

THE STUDY OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF POSITIVE-THINKING SKILLS ON REDUCTION OF STUDENTS' ACADEMIC BURNOUT IN FIRST GRADE HIGH SCHOOL MALE STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the present study is to examine the effectiveness of positive-thinking skills on reduction of first grade high school students' academic burnout at Zirkoooh city. This research is a pilot one with the plan of pre-test and post-test. Among the male students of Zirkoooh city high schools, 2 high schools selected through cluster sampling and by administering Academic Burnout Questionnaire, 40 students who obtained higher scores in academic burnout were randomly divided into two groups as experimental and control groups (each group consists of 20 students). Positive-thinking teaching was executed for experimental group for 10 sessions, and control group was in the expectation list. Data were analyzed using analysis of one-variable covariance (ANOVA). ANOVA analysis showed that there is a significant relationship between two groups in academic burnout and its component ($p < 0.01$). Findings indicate that teaching positive-thinking has been effective in reduction of academic burnout and its components (academic exhaustion, academic cynicism, and academic inefficacy).

KEYWORDS: Positive-Thinking, Academic Burnout, Academic Exhaustion, Academic Cynicism, Academic Inefficacy

One of the most important objectives of the Education is to create a ground for multi-dimensional development and training the healthy, effective and responsible human beings to play the role in individual and social life. Since students, as the principal pillar of the country's educational system, have special role and position in achieving the educational system objectives, paying attention to this stratum in terms of teaching and training causes the more flourish and fertility of the community's training and educating system. However, a few number of students, who enter into the education system, can flourish their talents and become success in this field and show good academic performance. One of the most important and effective factors in students' educational process is their psychological factors; and one of the main psychological properties that influences on academic performance is academic burnout.

Yang (2005) defines academic burnout as "in learning process, due to educational period stresses, students show the weight resulting from educational period or other psychological components that cause the state of exciting exhaustion, inclination toward lack of attention to individual identity (personality loss) and feeling less personal progress".

The concept of exhaustion was generalized by development of Maslach inventory (Maslach and Jackson, 1981). Most studied done about exhaustion have been in

situations such as sellers (Sand and Miyazaki, 2000), teachers (Greenglass et al., 2001), nurses (Zallars et al., 2000) and psychologists (Sandoval, 1993) that are known as job burnout (Maslach and Jackson, 1984). However, this burnout variable has been expanded to educational situations and contexts that is known as academic burnout (Salmela-Aro et al., 2008).

According to demands-resources model (Skaflly and Baker, 2004), high and non-returning energy consumption causes to lose individual's saved energy. If the imbalance between energy consumption and regenerating it continue for a long time, burnout occurs. According to demands-resources model, we can say that two processes occur in academic burnout: from one side, in new academic period, teachers' demands from students to do more study increase (Shanahan, 2000), and from other side, students, due to awareness of individual differences, do not have the enough motivational sources to face with these academic demands (Wigfield et al., 2006). These two processes cause to generate mental pressure and finally academic burnout. The recent etymological researches show that in most schools, mental pressures related to school and health problems related to mental pressures of education have been extraordinarily increased (OECD, 2009); specially the adolescent students have new educational transition, that is, have entered into higher grade, this educational

transition causes mental pressure and academic burnout, therefore this alarming trend should be considered seriously (Salmela-Aro et al., 2008).

Academic burnout has obvious and negative consequences such as depression, negativism, educational loss, (Parker, 2001) and also academic burnout can influence on the rate of learning, mental health, and less domination on professional duties and causes the reduction of motivation to do demands and requirements of the education setting and higher absence (Rudman and Gustavsson, 2012). Mikaeili, Afrooz and Gholizadeh (2012) state that the academic burnout has three components: academic exhaustion, academic cynicism, academic inefficacy.

