

An investigation on normal school students' learning burnout - A case study of English normal students

Linjing Xu*

School of Foreign Languages, Jiangxi Normal University, Nanchang, Jiangxi, China

ABSTRACT: Learning burnout is a phenomenon in which students hold a negative attitude to curriculum learning, which manifests in aspects of physiology, psychology, behavior and interpersonal communication. China attaches great importance to higher education, colleges and universities shoulder the important task of training national modernization personnel. The problem of university students' learning burnout has become a social phenomenon that cannot be ignored. Normal university students are one of the important groups of college students, and this phenomenon of learning burnout may also occur among them. English majors are the backbone of English teachers in primary and secondary schools in the future. The learning status of these groups affects the overall quality of teaching in normal colleges and universities and, more importantly, the quality of teachers in primary and secondary schools in the future. This paper first reviews the definition of learning burnout and the research methods of measurement. Subsequently, it investigates the learning burnout of English matriculation students by taking the first-year English majors of Jiangxi Normal University as an example. In this way, this research is hoped to promote the study on learning burnout not only among English normal students but also other normal students.

Keywords: learning burnout; normal English students; normal colleges

1 DEFINITION OF LEARNING BURNOUT

Pines and Katry (1989) firstly proposed the student burnout, which means the burnout of students in the learning process. Maslach (1997) once mentioned that burnout is a popular expression that can easily be used to describe students who have just had some pressure, and burnout should actually be much more stressful than that. She also believes that burnout is actually a combination of exhaustion, depersonalization, and a negative view of yourself. Because of the important influence of burnout concept of Maslach on burnout research, the concept of learning burnout abroad basically uses Maslach about the concept of burnout, but only adjusts the time background. For example, Schaufeli (2001) defined the nature of learning burnout as a result of excessive learning demand, but the students' emotional exhaustion, alienation from their studies, and low sense of achievement. Fives and Hamman (2007) have analyzed the burnout problem in student-teaching period. Stoliker and Lafreniere

(2015) did the research on the influence of perceived stress, loneliness and learning burnout on University students' educational experience. Kokkinos and Stavropoulos (2016) have studied the burnout phenomenon among teacher trainees.

In China, Taiwanese scholars began to study burnout earlier, and Zhang (1989) thought that burnout occurred at the learning level of students, and they should translate *Student Burnout* into *learning burnout*. The learning burnout is defined as: a phenomenon that students in the learning process produce emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and low personal accomplishment because of academic pressure, workload, or other psychological factors. Yang, H. Z. (1998) argued that the above translation cannot express the primitive spirit of student burnout, and *study burnout* should be translated as *learning breakdown*, but the concept of learning burnout is still from the Zhang. Lian, Yang L. X., and Wu (2005) did a research on college students, and put forward that college students' learning burnout is students' behavior on account of lack of interest or lack of motivation. This concept is based on the study of the current situation of college

*Corresponding author: 379025417@qq.com

students in the Chinese cultural background, and emphasizes the lack of interest in the major, which is the main reason for college students' learning burnout.

2 THE MEASUREMENTS OF LEARNING BURNOUT

In the light of job burnout, Maslach and Jackson (1981) compiled the MBI (Maslach Burnout Inventory burnout inventory). There are three versions of MBI, which consists of three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of personal accomplishment. The MBI-HSS (MBI-Human Service Survey) is the earliest burnout scale, including 22 items; MBI-Form Ed (MBI-Educators Survey) is based on the original scale and aimed for educators. The scale took the school organization as the background, including 22 items too. In addition, Maslach, Jackson and Leiter (1996) developed the new scale MBI-GS (MBI-General Survey) for those persons whose jobs are not serving others. The three MBI scale were used in Likert seven self rating scale, in terms of frequency, ranging from "never" to "every day".

According to the learning burnout, other scholars have revised their scales. For example, Maslach and Schaufeli et al. (2001) revised the MBI-GB scale, and then made the MBI-SS (Maslach Burnout Inventory-Student Survey) scale. Gold and Michael (1985) did the research on the relationship between academic self-concept and potential burnout in a sample of first-semester elementary school practice teachers. Eventually, they created MBI-CSS (College Student Survey). The Taiwanese scholar Yang H.Z. (1989) revised the MBI-GS scale in terms of location, object and work nature to measure the learning burnout of college students in Taiwan. Lian et al. (2005) taken the actual situation of college students in China into consideration and developed the "learning burnout scale" for college students after a series of research, which includes three dimensions: depression, misconduct, low sense of achievement.

