




The structural relationship of academic engagement based on mindfulness with the mediating role of academic burnout and academic self-handicapping in students

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The purpose of this research was to predict academic engagement based on mindfulness with the mediating role of academic burnout and academic self-impairment among Azad University students.

Methods and Materials: The research was a descriptive-correlational study. The statistical population includes all students of Azad University of Tehran who were studying in the academic year 2020-21, the target sample was selected using random sampling method in the number of 350 people. In order to analyze the data, it was analyzed using the structural equation method of factor analysis with the help of AMOS software. Data collection tools were: Reeve Academic Involvement Questionnaire (2013), Freiburg Mindfulness Questionnaire (FMI-SF), Academic Boredom Questionnaire by Pekrun et al. (2020), and Jones Academic Self-Disability Questionnaire (2020); and the results of factor analysis and Cronbach's alpha also confirmed their validity and reliability.

Findings: The results showed mindfulness ($B=0.38$, $P<0.001$) directly and positively and academic self-disability ($B=0.29$, $P<0.001$) and academic boredom ($B=0.24$, $P<0.001$) predict academic engagement. In addition, the proposed research model had a good fit.

Conclusion: It can be concluded that mindfulness has a significant effect on the academic engagement of students due to the mediating role of academic boredom and academic self-handicapping.

Keywords: academic engagement, mindfulness, academic boredom, academic self-disability.

1. Introduction

Given the importance of higher education and the increasing demand on universities to improve the

quality of education and academic performance of students, educational researchers are seeking to study and examine variables related to academic success and effective strategies for addressing the academic and psychosocial needs of

students (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). Furthermore, educational systems are now facing significant changes and developments, during which universities are trying to provide their education in accordance with the needs of students and society (Vidic & Cherup, 2019). Creating motivation in students that enables them to be successful in their studies is one of the important challenges in improving the quality of education. One of the most important indicators of educational quality and academic progress is students' academic engagement (Wang, Zou, & Liu, 2023). In Universities such as Free Universities, where knowledge in related fields is constantly updated and new information is added, it is necessary for students to keep themselves up-to-date with the latest knowledge in order to succeed. Academic engagement is a construct that was introduced to understand and explain academic failure and dropout, and serves as the basis for reform efforts in the field of education (Abutalebi, Khamsan, & Rastgomoghadam, 2018). Many variables have been found to be effective in academic engagement, including motivation for academic progress, which significantly increases academic engagement (Torbatinezhad, Kavyar, & Ghandizadeh, 2022).

On the other hand, being aware of the mental processes and thinking can help an individual to focus more effectively on the present moment. Therefore, the concept of mindfulness is considered one of the effective variables in academic engagement. In simple terms, mindfulness means full presence in the present moment. According to Kabat-Zinn (2003), mindfulness is "paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally, as if your life depended on it." However, in today's world, which is so vast and causes so much confusion and distraction, being one hundred percent attentive to the present moment is not easy (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). This issue is very common among students and there is a need for thorough studies in this area. Students' disengagement can sometimes be caused by a negative feeling called academic burnout, where they lose their patience and interest in their studies. During their academic career, anyone may experience a situation in which, after 20 minutes of starting the class and following the presented material, gradually loses interest in continuing to sit in the class and looks at the clock as time passes slowly. In this situation, they want to do something, but they can't. When they look around, they can see dissatisfaction and disinterest in the faces of some of the attendees, but not all of them (Wen et al., 2022).

From a psychological perspective, the aforementioned states are some of the indicators used to refer to feelings of depression or boredom in individuals (Sepehri & Kiani, 2020). In fact, depression is an emotion that includes emotional components (unpleasant and disturbing feelings), cognitive (modified perceptions of time), physiological (reduced arousal), indicative (facial, vocal, and bodily expressions), and motivational (motivation for changing activity or leaving the situation) components. At first, it may seem that depression is a fleeting emotion, but the reported consequences of depression in numerous empirical studies are thought-provoking. For example, researchers have identified the harmful effects of depression on physical and mental health (Golshan, Zargham Hajebi, & Sobhi-Gharamaleki, 2021).

