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The role of specialization satisfaction in predicting learning burnout among students of the college of physical education and sports sciences

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Abstract

The significance of the current study arises from the need to examine the relationship between specialization satisfaction and learning burnout among students in Colleges of Physical Education and Sports Sciences in Iraq, especially given the scarcity of local research addressing this topic. The study aims to provide findings that support academic and counseling programs within universities. The problem of the study is framed by the question: *What role does specialization satisfaction play in predicting levels of learning burnout?* The researcher adopted a descriptive methodology and administered two psychological scales to a sample of 100 fourth-year students from the College of Physical Education and Sports Sciences at the University of Diyala. The results revealed that students exhibited a good level of specialization satisfaction, accompanied by a moderate level of learning burnout. A statistically significant negative correlation was found between the two variables, indicating that higher satisfaction with one's specialization contributes to reducing symptoms of burnout. Regression analysis further demonstrated that specialization satisfaction is a strong predictive variable in explaining levels of learning burnout. These findings suggest that students' satisfaction with their academic specialization enhances their motivation and alleviates academic and psychological pressures, thereby decreasing the likelihood of experiencing burnout. The researcher recommends enhancing students' specialization satisfaction through curriculum development, activation of academic counseling programs, and the implementation of regular assessment tools to detect early signs of burnout. Such measures can contribute to improving the quality of university life and students' mental well-being.

Keywords: Specialization Satisfaction, Learning Burnout

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction and Significance of the Study

University education represents a pivotal stage in shaping students' personalities, academic identities, and professional orientations. One of the most influential factors affecting students' engagement with their academic disciplines is what is known as specialization satisfaction, which reflects the extent to which students accept their chosen field of study, feel comfortable with its content, and perceive its alignment with their interests, aspirations, and future goals. Numerous researchers have emphasized that satisfaction with one's specialization is a critical psychological factor influencing academic achievement, motivation, and positive immersion in the university environment. Shaqeefi (2022) ^[2] highlighted a statistically significant negative relationship between specialization satisfaction and academic procrastination among students at Umm Al-Qura University. The findings indicated that students with lower levels of satisfaction tended to exhibit weaker academic performance and disengaged or indifferent behaviors.

On the other hand, the concept of learning burnout refers to a state of psychological, cognitive, and emotional exhaustion resulting from accumulated pressures related to the educational process, such as assignment overload, exam stress, and lack of academic recognition. Learning burnout is increasingly prevalent in university settings and may be more pronounced in disciplines that demand high physical and cognitive effort, such as physical education and sports sciences. It is characterized as an emotional state of exhaustion, negativity in interpersonal relationships, and diminished personal accomplishment within the academic environment. This condition arises in response to

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overwhelming academic demands that exceed students' capacity to manage their energy, resources, and resilience (Al-Sadiq & Abbadi, 2018) ^[1]. Although numerous international studies have addressed academic burnout, the connection between it and specialization satisfaction remains underexplored in the Arab context, particularly in Iraq. This gap presents an opportunity for the current study to investigate the relationship between specialization satisfaction and learning burnout among students in Colleges of Physical Education and Sports Sciences in Iraq. The significance of this study lies in its potential to provide applied scientific knowledge that enables academic institutions to develop psychological and educational support programs aimed at reducing levels of learning burnout, enhancing students' alignment with their academic specializations, and strengthening academic counseling initiatives within universities.

1.2 Problem of the Study

Specialization satisfaction is considered one of the key psychological factors influencing a student's academic journey. It reflects the extent of psychological and cognitive alignment with one's chosen field of study, as well as the sense of fulfillment and acceptance toward the academic content. The more satisfied a student feels with their specialization, the greater their motivation for achievement and their ability to adapt to academic demands and vice versa. Conversely, a number of university students suffer from learning burnout, a condition characterized by physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion resulting from continuous academic pressure. This includes feelings of demotivation, reduced academic performance, and emotional disengagement. Educational literature indicates that burnout is not solely linked to workload or exam stress, but may also stem from internal psychological factors such as specialization alignment and genuine desire to continue in the field. Although the educational environment in Iraq particularly in Colleges of Physical Education and Sports Sciences is marked by its intensive practical and physical nature, there is a noticeable lack of studies that examine the relationship between specialization satisfaction and learning burnout within this specific context. Accordingly, the research problem emerges through the following central question: What role does specialization satisfaction play in predicting levels of learning burnout among students of the College of Physical Education and Sports Sciences?