3 RESEARCH AND DISCOVERY

In terms of subjects, Weckwerth, A. C. and Flynn, D. M. (2006) studied the gender differences in social support and burnout among students at a Canadian university, and concluded that the index of women's burnout is generally lower than that of men, as far as women are concerned more social support related. Uludağ, O., & Yaratana, H. (2010) conducted a survey of emotional exhaustion, learning burnout for students at a university in Cyprus and found that older students, male students, sophomores at college encountered more burnout problems than younger students, female students, and senior students.

The problem of studying burnout in domestic re-

search students is still in its infancy, and its research and development time is generally later than that of abroad. In foreign studies, the research object category is rich, and there are normal students, sports students, social work students, and college students volunteers. However, most of the domestic research objects are aimed at general college students and there is no professional distinction. Learning burnout problems are widely distributed, different groups are in different social backgrounds, and learning environments are different. It is difficult to go deep into the essence of the problem of learning burnout of various majors if there is no distinction among different majors.

At present, there are only a few studies on burnout in this unique group of normal university students. Only twenty related studies can be found out on CNKI, of which there are only a few studies on normal school students in English. Studying English majors' learning burnout has important theoretical and practical significance. In theory, it is conducive to enriching the study in the field of burnout and providing information for the good response to the learning burnout problems of English majors. In fact, it is helpful to help teachers in normal colleges and universities improve their teaching quality.

4 THE CASE STUDY ON LEARNING BURNOUT

4.1 Purpose of the study

This study was designed to assess learning burnout of freshmen in normal English major which includes exploring the components and dimensions of learning burnout behaviors and analyzing the overall learning burnout problems. The study seeks answers to the following questions:

- 1) What are the burnout levels of freshmen in normal English major?
- 2) What are the factors leading them to feel burnout?
- 3) In view of the characteristics of learning burnout among normal English majors, what are the strategies we can put up with?

4.2 Methodology

4.2.1 Participants and procedure

Participants were all freshmen from class eight, foreign languages college, Jiangxi Normal University. The questionnaires were administered in class with a total of 40 students. A consent letter was attached on the top of the questionnaire to ensure voluntary and anonymous participation. The students were informed that all the data would remain confidential, and would only be reported by group. The students were permitted to leave at any time during the survey. A total of 35 valid surveys were collected. The effective re-

sponse rate was 87.5%. Among all respondents, 20% were males, 80% females. The valid questionnaires were analyzed using the SPSS for statistical analysis.

4.2.2 Instruments

The survey used in this research included two parts: the first part was basic information about school, grades, genders and hometown, and the second part was revised version of The Learning Burnout Scale for Normal English Majors. The scale was based upon the Lian Rong Burnout Inventory, with some items revised according to Jiangxi Normal University educational environment to make it suitable for those students. The Learning Burnout Scale for Normal English Majors is described below.

The Learning Burnout Scale for Normal English Majors

Lian Rong Burnout Inventory was based on Maslach Burnout Inventory, and the original instrument has shown construct validity and reliability in previous research. Bilge has ever taken 194 college teachers as participants and shoed the Maslach Burnout Inventory has 3 subscales with Cronbach’s α coefficients being .830, .650 and .720. The scale used in this study were total of 20 questions, using a Likert five-point scale, with ratings from always, sometimes, not sure, seldom to never, assigned 5,4,3,2 and 1 points respectively. So that the higher the score, the stronger the degree of learning burnout. (Q1, 3, 6, 8, 11, 13, 15 and 18 are reverse questions). Among the 20 questions, Q2, 4, 5, 7, 9, 12, 17, 20 are belong to negative emotional exhaustion; Q1, 8, 10, 14, 16, 19 are belong to inappropriate behaviors; Q3, 6, 11, 13, 15, 18 are belong to low sense of achievement.