Therapists to reduce academic burnout have used different approaches and treatments. One of the methods that seem effective in reducing academic burnout is positive thinking. Positive thinking is an approach and general orientation about living; in other words, positive thinking is to enjoy the appropriate internal balance and maintaining quiescence and relaxation in confronting problems in order the individual can maintain his/her personal motivation and act appropriately and have a satisfactory sense of the action s/he does. Positive thinking skill includes fighting against negative thoughts, changing mental images, strengthening self-esteem, self-assertion, realization of potential powers and positive living (Quilliam, translated by Barati et al., 2007).

Positive thinking interventions emphasize on improvement of the individual abilities to confront with negative situations and focus on positive skills (Stallard, 2008). The purpose of teaching these skills is that students can achieve a realistic attitude toward self and life through them and make an accurate judgment about their real problem. In fact, teaching these skills help students to have acceptable self-esteem and following it, they have an effective and correct relation, and face the life purposively, and when arising problems by keeping spirit take correct decisions, and finally spend the life stages with peace and joy (Raeisi, 2003).

Teaching positive thinking skills to people, especially children and adolescences to strengthen and improve positive relation with self, positive relations with others and world life and also to increase their self-esteem and academic success is very effective and useful. Teaching these skills to students helps them to identify themselves and be curious about their opinions about

self and the world. In teaching optimism and positive thinking, students are encouraged to recognize their good and positive experiences (Barkhordi, Refahi and Farahbakhsh, 2010). Therefore, we expect that by these components in positive thinking approaches, participants in these teachings experience less academic burnout.

Application of positive thinking in psychotherapy by Khodayarifard (2004) indicates that intervention based on strengthening personal positive understandings could result in increasing the individual's self positive descriptions and the referents enjoy more self-esteem, family maladjustments are decreased significantly, and the referents' depression are improved. Therefore, in order students have positive spirits about themselves, the others and world, and identify themselves useful and effective and can spend the life with optimistic thought, more realistic attitude and certainty, the need to teach an train them is felt more than any other time in order to learn with hope and motivation. Smith and Troth (1975) show that teaching positive thinking is effective in progress motivation. Froman (2009) believes that positive emotions change the thinking and behavioral characteristics of human beings toward a positive trend. Seligman, Steen, Park and Peterson (2005) found that teaching positive-therapy for a week increased the individuals' happiness and removed the symptoms of depression.

Snyder (2005) showed that positive thinking interventions cause the improvement of self-esteem and meaning of life as well as reduction of anxiety and depression. Pearson (2008) in his research showed that the hope has negative relationship with anxiety. They found that individuals with high level of hope and those who enjoy supports and strategies of fighting against derangement, the anxiety is lower. Cooper (2008) indicates that the referents' positive thinking during treatment sessions makes difference both in terms of quality and quantity.

As mentioned, academic progress is one of the main important objectives in every educational system, so studying factors such as academic burnout that is an obstacle for realization of that objective seems necessary. Also, since about academic burnout and the effective of positive thinking on it, fewer studies have been done in the country, therefore, the results of the present research can have a special importance in increasing our knowledge in this field. The most important hypothesis of

the present research is: teaching positive thinking skills is effective in reducing the rate of academic burnout and its components in students.

METHODOLOGY

The method of this research is an experiment with scheme of pretest-posttest with a control group. The statistical population of the present research includes all male students of first grade high school in Zirkooh city in academic year 2013-2014 (1392-1393 in Iranian calendar). Sampling method is cluster sampling, so that at first stage, among three education region, one region was

selected randomly, and then among the high schools of that region, 2 high schools were selected. Next, academic burnout questionnaire was administered and according to obtained scores, among those who had acquired the highest scores in academic burnout questionnaire, 40 individuals were selected randomly, and are divided randomly into two groups of experimental and control groups (the number of subjects in each group was 20). The experimental group was trained for 10 sessions 2 hour per each session for positive thinking teachings, while no intervention was done in control group. Finishing the teaching, post-test was administered for both groups.

