The Effectiveness of Glasser's Control and Choice Theory Training on the Reduction of High School Students' Academic Burnout

Omid Mirzaee Fandokht[1], Mojtaba Salmabadi[2], Faeze Pardakhti[3], Marzieh Davoudi[4], Sayyed Mohammad Hosseini[5]

[1]MA in educational psychology, Faculty of Psychology and Education, Allameh Tabatab'i University, Tehran, Iran
[2] MA in Family Counseling, Faculty of Psychology and Education, Allameh Tabatab'i University, Tehran, Iran
[3]MA Student of Counseling, Faculty of Psychology and Education, Islamic Azad Neyshabur Branch, Iran
[4]MA in Educational Curriculum Faculty of Psychology and Education, Allameh Tabatab'i University, Tehran, Iran
[5]MA in Rehabilitation Counseling, Faculty of Psychology and Education, Allameh Tabatab'i University, Tehran, Iran

ABSTRACT

This study intended to examine the effectiveness of Glasser's control and choice theory on the reduction of high school students' academic burnout, using an experimental research method. Study participants were 700. Subjects classified into two groups of experimental and control was 30, selected by cluster random-assignment sampling. For data gathering, we used the Academic Burnout Scale. For data analysis, we used co-variance analysis for the two groups. After the conduction of intervention, the co-variance analysis test results showed significant difference between experimental and control groups ($P \leq 0.05$, F=6.73, df=1). It is concluded that Glasser's choice and control theory is effective on the reduction of high school students' academic burnout.

KEYWORDS: Academic Burnout, Control and Choice Theory, Glasser

INTRODUCTION

The 'education system' is considered as one of the fundamental resources of each country and culture, one of whose important tasks and goals is to provide a context for a comprehensive development of individuals, and educate healthy, efficient, and responsible citizens ready to play their roles in personal and social life. This very kind of education for citizens can be achieved by proper attention and investment. Accordingly, students who make up a large segment of every society's population, and spend a lot of their time in schools, naturally, need an atmosphere of scientific freshness and vitality. However, a few number of the students entering the education system every year, can take their talents to flourish, become successful in the field of education, and show a so-called good academic performance. So, if the schools fail to meet the needs of students in educational terms, they will cause reluctance or the so-called academic burnout among students. Yang & Farn (2005) in their study define academic or student burnout as "students in the learning process because of course stress, course load or other psychological factors cause a state of emotional exhaustion, a tendency of depersonalization, and a feeling of low personal accomplishment." Salmela-Aro, Kiuru, Pietikäinen, & Jokela, [1]define school burnout as consisting of exhaustion due to school demands, cynical, and detached attitude toward one's school, and feelings of inadequacy as a student. Academic or school burnout is a condition that occurs as a consequence of the constant pressure of attending school: thus the student in school -due to internal and external factors- feels a constantly repeated pressure, which eventually ends in a feeling of exhaustion. This in itself is a result of excessive exposure to academic permanent environmental stressors, which gradually take effect, and if the student continues to study in such a condition, academic burnout will be fixed [2].On the other hand, studies have shown that difficult educational conditions are effective in creating academic burnout [3]. Meier & Schmeck [4] believe that a permanent source of stress eventually leads to burnout. Burnout is sequel to the incapability of managing one's stress. Today, researchers agree that burnout is experienced by both school and university students [5].In this regard, there are some evidences that support the existence of burnout among school students [6].