Another variable that can have an impact on academic engagement of students is academic self-handicapping or academic self-handicapping. In recent decades, the concept of academic self-handicapping has become a common psychological injury and the biggest obstacle to coping with a sense of self-efficacy among learners in educational systems, attracting the attention of researchers in educational psychology (Coudevylle, Gernigon, & Martin Ginis, 2011). The use of learned helplessness strategies to justify possible academic failures among students has become commonplace, and the results of research inside and outside the country indicate the negative impact of using these strategies on important educational processes and academic performance. Learned helplessness includes any action or area that allows an individual to attribute failure to external factors as an excuse and attribute success to internal factors to gain prestige (Ibrahim Ibrahim Khodair, 2023). Based on the variables mentioned above, it can be concluded that academic engagement can be examined in relation to several variables to gain a clearer understanding of the issue and find effective actions to involve more students. Therefore, given the necessity of the issues discussed, further research in this area is necessary. Therefore, the subject of this research is the structural relationship between academic engagement based on mindfulness with the mediating role of academic burnout and academic self-handicapping among students of the Islamic Azad University. Based on the issues raised and the variables in the research model, a conceptual model has been developed that uses numerous variables to predict academic engagement. Thus, the aim of this study was to predict academic engagement based on mindfulness with the mediating role of academic burnout and academic self-

handicapping among students of the Islamic Azad University.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

The present research was descriptive and correlational. The statistical population of this study consisted of all students of the Islamic Azad University of Tehran who were studying in the academic year 2020-21. The desired sample size of the study was 350, which was selected through random sampling method. To conduct the questionnaire on the target population, first, after visiting the Islamic Azad University of Tehran North, a list of faculty names and university fields of study was prepared based on the number of students in each faculty and field of study, and information was collected using a questionnaire. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, students did not attend the university in person, so the questionnaire was implemented via an online link. To encourage students to participate in the study, they were told that if they send back their response to the questionnaire, the results of one of the questionnaires will be interpreted for them and sent to their email address. This led to students welcoming the implementation of the questionnaire. Of course, necessary assistance was provided to fill out the questionnaires from the continuing education of each faculty.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Academic Engagement

The Academic Engagement questionnaire was designed and developed by Reeve in 2013 to measure academic engagement. This questionnaire has 17 questions and 4 components of behavioral engagement, agentic engagement, cognitive engagement, and emotional engagement and measures academic engagement based on a seven-point Likert scale with questions such as ("I try to put different opinions together while studying to derive a meaning"). Validity and reliability are concerned with how well an instrument measures what we think it measures. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the following questionnaire sub-scales was calculated for all participants, in order: 0.86, 0.84, 0.85 (Azhdari & Yousefi, 2021).

2.2.2. Mindfulness

Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire-Short Form (FFMQ-SF) has been widely studied and its psychometric properties have been examined in many cultures. The initial form of the FFMQ, which consisted of 30 items, was designed by Baer and colleagues. Later, a short form with 14 items that was more appropriate for use in the general population was designed by Walach and colleagues. The long form of the FFMQ is more suitable for use in groups who are familiar with the Buddhist culture and practices of mindfulness, but the short form is more suitable for use in groups who are not familiar with the mindfulness background, and it can cover all aspects of the mindfulness field well. To examine the validity and reliability of the short form of the FFMQ, 400 students were selected using a multistage cluster sampling method. The reliability coefficient was obtained by Cronbach's alpha coefficient, split-half reliability, and retest. The validity was also calculated through concurrent validity and confirmatory factor analysis. For concurrent validity of the FFMQ-SF, Tangney's self-control scale and the emotion regulation subscale of the self-report emotional intelligence scale (SREIS) were used. In general, the correlation between the FFMQ-SF and the self-control ($r = 0.69$) and emotional regulation ($r = 0.68$) scales was reported to be significant at the 0.01 level (Azunny, Rahim, & Shalan, 2020).

2.2.3. Academic Burnout

One of the sub-scales of the progress emotions questionnaire is the academic burnout scale, which consists of 22 questions designed to measure students' level of disengagement during class and learning. However, in most studies, either the 5 or 6 questions related to classroom disengagement or learning-related disengagement are used to measure each of these two dimensions of academic burnout. In both of these scales, respondents must answer the questions on a 5-point Likert scale (from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). In various studies, the psychometric properties of the academic burnout scale have been confirmed. Pekrun showed the structural validity of this factor as one of the sub-scales of the academic emotions questionnaire by exploratory factor analysis. They also reported a reliability coefficient of 0.92 for this sub-scale. Other studies have also shown good internal consistency reliability for this scale. Pekrun has reported the psychometric properties of the learning-related disengagement scale for Chinese and Canadian cultures.