A brief description about teaching sessions of positive thinking

Sessions	A brief description about the contents of the sessions
First session	Introducing, explaining the group regulations, and some other explanations about thinking
Second session	The basic principles in positive thinking; recognizing the symptoms and signs of positive thinking; analysis of the individuals attitude
Third session	Fighting against negative thoughts; changing mental images
Fourth session	Using language to state informative words; rethinking about beliefs; maintaining positive behaviors
Fifth session	To love the self; respect to self, internal enemies
Sixth session	Creating optimism, creating elation, creating self-esteem; goal-selecting
Seventh session	Control of emotions and sensations (removing guilt-feeling, control of anger, fighting against anxiety, avoidance from jealousy, self-assertion)
Eighth session	Basic steps for self-assertion; saying "no"
Ninth session	Creating a positive environment, maintaining health and its effect in positivism, establishing good relations with the others
Tenth session	Fighting against routine problems of life, control of the life events

RESEARCH TOOLS

To measure this variable, school burnout questionnaire was used (Salmela-Aro, Kiuru, Leskinen and Nurmi et al, 2009). The compilers obtained the items of this questionnaire through factor analysis. This questionnaire consists of 9 items and 3 factors as following: the first factor is exhaustion of school activities including 4 items; the second factor is cynicism (pessimism) toward the concept of school including 3 items; and the third factor is to feel inefficacy at school consists of 2 items. The options were designed and ranked as completely agree (6), agree (5), partially agree (4),

disagree (3), partially disagree (2), and completely disagree (1). Salmela-Aro et al (2009) calculated the Cronbach's alpha of this questionnaire for exhaustion of school activities as 0.80, for cynicism toward the concept of school as 0.80 and for feeling inefficacy at school as 0.67. This questionnaire was translated for the first time by Savari and Bashlideh (2009) and administered on grade three high school students and its Cronbach's alpha was calculated as 0.74. In the present paper, Cronbach's alpha for whole test was 0.78.

FINDINGS

a) Statistical description of variables and indices in the groups

In this section, first a statistical description of variables and indices is done, and then the likely

differences of groups in different measuring stages are studied. Based on mean and standard deviation of scores, and different aspects of students academic burnout in pre- and post-test in both experimental and control group are reported.

Table 1: Descriptive information of the level of academic burnout and its component based on separate stage of measuring in groups

Variables	Group		Number	Mean	Standard deviation
Academic burnout	Experimental	Pre-test	20	35.50	7.95
		Post-test	20	26.40	6.79
	Control	Pre-test	20	28.50	6.63
		Post-test	20	30.25	7.12
Academic exhaustion	Experimental	Pre-test	20	14.55	4.11
		Post-test	20	12.30	3.20
	Control	Pre-test	20	11.70	7.46
		Post-test	20	12.40	3.39
Academic cynicism	Experimental	Pre-test	20	11.30	1.74
		Post-test	20	8.60	2.37
	Control	Pre-test	20	9.45	1.13
		Post-test	20	10.20	3.38
Academic inefficacy	Experimental	Pre-test	20	7.65	2.96
		Post-test	20	5.65	2.71
	Control	Pre-test	20	7.35	2.76
		Post-test	20	7.65	2.46

Descriptive information of the rate of academic burnout and its components has been presented in table 1 separately as pre-test and post-test in experimental and control groups. As we can see, the mean of experimental group at post-test shows a reduction to pre-test in all components of academic burnout.

b) Statistical analysis of research hypotheses

Inferential statistic includes the main part of statistical analysis; in the present research, the effect of teaching positive thinking skills on reducing the aspects of first grade high school students' academic burnout in Zirkooh city has been studied and the hypotheses have

been designed according to research subject that to measure them, covariance statistical test has been used, and at all stages SPSS software has been used.