1.3 Aims of the Study

1. To identify the levels of specialization satisfaction and learning burnout among students of the College of Physical Education and Sports Sciences at the University of Diyala.
2. To examine the correlational relationship between specialization satisfaction and learning burnout among students.
3. To determine the predictive power of specialization satisfaction in explaining levels of learning burnout.

1.4 Domains of the Study

1. **Human Domain:** Fourth-year students at the College of Physical Education and Sports Sciences, University of Diyala.
2. **Temporal Domain:** From March 1, 2025 to June 25, 2025.
3. **Spatial Domain:** Online questionnaires

1.5 Terminology of the Study

1. **Specialization Satisfaction:** Defined as the student's sense of comfort and acceptance toward their chosen academic specialization, and the extent to which it aligns with their interests, abilities, and aspirations positively influencing their motivation for achievement and academic persistence. (Hanifa & Al-Hashimi, 2021) ^[3]
2. **Learning Burnout:** A psychological condition characterized by emotional and physical exhaustion, feelings of frustration, and loss of interest in studying, resulting from chronic academic stress. It leads to decreased academic performance and student disengagement from the educational environment. (Shamkhi & Jasim, 2021) ^[4]

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Study Method

A method of a study is defined as "the intellectual steps taken by the researcher to solve a specific problem" (Noori & Rafi, 2004) ^[6]. Given the nature and requirements of the current study, the researcher adopted the descriptive method, as descriptive research aims to identify the nature and characteristics of certain phenomena in order to define or portray the current situation, analyze it, draw conclusions, and make predictions about its development (Mohsen & Akkab, 2013) ^[5].

2.2 Population and Sample of the Study

The population of the study was selected intentionally and consisted of fourth-year students at the College of Physical Education and Sports Sciences, University of Diyala, for the academic year 2024-2025. The total number of students was 210. A group of 45 students was excluded due to their participation in the pilot study. The main study sample included 100 students, representing 48% of the total population. The remaining students were excluded due to frequent absences and lack of regular attendance.

2.3 Devices and Tools Used in the Research

- Laptop computer (HP brand)
- Ballpoint pens

2.4 Data Collection Methods

- Internet resources
- Arabic and foreign references
- Pilot study
- Scientific observation
- Specialization Satisfaction and Learning Burnout questionnaire
- Statistical tools

2.5 Field Procedures of the Study

2.5.1 Psychological Scales Used in the Study

2.5.1.1 Learning Burnout Scale

- After reviewing relevant literature and previous studies on learning burnout (Shamkhi & Sana, 2021) ^[4], based on Ries et al. (2015) and grounded in Maslach's Burnout Theory (1981), the researcher adopted a scale consisting of 16 declarative statements. The scale includes four response options: *Strongly Agree*, *Agree*, *Disagree*, *Strongly Disagree*. For positively worded items, the scoring key was (1, 2, 3, 4), while for

negatively worded items, the scoring was reversed accordingly.

2.5.1.2 Specialization Satisfaction Scale

The researcher used the Specialization Satisfaction Scale adapted by Salem & Zuhair (2022) from Sayedhom (2020). The scale comprises 30 items, both positive and negative, distributed across three domains: *Interest in the Academic Specialization*, *Satisfaction with Guidance Methods*, and *Satisfaction with Career Prospects* each domain containing 10 items. The response options were: *Always*, *Often*, *Sometimes*, *Rarely*, *Never*, with weights assigned as (1, 2, 3, 4, 5) for positively worded items, and reversed for negatively worded items.

2.6 Pilot Study

- The pilot study served as an experimental phase to identify potential challenges and obstacles that researchers might encounter during the implementation of the main study. It was conducted on April 14, 2025, involving a randomly selected sample of 45 students from the College of Physical Education and Sports Sciences at the University of Diyala, who were not part of the main research sample.

2.7 Main Study

The main study was conducted on May 4, 2025, involving the research sample of 100 students.

2.8 Statistical Tools

The researcher used the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to analyze the results.