Confirmatory factor analysis showed the structural validity of the disengagement scale and the reliability coefficient of Cronbach's alpha for both of these scales was 0.84 and 0.86, respectively. In the present study, the reliability of this scale was also calculated by Cronbach's alpha coefficient and was 0.88 and 0.90 for classroom disengagement and learning-related disengagement, respectively (Romano et al., 2020; Ugwu, Onyishi, & Tyoyima, 2013).

2.2.4. *Academic Self-handicapping*

The original version of the Academic Self-handicapping scale consists of 23 items, rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree). The construct validity of the scale was examined using exploratory factor analysis. Additionally, its alpha reliability coefficient was found to be 0.78 (Coudevylle, Gernigon, & Martin Ginis, 2011).

2.3. *Data analysis*

Data were collected by completing the questionnaires, reviewing, coding the options, and extracting the data. The data were digitally recorded and entered into the SPSS program, and some statistical operations were performed using this program. Scores for each of the questionnaires and subscales were calculated. After obtaining the reliability of each subscale, controlling for proportional assumptions, obtaining descriptive indices for each variable, and removing some outliers, the sub and final models were calculated through AMOS software using path analysis. The model fit indices were also examined. The methods used in this study for analysis were divided into two sections: descriptive and inferential statistics. In the descriptive

statistics section, the obtained data were examined using tables and indices of central tendency and variability. Then, inferential data analysis was performed. The SPSS version 22 was used to describe and analyze raw data and draw correlation matrices, and AMOS version 22 was used to determine the fit of the assumed model with the observed data.

3. **Findings and Results**

The demographic characteristics of the research population showed that the sample consisted of 350 students from the Islamic Azad University, of which 40% were male and 60% were female, and 73% were between the ages of 19-22, while 6% were between the ages of 27-30, which constituted the lowest number.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics findings

Variable	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Behavioral engagement	9.41	2.47	0.18	-0.33
Agency engagement	7.32	2.86	0.32	-0.20
Cognitive engagement	8.32	2.86	-0.64	0.40
Emotional engagement	7.27	2.46	-0.43	-0.36
Emotional burnout	10.32	2.86	-0.70	1.67
None interest	10.65	3.79	-0.07	-0.61
Academic inefficiency	11.98	3.94	-0.31	-0.84
Academic self-handicapping	53.41	14.36	-0.11	-0.50
Mindfulness	26.17	5.89	-0.24	-0.52

Pearson correlation coefficient was used to identify the relationship between variables in the model. The findings obtained from the correlation coefficient between research variables are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Correlation matrix

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Behavioral engagement	1						
Agency engagement	0.38*	1					
Cognitive engagement	0.17*	0.29*	1				
Emotional engagement	0.28*	0.19*	0.22	1			
Emotional burnout	-0.29*	-0.18*	-0.22	-0.19	1		
None interest	-0.23*	-0.23*	0-.19*	-0.22*	0.23	1	
Academic inefficiency	-0.21*	-0.19*	-0.19*	-0.18*	0.21*	0.23*	1

Table 2 shows the correlation between each of the variables, as well as the correlation between the subscales. As observed, the subscales of emotional fatigue, academic

disinterest, and academic inefficiency have a negative correlation with other subscales, while the other subscales have a positive and significant correlation with each other.

Table 3

Fit indices

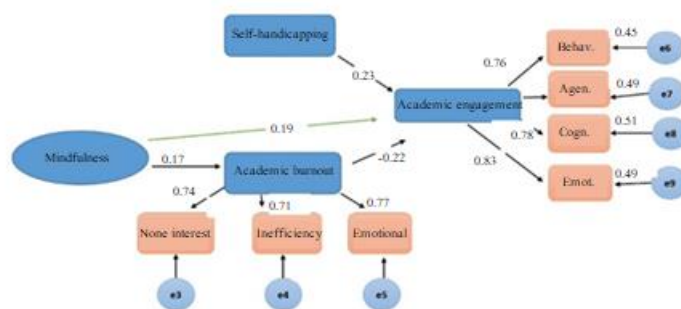
	X ² /df	CFI	NFI	GFI	AGFI	RMSEA	PCLOSE
Value	2.90	0.97	0.96	0.97	0.93	0.05	0.11
Appropriate fit	< 3	> 0.90	> 0.90	> 0.90	> 0.90	< 0.08	> 0.05

The results indicate a desirable fit of this measurement model [Table 3](#). Therefore, we can proceed with the structural

model fit of the study.