In applying parametric statistical methods, first the assumptions of the test must be confirmed in order to be able to use the intended test; therefore, firstly the assumptions of covariance statistical method were studied in different groups for "independence of observations, normal distribution of dependent variable, homogeneity of variances, linearity of the relationship between dependent variable and covariance, and homogeneity of regression gradients". Since all these assumptions are satisfied,

covariance analysis test was administered and the results have been reported in table 2.

Table 2: Results of covariance analysis test in research variables

variables	Statistical index	ss	Df	F	sig	Effect size	Test power
Academic burnout	Pre-test	910.83	1	24.82	0.0001	0.40	0.99
	Group	448.06	1	12.21	0.001	0.25	0.92
	Error	1357.71	37				
	Total	34509	40				
Academic exhaustion	Pre-test	240.82	1	40.11	0.001	0.49	1.00
	Group	38.19	1	6.34	0.02	0.15	0.69
	Error	222.18	37				
	Total	6564	40				
Academic cynicism	Pre-test	125.28	1	15.21	0.001	0.29	0.97
	group	63.14	1	7.66	0.009	0.17	0.77
	Error	304.73	37				
	Total	3990	40				
Academic inefficacy	Pre-test	22.10	1	3.69	0.06	0.09	0.42
	Group	50.24	1	8.39	0.006	0.18	0.81
	Error	221.44	37				
	Total	2019	40				

The results in table 2 show that by deleting the effect of pre-test variable and according to calculated F-coefficient, it is observed that there is a significant difference between scores modified means of academic burnout of all participants in terms of membership in experimental or control groups at post-test stage ($p < 0.05$). Therefore, according to obtained results in table 2, we conclude that the null hypothesis is rejected, and the use of teaching the positive thinking in participants in experimental group has had more effects in students' academic burnout than those of control group. The rate of this effect is practically 25%; that is, 25% of the whole variance or individual differences in students' burnout have been related to the teaching of the positive thinking. The results in the table 2 indicate that by deleting the effect of pre-test variable and according to calculated F-coefficient, it is observed that there is a significant

differences between scores modified mean of the aspect of participants' academic exhaustion in terms of membership in experimental or control groups at post-test stage ($p < 0.05$), therefore it can be concluded that the use of teaching the positive thinking in participants in experimental group has had more effects on academic exhaustion than those in the control group. The rate of this effect is practically 15%, that is, 15% of the whole variance or individual differences in the students' academic exhaustion have been related to the teaching of the positive thinking.

The results in table 2 show that by deleting the effect of pre-test variable and according to calculated F-coefficient, it is observed that there is a significant difference between scores modified means of academic cynicism of all participants in terms of membership in

experimental or control groups at post-test stage ($p < 0.05$). Therefore, it is concluded that the use of teaching the positive thinking in participants in experimental group has had more effects in students' academic cynicism than those of control group. The rate of this effect is practically 17%; that is, 17% of the whole variance or individual differences in students' cynicism have been related to the teaching of the positive thinking. The results in the table 2 indicate that by deleting the effect of pre-test variable and according to calculated F-coefficient, it is observed that there is a significant differences between scores modified means of the participants' academic inefficacy in terms of membership in experimental or control groups at post-test stage ($p < 0.05$). Therefore it can be concluded that the use of teaching the positive thinking in participants in experimental group has had more effects on students' academic inefficacy than those in the control group. The rate of this effect is practically 18%, that is, 18% of the whole variance or individual differences in the students' academic inefficacy have been related to the teaching of the positive thinking.

DISSCUSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of the present study has been to examine the effectiveness of positive-thinking skills on reduction of students' academic burnout. Findings show that teaching positive thinking has been effective in reduction of academic burnout and its components, that is, academic exhaustion, academic cynicism and academic inefficacy. Therefore, the research hypothesis has been accepted.