4.3 Results and discussion

4.3.1 The result of questionnaire

Table 1 shows the means and standard deviation of freshmen’s learning burnout. The means of all items of all participants is about 2.8286 on average, indicating that the burnout was close to the level of medium. Among them, the degree of “inappropriate behaviors”

is the highest, and the next ones are “negative emotional exhaustion” and “low sense of achievement”. Meanwhile, the means of burnout are between 2.00 and 3.00 points, i.e., between “seldom” to “not sure”, especially for the two factors of “negative emotional exhaustion” and “low sense of achievement”. Taking 3.00 as the reference, we can know that the learning burnout is “slight”.

Table 1. Means and the standard deviations of freshmen’s burnout

Items	Mean	Standard deviation
Learning Negative emotional exhaustion	2.7429	.6466
burnout Inappropriate behaviors	3.0190	.4551
Low sense of achievement	2.7238	.5032

From Table 2, we can see the Sig. of each item is .808, .443, and .741, which are all higher than .05. Therefore, there is no significant difference among genders.

Table 3 shows the Sig. of each item according to their family condition: only child or not. The Sig. of “negative emotional exhaustion” is .571, that of “inappropriate behaviors” is .816, and that of “low sense of achievement” is .172. Those numbers all exceed .05, so we can draw that only/not only child doesn’t make big difference.

4.3.2 The result of interview

Apart from the questionnaire method, interview is also used in this study. According to the questionnaire, the means of burnout are between 2.00 and 3.00 points, but we cannot definitely believe that there is no learning burnout at all. Through interview, we find that if they are interested in the courses, they will take part in them positively. If not, they think taking the class is wasting their time. Nearly 60 percent of interviewees acknowledge that they could feel nervous and negative about their performance and future. Through the interview, here come several reasons. Firstly, students have little information about the major. They like English indeed, and they want to learn English further. That’s why they choose the normal English as their major. However, they neglect the word “normal”. They thought the majors just need to learn how to speak and

Table 2. T-test for genders

		Levene’s test for equality of variances		T-test for equality of means						
		F	Sig.	T	df	Sig (2-tailed)	Mean (difference)	Std. error difference	95% Confidence interval of the difference	
									Lower	Upper
Negative emotional exhaustion	Equal variances assumed	.060	.808	-1.218	33	.232	-.31481	.25847	-.84067	.21104
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.229	11.648	.243	-.31481	.25612	-.87473	.24510
Inappropriate behaviors	Equal variances assumed	.603	.443	-.278	33	.782	-.05170	.18574	-.42960	.32620
	Equal variances not assumed			-.249	9.928	.809	-.05170	.20802	-.51566	.41227
Low sense of achievement.	Equal variances assumed	.11	.741	.562	33	.578	.11497	.20461	-.30132	.53126
	Equal variances not assumed			.477	9.400	.645	.11497	.24123	-.42721	.65715

Table 3. T-test for only/not only child

		Levene's test for equality of variances		T-test for equality of means						
		F	Sig	T	df	Sig (2-tailed)	Mean (difference)	Std. error difference	95% confidence interval of the difference	
									Lower	Upper
Negative emotional exhaustion	Equal variances assumed	.328	.571	-.896	33	.377	-.21750	.24265	-.71118	.27618
	Equal variances not assumed			-.945	18.684	.357	-.21750	.23012	-.69970	.26470
Inappropriate behaviors	Equal variances assumed	.031	.861	.798	33	.430	.13667	.17121	-.21166	.48500
	Equal variances not assumed			.805	16.917	.432	.13667	.16987	-.22187	.49520
Low sense of achievement.	Equal variances assumed	1.949	.172	1.194	33	.241	.22333	.18710	-.15733	.60399
	Equal variances not assumed			1.015	12.523	.329	.23333	.22002	-.25384	.70051

write in English well. In fact, those majors are English teachers-to-be, not only should they enhance the competence in English, but also they are supposed to be good teachers in the future. School authority cannot force us to be a teacher, but we should be responsible for the road we choose. So the difference between facts and imagination is one of the main reasons to learning burnout. Secondly, the curriculum stresses more on theory learning instead of practice. One student says “now that we are learning how to be good English teachers, we should spend more time and energy on practice. If we just read the English articles, listen to VOA or BBC to improve listening skills, or recite the glossary, we still don’t know how to be a teacher. I know that we will take English teaching skills class in one year or in two years, but I think we should take it now, and form the first term. We can practice it in the first three years and take internship in the fourth year. I think that would be better. We cannot say the theory learning is not important, but we need more practice.” Thirdly, the lack of communication with upper classmen may be a reason. Because freshmen don’t know much about their training program and how to make a scientific plan, they need to counsel upper classmen about it. Sometimes, they don’t know what matters most, and they want to complete all the missions perfectly, which makes them very back-breaking and time-consuming, and then result in learning burnout finally.