According to many studies, it can be said that academic burnout in educational opportunities is characterized by three features: 1. *Exhaustion:* fatigue caused by permanent study requirements, 2. *Cynicism:* growth of pessimistic sense, distant attitude and indifference towards learning matters and materials, and 3. *Educational inefficacy:* a sense of educational ineffectiveness and poor personal academic achievement [7]. Academic burnout is

*Corresponding Author: Sayyed Mohammad Hosseini, MA in Rehabilitation counseling, Faculty of Psychology and Education, Allameh Tabatab'i University, Tehran, Iran.

also associated with excessive stress, long hours of working and education, concerns and worries about grades, doubts about the future, low-level control, low satisfaction with the imbalance between personal and professional life, and a low level of support from peers and friends[8]. Furthermore, the findings of some empirical researches on academic burnout suggest that it is correlated with significant behavioral and psychological problems such as depression, absenteeism and academic failure[9-10]. Student burnout can also lead to higher absenteeism, lower motivation to do required course work, higher percentage drop out at college and so on [11]. Zhang, Gan, & Cham (2007) have also suggested that negative perfectionism (doubts about actions, concerns over mistakes, etc.) were related to burnout symptoms while positive perfectionism (personal standards and organization) to academic engagement [12]. To escape academic reluctance, there are several solutions; Dornbusch, Ritter, et al [13] recognized parents encouragement helpful to solve the problem. Rayan [14] also found that students who see their teachers as their supporters are more willing to do school assignments. Midgley & Urdan [15]concluded in their study that students' perception of the classroom and the teacher can have a great impact on their motivation. Bandura [16] recognizes the important role of the peer group, and believe that adolescents with their feedbacks and evaluations taken from their peers, determine their behaviors.

On the other hand, one of the major approaches which has paid a specific attention to schools, students and teachers and has offered basic and practical solutions for students' academic achievement is Glasser's Choice Theory. In his book "Schools without Failure", Glasser argued the basic role of the interaction between teacher and students. He believes that teachers and students need to have an emotional connection and be involved in each other's issues. He considers empathy between teacher and students as one of the basic strategies for success in schools [17]. Glasser notes that the main obstacle is our current education system: A philosophy based on lack of affective relationships, lack of connection between academic contents and limited emphasis on thinking. Education must move towards a positive philosophy: A philosophy based on affective communication, content relationship, and thinking, otherwise we could not have many problems of failed students resolved[17]. The results of a study indicated that Glasser's theory is effective on coping with students in school. In this regard, a research by Mohsenzadeh and Mohammad (18) has shown that Glasser's reality therapy is effective on the reduction of students' academic negligence. In a research by Razimoradi, Etemadi and Naeemabadi (19) the results showed the effectiveness of Glasser's Choice Theory on the increase of students' coping ability. Another research conducted by Agedy and Etemadi (20) concluded that Glasser's Choice Theory is effective on the identity of school students. Reality therapy is Glasser's strategy for helping individuals to understand the basic reasons for their behavior and then to learn more effective strategies. Glasser[18] has also shown that Choice and Control Theory can be frequently and appropriately applied in schools. Glasser's theory consists of four basic steps: 1. Discovery of the wants and needs; 2. Identification of the recent behaviors used to meet those needs; 3. Assessment of the impact of those behaviors; 4. Planning of usable behaviors more likely to meet the needs [18]. We're choosing all our actions and thoughts, almost all of our feelings, and even the major part of our physiology indirectly. No matter how we feel bad, much of the interactions going on inside our body when suffering from a pain or a disease, are the indirect results of the actions and thoughts that have been or will be chosen by us, affected by our quality world [19].Choice theory considers that we have control over their lives, more than what we think. Unfortunately, a considerable portion of this control is not effective. The seed of all our misfortunes is sown in the years when we are dealing with people who believe that not only do they have discovered for themselves what is right, but also know what is good for others[19].

Based on the findings of different researches, it can be acknowledged that given the relatively high-frequency academic negligence among students, it is necessary for schools, parents and cultural officials to give students the opportunity to provide a suitable ground for their growth, increase their educational motivations and prevent their reluctance and burnout. Regarding the Glasser's emphasis on 'schools without failure' and his theory application on the improvement of academic failure -which has been directly and indirectly pointed out by different studies, this study intends to further explore the role of control theory in students' academic burnout and determine its effectiveness. Therefore, this study aims to examine the effectiveness of Glasser's control and choice theory on the reduction of academic burnout among high school students, and also seeks to answer the question that whether or not Glasser's theory is effective on academic burnout.