Most researches done in Iran and in the world have studied less the effect of positive thinking in academic burnout and its components, and research orientations have been more in the field of teaching positive thinking with variables such as creativity (Dastgheib, Alizadeh and Farokhi, 2012), self-esteem and happiness (Barkhori et al, 2010), progress motivation (Baran, 2011) and source of control (Sohrabi and Javanbakhsh, 2009; Shin, 2013; Snyder, 2005; Cooper, 2008). Since academic burnout has (indirect) correlation with progress motivation, self-esteem and happiness (Shin, 2013), therefore, the results of the present research is somewhat compatible with those of recent studies.

Erikson believes that, in learning process, teachers are able to induce hope and positive thinking in students. Positive thinking makes students able to do fantasy to learn about every imaginable thing; while by

teaching them, it is expected that they think about possible things. This induced pressure in teaching instead of enrichment interest in learning causes failure in students. Positive thinking has the capacity to renovate the interest in learning; thus, according to this finding in Erikson's (2000) study, we expect that the participants in positive thinking teachings experience less academic burnout.

Curry and Snyder (2001) reported that positive thinking and hope are obviously associated with performance and progress, and those who enjoy higher hope have better averages and sport performances than their result is in line with that of present research.

Also, individuals with higher hope and positive thinking are more creative in finding alternative ways to achieve their objectives and have higher motivation to persuade them. Importantly, they consider the barriers as challenges and believe that they are able to learn lessons from previous failures and successes to achieve future objectives. They choose objectives that need more attempts. They are certain about their goals and focus on them (Snyder, 2000).

In addition, Chan (2009) pointed out that positive thinking individuals not only enjoy achieving to target but also enjoy the process. Positive thinking individuals, by breaking down the huge purposes into small ones, are able to reach to the complex goals (Snyder and Taylor, 2000). Also the status of the need to high progress is associated with positive satisfaction and emotions resulting from attempting and predicting success in endeavors related to success; reversely, the status of the need to low progress is associated with defensive emotions and fear of failure resulting from predicting weak performance (Reeder, 2010). Therefore, according to this result in positive thinking, we expect that the participants in these trainings enjoy more academic efficacy and interest.

Despairing and negative thinking individuals, emphasizing on agent thought, have ineffective pathway. They become close to targets with negative emotions, have dual sensation, and instead of success focus on failure. Individuals with low hope face problems in producing thoughts, plans and steps toward the target (the thought of weak pathway). And often feel immobility, inability and lack of motive in persuading goals in them is obvious (Snyder, 2000).

The objective of positive thinking is to help patients to determine clear objectives and create several paths to achieve these objectives, and encourage them to follow their objectives and reframe the barriers as challenges to overcome them (Carr, 2004, translated by Pasha sharifi, Najafi Zand and Sanaei, 2006). It is obvious that hope is related to many fields of the life. Pearson (2008) showed that positive thinking is related to academic performance in guidance, high school and university students.

Based on the McClelland's theory of needs, individuals who in terms of progress are at high levels prefer to do relatively difficult tasks and have very good performance in doing them. When the likelihood of success and failure is equal, they are more likely to show stability. In addition, individuals with need to high progress are more responsible to do tasks and follow to find feedback about their performance (Ayers, 2010).

Academic burnout has obvious and negative consequences such as depression, negativism, school dropout (Parker et al, 2011); also academic burnout can influence on the level of learning, mental health, less dominant on professional duties and also can result in reduction of the motivation to do demands and necessities of education environment and high absence (Rudman and Gustavsson, 2012). Since the objective of positive thinking is to help patients to determine clear objectives and create several paths to achieve these objectives, and encourage them to follow their objectives and reframe the barriers as challenges to overcome them (Carr, 2004, translated by Pasha sharifi, Najafi Zand and Sanaei, 2006), therefore we expect the participants show fewer symptoms of academic burnout in teaching positive thinking.

Since the present research showed that teaching positive thinking is effective in reduction of academic burnout and its component, so it is recommended to therapists and school consultants to utilize these teachings (trainings) to reduce students' academic burnout. As the studied population of the present research were male students, so it is suggested the future researchers conduct a similar study on female students in order the results can be generalized.

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