Figure 1

Structural model with direct effects



After applying the measurement error of the model, the problematic path of mindfulness and academic burnout was

identified, as shown in Figure 1. Notably, after corrective measures were taken, the final model was obtained.

Table 4

Direct effects and t-values after correction

Path	Standard coefficient	Non-standard coefficient	SE	T-value	p
Mindfulness to academic burnout	0.383	0.323	0.088	3.68	0.01
Mindfulness to academic engagement	0.253	0.381	0.103	3.11	0.01
Self-handicapping to academic engagement	0.295	0.325	0.156	5.63	0.01
Academic burnout to academic engagement	0.244	0.271	0.105	5.89	0.01

Based on the information in [Table 4](#) regarding the direct relationship between mindfulness and academic burnout, the t-value is 3.68, indicating that there is a significant relationship between mindfulness and academic burnout. Regarding the direct relationship between mindfulness and academic engagement, the t-value is 3.11, indicating that there is a significant relationship between mindfulness and academic engagement. Regarding the direct relationship

between self-efficacy and academic engagement, the path coefficient is $p > 0.05$ and the t-value is 5.63, indicating that there is a significant relationship between self-efficacy and academic engagement. Regarding the direct relationship between academic burnout and academic engagement, the path coefficient is $p > 0.05$ and the t-value is 5.89, indicating that there is a significant relationship between academic burnout and academic engagement.

Table 5

Indirect effects after correction

Path	Standard coefficient	Non-standard coefficient	SE	T-value	p
Mindfulness to academic engagement	0.475	0.421	0.174	3.39	< 0.05

According to the results in Table 5, there is a significant indirect relationship between self-efficacy and academic engagement. Additionally, there is a significant relationship between mindfulness and academic burnout on academic engagement.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of this study was to develop and test a structural model of academic engagement based on mindfulness with the mediating role of academic burnout and academic self-handicapping among university students. The results showed that mindfulness, with the mediating role of academic burnout and academic self-handicapping, has a significant effect on academic engagement. The fit indices of the final model were acceptable. It is suggested that with an increase in mindfulness, individuals' distance themselves from their negative academic experiences, focus more on the present, and develop greater capacity to face academic challenges and engagement with them. Though previous research suggests that mindfulness, self-handicapping, and academic burnout can individually affect academic engagement, the current research combines these variables in a novel way. The findings of this study are consistent with previous research on the impact of mindfulness on academic engagement among university students (Coudevylle, Gernigon, & Martin Ginis, 2011). Similarly, the current study is consistent with research on the effect of self-handicapping on academic engagement among university students (Bagheri Feroji, Zoghi, & Shariat Bagheri, 2021; Zulalie & Ghorbani, 2014).

In the present study, it can be acknowledged that mindfulness is among the issues that can affect students' learning and academic engagement, allowing them to comprehend the issues in the present moment without any prejudice or judgment. Additionally, mindfulness teaches individuals how to get away from inflexible habitual behaviors and redirect their processing resources toward attention-neutral goals, such as breathing or momentary sensations, preparing them for change (Vidic & Cherup, 2019). Having a moderate perspective toward the past, present, and future represents psychological well-being, whereas extreme attitudes indicate bias leading to unhealthy lifestyle habits. The aim is to learn from the past, enjoy the present, and manage the future. Academic engagement is learned and changes due to personal, social, and institutional effects, varying from person to person. Academic

engagement plays a critical role in shaping perception, expectations, attentional biases, achieving social goals, motivation, and sense of control (Casuso-Holgado et al., 2013; Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Pintrich & De Groot, 1990). Therefore, the undeniable impact of mindfulness on academic engagement cannot be ignored.