Research Hypothesis: Training Glasser's Control and Choice Theory is effective on the reduction of academic burnout.

METHOD AND PARTICIPANTS

This is a quasi-experimental study including a pre-post-test design with a control group. Accordingly, both experimental and control groups were tested twice. Before intervention, pre-test was implemented for both control and experimental groups. After 6 sessions of intervention, post-test was implemented once again. Study participants

were 700 high school students in Tehran, Iran. The sample consisted of 30 subjects selected by a multi-level cluster sampling. Thus, we selected two high schools from Tehran Educational District 8, and then some classes were randomly selected as clusters. Finally, after the homogenization of groups in terms of age, sex and educational level, 30 subjects were assigned by simple random sampling in control and experimental groups.

Research Instrument

School Burnout Inventory (SBI): We used Salmela-Aro, et al [10] School Burnout Inventory (SBI). The developers of the inventory made its items through factor analysis. The questionnaire consists of nine items and three factors. School-related burnout comprises three dimensions: (a) exhaustion at school composed of four items, (b) cynicism toward the meaning of school composed of three items, and (c) sense of inadequacy at school composed of two items. Respondents are asked to rate each of the items on a six-point Likert-type rating scale: (1) "strongly disagree", (2) "disagree to some extent", (3) "disagree", (4) "agree to some extent", (5) "agree", and (6) "Strongly agree". According to Salmela-Aro, et al[10] Cronbach's alpha for this scale by exhaustion at school was 0.80, by cynicism toward the meaning of school was 0.80, and by sense of inadequacy at school was 0.67. The questionnaire was translated into Persian by Savari and Bashlideh (2009) and conducted on Iranian junior high school students, whose Cronbach's alpha was reported 0.74. [20]. In this study, Cronbach's alpha was 0.871.

Implementation method and data collecting:

After sampling and random assignment of individuals in control and experimental groups, School Burnout Inventory was conducted on both groups as pre-test. Then the experimental group was instructed for 6 weeks in Glasser's Choice and Control Theory training package. Glasser's Choice and Control Theory training sessions is abstracted in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of Glasser's Choice and Control Theory six sessions of training for experimental group

Session	Sessions content
1st	Introduction and familiarity, introduction of the therapist, number and rules of sessions, explanation of group's contracts and objectives
2nd	Training a variety of concepts on Glasser's theory, and subjects' familiarity with these concepts
3rd	Training internal and external control beliefs, and discovering the relationship difficulties
4th	Training principles of Choice Theory
5th	Training of basic needs and the application of Glasser's Choice Theory in schools, and the explanation of 'Schools without Failure'
6th	Summarizing previous weeks' trainings and conclusion

At the end, School Burnout Inventory (SBI) was again conducted on the two groups as post-test. It should also be noted that the control group had been on a waiting list until the end of all sessions, with no intervention on them.

RESULTS

In this section, we first report the descriptive indicators such as: mean, standard deviance, and Cronbach's α. Then the results of inferential analysis is performed and presented through covariance analysis. Therefore, the main hypothesis of the study and then its sub-hypotheses has been proposed first, and then the answers are presented via statistical results.

The descriptive indicators of academic burnout and its components are presented in the following:

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of academic burnout and its components

Statistic indicators	Alpha	Variance	M±S	N	Test
Exhaustion	0.871	4.09	8.10+2.02	30	Pre-test
		38	18.2 +6.08	30	Post-test
Cynicism		12	9.66+3.37	30	Pre-test
		52	18.3 +7.17	30	Post-test
Educational inefficacy		16	32. +7.72	30	Pre-test
		60	9.66+3.88	30	Post-test
Total academic burnout		64	31 +7.98	30	Pre-test
		77	48+8.27	30	Post-test

The average age of participants was 15 - 19 years who were all male high school students. The number of participants in this study was 30. In experimental group, the means obtained for the components and variables of academic burnout by pre-test and post-test are different. Total academic burnout variable scores according to pre-test by mean and standard deviation are respectively 30.40 and 7.98, and according to post-test are 47.73 and 8.27 respectively, which shows a difference between the means. Cronbach's α for academic burnout was 0.871. The results according to kurtosis and skewness by post-test are respectively 0.535 and 1.098.

