

# Gender Differences in Academic Burnout Among Childhood Education Students

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## Abstract

This research examined the level of academic burnout as experienced by male and female childhood education students in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions in the South-east zone. Sixty (60) conveniently sampled childhood education students from public colleges of education and public universities were the respondents of this descriptive survey. A well-validated questionnaire assessing academic burnout in students was used for data collection. We used independent t-test for analysis of data collected. Results showed no significant difference in mean academic burnout among the male and female students. School-driven interventions are required to help these students in reducing academic burnout concerns.

**Keywords:** Gender differences, academic burnout, early childhood, childhood education students

## 1. Introduction

Gender is an achieved status which is constructed through psychological, cultural, and social means (West & Zimmerman, 2013). Gender is an important construct in all societies, which involves a binary difference of what is taken to be masculine or feminine (Gormley, 2015). Furthermore, gender refers to the roles and responsibilities of men and women that are created in families, societies and cultures. The concept of gender also includes the expectations held about the characteristics, aptitudes and likely behaviours of both women and men (femininity and masculinity) (March, & Smyth, 2003). Again, gender can be seen as that which is embedded so thoroughly in our institutions, our actions, our beliefs, and our desires, that it appears to us to be completely natural (Eckert et al., 2013). Gender is a socially constructed norms and ideologies which determine the behaviour and actions of men and women (Kangas et al., 2014). Academic burnout is a situation that can affect students in many ways. It reduces productivity and satisfaction in education; increased rates of mood disorders such as depression and anxiety and a plethora of physical problems; including increased inflammation biomarkers and cardiovascular disease, metabolic syndrome, sleep disturbances, changes in appetite, fatigue, lowered immunity, headaches, and gastrointestinal distress (Norez, 2017). Study equally found that, when there is an increase in the level of burnout in students, it decreases the student's learning ability and performances, and negatively affect their health condition (Rana, 2016).

Furthermore, a study found that burnout also has a negative effect on the performance of students (Rodríguez-Hidalgo et al., 2014). In a sample of 274 students (average age = 20,61 years old), a study found that those students faced with a higher level of burnout problem indicated a lower level of self-perception as they tend to develop their skills (Rodríguez-Hidalgo et al., 2014); and only one aspect of burnout was linked with self-perception of the skills' development (Rodríguez-Hidalgo et al., 2014). The literature on gender connection with academic burnout has produced inconsistent outcome in line with the strength and direction of this relationship (Purvanova & Muros, 2010). On this, a meta-analysis of the relationship between gender and burnout using effect sizes from 183 studies shows the challenge on the commonly held belief that females are more likely to experience burnout than males (Purvanova&Muros, 2010). The study revealed the females being more emotionally exhausted than males while males are somewhat more depersonalized than females (Purvanova & Muros, 2010). Again, a study on academic burnout and engagement in college students, using a dual-process model, had equally noted that negative perfectionism (doubts about actions, concerns over mistakes) were related

to burnout symptoms with no clear gender differences (Zhang et al., 2007). The main purpose of this study was to determine the level of academic burnout as experienced by male and female childhood education students in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions.

**2. Method**

Sixty (60) conveniently sampled early childhood and childhood education students from public colleges of education and public universities were the respondents of this descriptive survey in the South-east zone of Nigeria. A well-validated questionnaire of 16 items with a scale ranging from strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (4) on academic burnout (Reis et al., 2015) was used for data collection by the researchers. The questionnaire has two clusters, namely, exhaustion and disengagement with 8 items each. Verbal informed consents were given by participating students. Two research assistants were employed to gather data from students. The researchers used independent t-test for analysis of data collected. Results were considered significant when  $P \leq 0.05$ .

**3. Results**

Table 1. Results of overall mean burnout among childhood education students

Burnout Subscale	N	M(SD)	t	p	BCa 95% Confidence Interval
Male	21	51.14(7.36)	-1.177	.860	47.86 – 54.13
Female	39	51.49(7.06)			49.31 – 53.64

Results in Table 1 showed the mean academic burnout without taking into consideration the subscales. Based on the result, there is no significant difference in mean academic burnout between male students (51.14±7.36) and female students in childhood education, (51.49±7.06),  $t(58) = -1.177, P = .860$ .

