and mental distancing from academic work. The aim of the present study was to examine the contribution of perfectionism and emotion regulation to academic burnout among students in Montenegro. A sample of 181 students from several universities in Montenegro participated in the study. The instruments included the Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (FMPS; 35 items, 5-point Likert scale), the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ; 18 items, 5-point Likert scale), and the student version of the Burnout Assessment Tool (BAT-S; 34 items, 5-point frequency scale ranging from *never* to *always*, with higher scores indicating more frequent experience of burnout symptoms), along with a set of socio-demographic questions. The results indicated a strong positive correlation between perfectionism and academic burnout ($r = .66, p < .001$), as well as an even stronger association between difficulties in emotion regulation and burnout ($r = .74, p < .001$). Regression analyses showed that both perfectionism and emotion regulation significantly predicted burnout levels, with emotion regulation accounting for a larger proportion of explained variance. Furthermore, students reporting greater difficulties in emotion regulation scored significantly higher on the BAT compared to those who regulated their emotions more effectively. Overall, the findings suggest that while perfectionistic tendencies contribute to vulnerability, difficulties in emotion regulation play a more central role in the development and severity of academic burnout. The results highlight the importance of preventive and educational interventions aimed at strengthening adaptive emotion regulation strategies and promoting realistic academic expectations. Such efforts may contribute to reducing burnout risk, improving students' psychological well-being, and fostering healthier academic environments.

Keywords: *Perfectionism, emotion regulation, academic burnout, university students, Montenegro.*

1. Introduction

Montenegro has undergone profound transitions and structural changes across all spheres of life since the 1990s. The country was granted candidate status for European Union membership in 2010 (European Commission, n.d.). Higher education has likewise been substantially reformed over the past two decades, particularly following the country's participation in the Bologna Process and its accession to the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), as reflected in the Law on Higher Education (Vlada Crne Gore, 2022). Within this framework, which conceptualizes full-time study as equivalent to an 8-hour working day, students face increased academic demands and heightened pressures related to academic success and future employability.

The contemporary academic environment is further characterized by continuous assessment and high performance expectations. Consequently, university students are exposed to numerous stressors that may negatively affect their psychological well-being. One of the most frequently studied psychological outcomes associated with academic stress is academic burnout (Schaufeli et al., 2002; Walburg, 2014).

Academic burnout is typically defined as a psychological syndrome consisting of emotional exhaustion, cynicism toward academic tasks, and reduced academic efficacy. Previous research has demonstrated that burnout is associated with lower academic motivation, poorer academic performance, and increased risk of psychological difficulties among students (Maslach et al., 2001; May et al., 2015).

Among the psychological factors associated with burnout, perfectionism has received considerable attention. Perfectionism refers to the tendency to set excessively high personal standards accompanied by critical self-evaluation (Frost et al., 1990). Contemporary research commonly distinguishes between adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism. While adaptive perfectionism may foster motivation and persistence (Frost et al., 1990), maladaptive perfectionism is characterized by excessive concern over mistakes, doubts about actions, and fear of negative evaluation, which can increase vulnerability to stress and burnout (Zhang et al., 2007). Empirical studies indicate that maladaptive perfectionism is associated with higher levels of academic stress and burnout among university students (Hill & Curran, 2016).

Emotion regulation represents another important factor associated with students' psychological adjustments. Emotion regulation refers to the processes through which individuals influence which emotions they experience and how they express them (Bargh & Williams, 2007). According to the process model of emotion regulation, individuals use different strategies to manage emotional responses, such as cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression (Gross, 1998). Effective emotion regulation strategies may help students cope with academic demands, whereas difficulties in emotional regulation may intensify stress and emotional exhaustion (Gross & Thompson, 2007; Seibert et al., 2017).

Although academic burnout has been extensively studied internationally, research examining the combined effects of perfectionism and emotion regulation among university students in Southeast Europe remains limited. In particular, empirical evidence focusing on students in Montenegro is scarce, highlighting a notable gap in the research literature. Addressing this gap may contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the psychological risk and protective factors associated with academic burnout, particularly within underrepresented educational and socio-cultural contexts.

The present study is grounded in the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) framework (Bakker et al., 2004) further extended through the Study Demands-Resources (SD-R) framework. According to this model, burnout arises when academic demands exceed available personal resources (Bakker et al., 2004; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Within this model, maladaptive perfectionism can be conceptualized as an additional psychological demand, whereas effective emotion regulation may serve as a personal resource that buffers against academic burnout. Therefore, the aim of this study was to examine the relationship between perfectionism, emotion regulation, and academic burnout among university students in Montenegro.

2. Design

The study employed a quantitative cross-sectional research design aimed at examining relationships between perfectionism, emotion regulation, and academic burnout among university students. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire consisting of standardized psychological scales and demographic questions.

This research design enabled the analysis of associations between the examined psychological variables and the identification of potential predictors of academic burnout. The design was appropriate for examining individual differences in psychological characteristics and their relationship with burnout symptoms in the academic context.

3. Objectives

The main objective of this study was to examine the relationship between perfectionism, emotion regulation, and academic burnout among university students in Montenegro.