Analysis and testing of research hypotheses:

For the application of a statistical method to determine the type of test (parametric or non-parametric), Kolomogrov-smirnov test was used for data normality.

Table 3. Kolomogrov-Smirnov mono-sample test

Statistical indicator	P	Z
Exhaustion	0.45	0.85
Cynicism	0.53	0.80
Educational inefficacy	0.92	0.54
Total academic burnout	0.23	1.03

As shown in Table (3), according to total academic burnout Z score (1.03) and its components and the obtained significance which is higher than the significance level of 0.05, the variable data are normal, therefore a parametric test can be used for it.

Table 4. Levine's test for the homogeneity of variances by post-test

Statistical indicator	Sig	Df2	Df1	F
Exhaustion	0.91	28	1	0.15
Cynicism	0.18	28	1	1.81
Educational inefficacy	0.36	28	1	0.83
Total academic burnout	0.64	28	1	0.21

According to Table (4) and the obtained significance level which is above 0.05, variances are homogeneous.

Table 5. Covariance test for difference between groups by pre-test and post-test

Statistical indicator	Groups Factor	P	F	MS	df	SS
Exhaustion	Between group	0.12	2.55	77.03	1	77.03
	Within group			30.14	27	814.02
	Total				30	11049
Cynicism	Between group	0.04	4.43	210.02	1	210.02
	Within group			47.39	27	1279.66
	Total				30	12135.00
Educational inefficacy	Between group	0.05	3.88	48.08	1	48.08
	Within group			12.53	27	388.56
	Total				30	3242.00
Total academic burnout	Between group	0.01	6.73	428.62	1	428.621
	Within group			63.64	27	1718.29
	Total				30	1718.29

An ANCOVA between subject factor: Exhaustion revealed no main effects: $F_{(1, 814)}=2.55$, but the predicted main effect of cynicism: $F_{(1, 1279)} =4.43$, $p = 0.04$; educational inefficacy $F_{(1, 388)} =3.88$, $p= 0.05$, and total academic burnout $F_{(1, 1718)} =6.73$ $p=0.01$ was significant. Therefore, the total hypothesis of this research was confirmed.

Conclusion:

This study intended to examine the effectiveness of Glasser's control and choice theory training on the reduction of high school students' academic burnout.

Glasser [17]believes that many students simply fail in school and many others due to excessive pressure, which leads to resentment, absence, shut-down, and disruption, fail to show a rich performance. He also points out that the main obstacle is our current education system:

A philosophy based on lack of affective relationships, lack of connection between academic contents and limited emphasis on thinking. Education must move towards a positive philosophy: A philosophy based on affective communication, content relationship, and thinking, otherwise we could not have many problems of failed students resolved. The results of this study also suggest the effectiveness of Glasser's theory training on the reduction of academic burnout. Accordingly Glasser's theory which is widely applied in schools, have been indicated to be the best for developing students' academic achievement. It can be inferred from the results of this hypothesis that Glasser's Choice and Control Theory, according to its principles and concepts such as responsibility, empathy between students and teacher, evaluation of the needs and other school-related concepts[18]can increase motivation and willingness to learn and develop a framework for the reduction of academic negligence and burnout. Previous studies examining the effectiveness of Glasser's theory on schools have obtained similar results (Agedy & Etemadi, 2012; Razimoradi, et al., 2010; Mohammad & Mohsenzadeh, 2011). We recommend that future studies pay more attention to the role of academic burnout in schools, and apply useful and relevant theories on this subject to solve the problem. We also recommend changing of study population to college students. One of study limitations was same statistical population. The population of this study is comprised only of high school students, whose results cannot be confidently generalized to all students and other classes and sections of society.

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