Table 2. Academic Burnout scores across gender among childhood education students

OLBI-S dimensions	Variables	N	Mean	SD	Mean Difference	t	p	BCa95%CI
Exhaustion	Male	21	25.23	2.98	-.96703	-.889	.378	24.00- 26.47
	Female	39	26.21	4.47				24.88 - 27.59
Disengagement	Male	21	23.38	5.03	-1.9011	-1.626	.109	21.09 - 25.46
	Female	39	25.28	3.89				24.05 - 26.50

The result on academic burnout subscales in table 2 showed that the female childhood education students experience burnout mostly as exhaustion (26.21±4.47; BCa95%CI=24.88 - 27.59) than the male students (25.23±2.98; BCa95% CI=24.00 - 26.47). However, this outcome showed no significant difference in mean academic burnout,  $t(58) = -.889, P = .378$ . Also, the result showed that the female childhood education students experience burnout mostly as disengagement (25.28±3.89; BCa95% CI=24.05 - 26.50) than the male students (23.38±5.03; BCa95% CI=21.09 - 25.46). This outcome was also not significant  $t(58) = -1.626, P = .109$ . The clear pictorial evidence shown using the bar chart in Figure 1 confirmed this result with a small mean difference of .96703 and 1.9011.

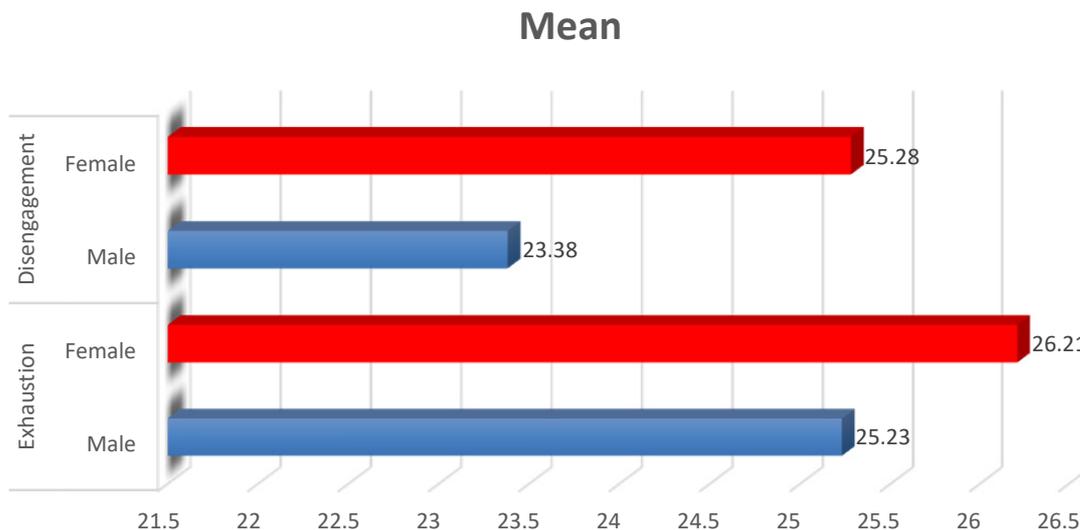


Figure 1. A bar chart showing the mean academic burnout scores across gender among early childhood and childhood education students

#### 4. Discussion

This research examined the level of academic burnout as experienced by childhood education students in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions. Our findings showed that there is no significant difference in mean academic burnout among the students. This finding is in line with a study which explored gender differences in burnout of students in Nigeria (Arumede et al., 2019). Furthermore, a previous study showed among 36 postgraduate students, a no significant difference in pretest mean burnout scores (Ezeudu, et al., 2019). But on the long run, experimental group posttest scores showed a significant enhancement compared with both experimental group pretest scores and with control group posttest scores (Ezeudu, et al., 2019). Another recent study treating academic burnout of undergraduates found that the pre-test results indicated no significant difference in the burnout scores of the students (Ezeudu, et al., 2019). There was a significant time by group effect on burnout among those who participated in a burnout treatment program (Ezeudu, et al., 2019). Again, a study also shows that both sexes do not differ significantly in the experience of burnout (Adekolala, 2012). Thus, there is a need for school-driven interventions to help students in reducing academic burnout concerns.

#### 5. Conclusion

Burnout is a growing problem among tertiary institution students. Our study revealed that no significant difference exists in the mean academic burnout among the students of childhood education. School-driven interventions are required to help these students in reducing academic burnout concerns.

#### Competing Interests Statement

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

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