In explaining the findings of their research on self-handicapping and academic engagement, it can be said that self-handicapping strategies set up future contingencies that enable individuals to hope to replace factors that may question their competence in the future, and it is evident that if a student deliberately does not try in university and procrastinates until the last moment to study, they will display poor performance and as a result, will have minimal academic progress. Academic engagement has significant cognitive, emotional, and behavioral consequences for individuals. Students with high levels of academic engagement find learning difficulties inherently interesting and attractive, and the value of learning is inherent in their engagement. Research evidence suggests that such individuals do not use self-handicapping strategies in their academic progress, as they are focused on excellence and competence, and, therefore, do not benefit from self-handicapping as it does not yield any profit. Instead, they focus on academic engagement and try harder to achieve their goals (Dogan, 2015; Ugwu, Onyishi, & Tyoyima, 2013). Researchers have shown that students with high levels of academic engagement perform better in university-related areas, sports, health preservation, problem solving, and psychological well-being. Academic engagement is effectively influential in many areas of life because such individuals are capable of setting effective goals and making appropriate decisions about these goals. Research findings indicate that individuals with higher levels of academic engagement positively perceive self-esteem and competence and negatively perceive academic burnout (Azhdari & Yousefi, 2021). In terms of future orientation, individuals with high levels of academic engagement are more optimistic, more focused on success rather than failure when pursuing their goals, and a two-sided relationship between academic engagement and academic burnout can be emphasized. Moreover, as academic engagement strategies target stress-inducing factors by focusing on problem-solving efforts to change the stressful situation, it seems that academic burnout is inversely related to academic engagement, in that individuals who have high levels of academic engagement have relatively low levels of academic burnout, and vice versa, individuals who have

academic burnout and emotional avoidance behaviors expose themselves to academic burnout. Research findings also confirmed this (Furrer & Skinner, 2003).

Evidence indicates that academic burnout and academic performance have reciprocal effects on each other (Romano et al., 2020). They reinforce each other in such a way that involvement in self-handicapping leads to poor performance and poor performance also leads to the use of self-handicapping strategies. Academic burnout is also associated with inappropriate study habits, such as spending less time studying and engaging less in study-related activities to prepare for exams. Academic burnout is claimed to occur in two forms: claim-based academic burnout and behavioral academic burnout. Claim-based academic burnout refers to situations where individuals claim disabling factors such as fatigue, pressure, or test anxiety. Behavioral academic burnout refers to situations where individuals actively create obstacles to reduce their chances of success. In other words, the disheartened have weaker academic engagement compared to ordinary individuals, and since academic achievement is an indicator of job stability and economic status, it can be predicted that individuals with academic burnout will have poor job and economic situations after graduation (Ugwu, Onyishi, & Tyoyima, 2013).

5. Limitations & Suggestions

This research was only conducted on students in the city of Tehran. Therefore, this issue should be considered when generalizing the results and the patterns obtained. Another limitation of this study was the lack of access to some articles and structural models of academic engagement on Latin websites, which only provided their services to members and the full text and article models were not available on these websites. Since only a percentage of the variance of academic engagement has been explained in the fitted models, it seems that other factors may play a role in the academic engagement of students. Therefore, it is essential to try to access effective and useful factors in academic engagement in future studies using various methods. Researchers are recommended to carry out a study like this on a more extensive sample. Considering that in this study, all efforts were made to identify and analyze the effective components of academic engagement, researchers can identify new components for this purpose with more time and expense. Another research proposal suggests that researchers examine other factors affecting academic

engagement in structural models. Given the importance of the academic engagement variable, it is suggested that organizations that work more with students pay more attention to this issue as it provides successful experiences with constructive feedback, leading to high self-efficacy in students. Based on the results of this study and the identification of the direct and indirect effects of mindfulness, academic burnout, and academic self-handicapping on academic engagement in students, education specialists need to focus on strengthening these components in students. It is essential for parents of students to take measures to increase their awareness of the importance and role of academic self-handicapping and burnout beliefs and their impact on various aspects of learning.

Based on research findings, it is recommended that the educational system prioritize reducing academic burnout among learners and seek multi-faceted coping strategies that focus on different elements of the curriculum and teaching methods to combat learners' demotivation. The findings of multiple studies show that providing opportunities for collaborative learning, mitigating the competitive atmosphere, and modifying the evaluation system in universities, reducing student control, and creating flexibility in task performance can reduce student demotivation and increase their control over their situation and perception of competence, leading to an increase in their academic happiness.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethics Considerations

Ethical considerations were observed in this study, including confidentiality, privacy, and honesty. Participation in the study did not pose any potential harm to the participants.

Authors' Contributions

The first author of this article, Elham Mostafavi, served as the project's executive, primary author, and data analyst. The second author, Hamid Vatan Khah, served as the advisor, and the third author, Javad Khalatbari, served as the consultant in this study.

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