4.4 Conclusion

This study intends to examine the components and situation of learning burnout of freshmen of English majors in Jiangxi Normal University. And from the T-test results above, we know there contains no significant difference in genders and child members. But according to interview, we can find there are some other reasons, such as knowing little about the major, lack of practice and communication with upper classmen.

Based on the findings, we recommend that education officials in Jiangxi Normal University or profes-

sionals who are interested in college students should pay attention to students’ learning burnout. As we know, most of universities have established organizations to provide students counseling. School administrators may encourage students to make good use of them. In addition to common courses, school may consider offering more practical courses and opportunities into students’ general education courses. And school can also hold experience exchange salon more frequently to help freshmen become used to it. It should be quite helpful toward reducing the degree of students’ learning burnout.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This paper is the periodical achievement of the Innovation Fund for Graduate Students of Jiangxi Normal University - “Study on the Burnout Levels of Normal English Majors and Countermeasure - Illustrated by the Case of Jiangxi Normal University”.

I am very grateful to my supervisor professor Tang, Xiongying and my friends for their helpful comments and suggestions. Thanks all the participants and volunteers in the study.

REFERENCES

- [1] Fives, H., Hamman, D., & Olivarez, A. 2007. Does burnout begin with student-teaching? Analyzing efficacy, burnout, and support during the student-teaching semester. *Teaching & Teacher Education*, 23(6): 916-934.
- [2] Gao, G. 2012. Analysis of learning burnout characteristics of non-English majors. *Foreign Language Journal* (6): 113-118.
- [3] Gold, Y., & Michael, W.B. 1985. Academic self-concept correlates of potential burnout in a sample of first-semester elementary school practice teachers: A concurrent validity study. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 45: 909-914.
- [4] Huang, Y.C., & Lin, S.H. 2010. Canonical correlation analysis on life stress and learning burnout of college students in Taiwan. *International Electronic Journal of Health Education*, 13: 145-155.

- [5] Kokkinos, C.M., & Stavropoulos, G. 2016. Burning out during the practicum: the case of teacher trainees. *Educational Psychology*, 36(3): 548-568.
- [6] Lian, R., Yang L.X., & Wu, L.H. 2005. The relationship between College Students' professional commitment and learning burnout and scale development. *Journal of Psychology*, 37(5): 632-636.
- [7] Maslach, C., Jackson, S.E., & Leiter, M.P. 1997. *The Maslach Burnout Inventory Manual*. Lanham: Scarecrow Press.
- [8] Maslach, C., Schaufeli, W.B., & Leiter, M.P. 2001. Job burnout. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 52(1): 397-422.
- [9] Stoliker, Bryce E., Lafreniere, Kathryn D. 2015. The influence of perceived stress, loneliness, and learning burnout on university students' educational experience. *College Student Journal*, 49(15): 146-160.
- [10] Tao, W. 2017. Relationship between mindfulness, foreign language learning burnout and English autonomous learning. *Modern Foreign Languages*, 40(2): 1-9.
- [11] Yang, H. Z. 1998. A study of factors affecting learning burnout and computer learning outcomes of information management students (Doctoral dissertation, Taiwan national Centre College).
- [12] Yan, J.B. 2013. Study on the status of vocational students' burnout in education. *Journal of Education*, (9): 109-113.
- [13] Yu, K. 2010. Analysis of middle school students' learning burnout from the perspective of demand theory. *Journal of Shanxi Normal University (Social Science Edition)*, (2): 118-120.
- [14] Zhang, Z.Y. 1989. The relationship between locus of control beliefs, social support and learning burnout among College Students. (Doctoral dissertation, Changhua Normal University).