More specifically, the study aimed to:

- Examine whether perfectionism significantly predicts burnout,
- Examine the influence of emotion regulation on academic burnout,
- Explore whether there are differences in burnout levels between students with different levels of emotional regulation

Based on these objectives, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H1: Perfectionism has a significant effect on academic burnout among students.

H2: Difficulties in emotion regulation predict academic burnout

H3: There is a difference in burnout levels between students with higher and lower emotion regulation abilities.

4. Methods

4.1. Participants and procedure

The study was conducted on a sample of 181 university students from different universities in Montenegro. Participants were recruited through an online survey distributed through academic networks. Participation in the study was voluntary and anonymous, and respondents were informed about the purpose of the research before completing the questionnaire. The survey of standardized psychological scales and a set of socio-demographic questions.

4.2. Instruments

Three standardized instruments were used in the study.

The Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (FMPS) was used to measure multiple dimensions of perfectionism, including concern over mistakes, personal standards, parental expectations, parental criticism, doubts about actions, and organization.

The Emotional Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ) was used to assess individual differences in emotion regulation strategies, particularly cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression.

Academic burnout was measured using the Burnout Assessment Tool (BAT), which measures symptoms of burnout including emotional exhaustion, mental distance from academic activities, cognitive impairment, and emotional impairment.

In addition to these scales, socio-demographic variables such as age, gender, and academic performance were collected.

4.3. Data analysis

Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to examine the distribution of the main variables. Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to examine relationships between perfectionism, emotion regulation, and burnout. Regression analyses were used to determine the predictive role of perfectionism and emotion regulation in explaining academic burnout among students.

5. Results

5.1. Description of the sample

Descriptive analyses indicated that students demonstrated moderately high levels of perfectionism ($M=3.53$, $SD=0.65$) and moderate to relatively high levels of emotion regulation ($M=3.62$, $SD=0.60$). Academic burnout scores indicated a moderate level of burnout symptoms ($M=3.45$, $SD=0.72$).

The majority of students reported spending between five and seven hours per day on academic activities such as studying and attending lectures. Regarding academic performance, most students reported relatively high-grade averages, with the largest proportion of students having an average grade between 8.0 and 8.99.

Approximately 71.8% of students reported that they had never experienced burnout, while smaller proportions reported experiencing burnout before the pandemic (2.8%), during the pandemic (5.0%), or after the pandemic (20.4%).

5.2. Relationship between perfectionism, emotion regulation, and burnout

Correlation analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between perfectionism and academic burnout ($r=0.661$, $p<0.01$). This indicates that higher levels of perfectionism are associated with higher levels of burnout among students.

A simple linear regression analysis showed that emotion regulation also significantly predicted academic burnout ($F(1,179) = 211.043$, $p<0.001$), explaining 54.1% of the variance ($R^2=0.541$). These results indicate that difficulties in emotion regulation are a particularly strong predictor of burnout symptoms.

An independent samples t-test further showed that students with greater difficulties in emotion regulation reported significantly higher burnout scores ($t = -8.519$, $p<0.001$).

5.3. Predictors of academic burnout

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine additional predictors of burnout. The overall model was statistically significant ($F(8,171) = 7.374$, $p<0.001$) and explained 25.7% of the variance in academic burnout ($R^2=0.257$).

The results indicated that daily academic workload was a significant positive predictor of burnout, while variables such as university, year of study, and average grade were not statistically significant predictors.

These findings suggest that the intensity of academic demands and students' emotional coping capacities play an important role in explaining burnout.

6. Discussion

The results of this study indicate that both perfectionism and emotion regulation represent important psychological factors associated with academic burnout among university students.

The findings revealed a strong positive correlation between perfectionism and academic burnout, suggesting that students with stronger perfectionistic tendencies are more likely to experience burnout symptoms. Maladaptive aspects of perfectionism, such as excessive concern over mistakes and self-criticism, may intensify academic pressure and increase emotional exhaustion.

In addition, difficulties in emotion regulation were strongly associated with higher levels of burnout. Students who reported greater difficulties managing emotional responses demonstrated significantly higher levels of academic burnout. These findings suggest that emotion regulation plays an important role in students' ability to cope with academic stress.

From the perspective of the Study Demands-Resources framework, maladaptive perfectionism may function as an additional academic demand that increases psychological strain. Emotional regulation may represent a personal resource that helps students manage academic challenges and reduce the risk of burnout.

These findings are consistent with previous research emphasizing the importance of psychological resources in coping with academic stress and maintaining students' mental health.

7. Conclusions

The present study examined the relationship between perfectionism, emotion regulation, and academic burnout among university students in Montenegro. The findings indicate that both perfectionism and emotion regulation significantly contribute to the development of academic burnout. In particular, difficulties in emotion regulation appear to represent a strong predictor of burnout symptoms among students. These results highlight the importance of preventive programs aimed at strengthening adaptive emotional regulation strategies and reducing maladaptive perfectionistic tendencies among students.

Future research should further examine these relationships in larger and more diverse samples and explore interventions that may help reduce burnout and improve students' psychological well-being and academic functioning.

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