Presenting Results

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Number	Mean	Standard Deviation
Specialization satisfaction	100	95.43	12.583
Learning Burnout	100	41.27	8.961

Table 2: Correlation Coefficient

The two variables	Correlation Coefficient	Reference	Significance
Specialization satisfaction $\times$ Burnout	-0.612	0.0	Non-Significant (Negative relation)

Table 3: Regression Analysis

Coefficients	B	T	Significance
Stable	82.514	12.348	0.0
Specialization satisfaction	-0.432	-7.637	0.0

3. Discussion

Results shown in Table (1) indicate that the mean score for specialization satisfaction was (95.43), with a standard deviation of (12.583), while the mean score for learning burnout was (41.27), with a standard deviation of (8.961). These findings suggest that the research sample fourth-year students at the College of Physical Education and Sports Sciences generally exhibit a good level of specialization satisfaction, accompanied by a moderate to low level of learning burnout. This outcome may be attributed to the fact that fourth-year students tend to be more psychologically

and cognitively stable in their academic specialization, due to accumulated academic experience and proximity to graduation. Such factors enhance their satisfaction with the field and reduce their vulnerability to burnout symptoms. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2017) emphasized that academic belonging and satisfaction with one's specialization are directly associated with reduced burnout symptoms in educational environments.

Results presented in Table (2) revealed a statistically significant negative correlation between specialization satisfaction and learning burnout, with a correlation coefficient of ($r = -0.612$) at a significance level of (0.00). This finding indicates that as students' level of specialization satisfaction increases, their symptoms of learning burnout decrease thus supporting the study's main hypothesis. This outcome can be attributed to the role of academic satisfaction as a psychological protective factor that helps reduce accumulated stress and tension, which may otherwise lead to cognitive and emotional exhaustion two core components of burnout as described by Maslach (1981). Similarly, Schaufeli and Taris (2014) affirmed that satisfaction with one's field of study reduces psychological threats and mental fatigue, while enhancing students' commitment to their future career paths, thereby lowering the possibility of burnout development.

Whereas results presented in Table (3) indicate that specialization satisfaction contributes negatively and significantly to the prediction of learning burnout, with a beta coefficient of ($\beta = -0.432$), a t-value of (-7.637), and a significance level of ($P = 0.00$). This finding suggests that specialization satisfaction is a meaningful predictive variable that explains a substantial portion of the variance in students' levels of learning burnout. This result aligns with the findings of Bakker and Demerouti (2017) and their well-known Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model, which posits that the availability of psychological and positive resources such as satisfaction and engagement reduces the likelihood of burnout.

To sum up The researcher interprets these findings by noting that fourth-year students are undergoing a phase of academic maturity characterized by professional clarity. They have developed a deeper understanding of their specialization and future career paths, which enhances their sense of satisfaction. This feeling acts as a buffer against academic stress and future-related anxiety, thereby reducing psychological burnout. Moreover, the nature of their specialization Physical Education and Sports Sciences may play a role in alleviating psychological pressure due to the presence of physical and interactive activities that help reduce mental fatigue, especially when compared to more theoretical disciplines. This observation is supported by Cresswell and Eklund (2006) in their studies on athletes and burnout. These findings are consistent with the study by Shamkhi and Sana (2021), which indicated that lower specialization satisfaction increases the level of psychological burnout. They also reinforce the results of Sayedhom (2020), who demonstrated a fundamental relationship between students' satisfaction with their specialization and their ability to maintain academic continuity without experiencing burnout symptoms. The results confirm that specialization satisfaction is not only an indicator of academic stability but also a psychological protective factor against burnout. The presence of a significant negative relationship between the two variables

suggests that enhancing satisfaction within the university environment may serve as a key approach to preventing burnout particularly in practice-based disciplines such as physical education.

4. Conclusion

It was concluded that there is a statistically significant negative correlation between specialization satisfaction and learning burnout among fourth-year students at the College of Physical Education and Sports Sciences - University of Diyala. This indicates that higher levels of specialization satisfaction contribute to lower levels of burnout, and that specialization satisfaction serves as an effective predictive variable for learning burnout. The results of the regression analysis demonstrated a significant negative impact of specialization satisfaction on burnout levels. The fourth-year students showed a good level of specialization satisfaction, reflecting their alignment with their academic field and a sense of academic and professional stability. Based on these findings, the researcher recommends enhancing specialization satisfaction among students in Colleges of Physical Education and Sports Sciences through curriculum development, improved teaching methods, and strengthened academic counseling. Additionally, the use of specialization satisfaction and learning burnout scales as periodic assessment tools is advised to monitor students' psychological well-being and provide early support for potential cases. Future studies are encouraged to include students from different academic levels and multiple universities to compare results and gain a broader understanding of the relationship between specialization satisfaction and learning burnout.

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