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ednorman@poligran.edu.co
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Montoya-Restrepo, Luz Alexandra; Uribe-Arevalo, Abel Eduardo; Uribe-Arevalo,, Aura Janeth; Montoya-Restrepo, Ivan Alonso; Rojas-Berrio,, Sandra Patricia
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Artículos de investigación científica y tecnológica

ACADEMIC BURNOUT: IMPACT OF THE SUSPENSION OF ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES IN THE COLOMBIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

BURNOUT ACADÉMICO: IMPACTO DE LA
SUSPENSIÓN DE ACTIVIDADES ACADÉMICAS
EN EL SISTEMA DE EDUCACIÓN PÚBLICA EN
COLOMBIA

Luz Alexandra Montoya-Restrepo lamontoyar@unal.edu.co

Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Colombia

Abel Eduardo Uribe-Arevalo abel.uribe@uexternado.edu.co

Universidad Externado de Colombia, Colombia

Aura Janeth Uribe-Arevalo, aurauribe@gmail.com

Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Colombia

Ivan Alonso Montoya-Restrepo iamontoyar@unal.edu.co

Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Colombia

Sandra Patricia Rojas-Berrio, sprojasb@unal.edu.co

Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Colombia

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Abstract: Introduction: In 2019, Colombian public universities faced a suspension of activities that lasted more than four months and affected their academic and emotional lives, this study set out to examine the level of anxiety in these young university students applying the burnout syndrome analysis.

Objectives: Validating stress levels in the dimension of academic burnout among students enrolled in these higher education centers.

Methods: Studies on the subject were reviewed, it was evidenced that they had focused on measuring the dimensions of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and lack of personal fulfillment at work, suggested by Maslach and Jackson in their 1981 study. This article picks up this methodology and presents the results of 276 applied surveys examined by factor analysis on the items taken from the Maslach-Burnout survey.

Results: Results helped validate the questionnaire's effectiveness, as well as the presence of the syndrome among the students, showing higher levels for the dimension of exhaustion compared with other dimensions of the syndrome.

Conclusions: Results are conducive to future decisions pertaining to possible suspensions of the academic studies, a fact that significantly affects young people and impacts their mental health.

Stress, exhaustion, structural unemployment, academic performance.

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Keywords: Stress, exhaustion, structural unemployment, academic performance.

Resumen: Como objetivo se buscó encontrar los niveles de estrés mediante las dimensiones del burnout académico en los estudiantes de universidades públicas de Colombia, como consecuencia del paro académico ocurrido en el año 2019, que duró más de cuatro meses y afectó su vida académica. El burnout académico se define como el nivel de ansiedad y estrés prolongado al que se somete una persona por condiciones

de su actividad, en este caso académica y que afecta su calidad de vida. Se revisaron los estudios realizados sobre el tema, en los cuales se evidencia que se centran en la medición de las dimensiones: agotamiento emocional, despersonalización y la falta de realización personal en el trabajo, que son propuestas en el estudio de Maslach y Jackson de 1981. En el presente artículo se retoma esta metodología y se presentan los resultados de 276 encuestas realizadas, las cuales fueron examinadas mediante análisis factorial en los ítems considerados de la encuesta Maslach-Burnout. Los resultados permiten validar la presencia del síndrome en los alumnos y la eficacia del cuestionario, evidenciándose un mayor nivel en el nivel de agotamiento frente a las otras dimensiones que se consideran en el síndrome. Estos resultados permiten tomar decisiones en el futuro sobre posibles suspensiones de la carga académica que afectan de manera importante a los jóvenes y les impacta en su salud mental.

Palabras clave: Estrés, agotamiento, desempleo estructural, educación superior, desempeño académico.

INTRODUCTION

The burnout syndrome is a state of extended stress and anxiety and those who endure it could face major health problems (Benuzzi, 2021; Vallejos, 2021.) This physical, mental or emotional exhaustion directly impacts the person's quality of life. It is a silent predicament, and it is often detected at an advanced stage, when an individual's self-esteem, physical or mental health, performance or social relationships have been compromised. It can even harm a person's professional and academic performance, or decision-making processes in students (Robins et al., 2015) and faculty members (Da Fonseca et al., 2021; Abarca et al., 2020; Hernandez, 2020; Silas & Vazquez, 2020; Rojas et al., 2020.)

This condition was first studied in the United States in the mid 70's (Freudenberg, 1974,) it intended to explain the decline of people who worked with clients or users and who had manifested symptoms related to frustration with their tasks (Maslach & Jackson, 1981.)

Situations such as these make young university students a population of interest, they are usually exposed to additional anxiety-generating drivers, such as financial, social and academic factors (performance, in particular) that produce feelings of incapability at mental and physical level, loss of interest and capacity towards attaining their goals.

Those conditions are part of what is known as academic or student burnout syndrome and it exerts significant pressure on students' mental health, but it also affects other aspects of their lives, such as keeping a scholarship or realizing a future opportunity, which are conducive to higher anxiety levels, decreased academic performance and, very often, to drop out of school or even commit suicide (Rosales, 2012).

It is important to state that this syndrome –which has been studied with a focus on health practitioners– has not been extensively studied considering its effect on undergraduate students, in order to mitigate their academic-related anxiety and attain satisfaction and professional performance, all the more since satisfaction largely affects the assessment of the university's educational quality (Surdez-Perez et al., 2018). A review on this syndrome's existing literature resulted in a synthesis of the main findings that could steer the study towards the student population

(which is the object of this research.) In terms of further research, this work seeks to attenuate the effects of burnout on mental health in young populations, introduced in the next section. Afterwards, methodology, results and conclusions are presented.

Literature Review

Burnout, a syndrome that might affect anyone experiencing overload at any point in their lives, even without being aware, may be described using three large dimensions: 1. Exhaustion or emotional fatigue, 2. Depersonalization or dehumanization, and 3. Lack of or decreased personal realization at work and melancholy (sadness and even depression) (Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Gil-Monte, 2003; Glaria-Lopez et al., 2021). It has been classified as a recurring syndrome in work environments related to: healthcare, sports, teaching, military, households (homemakers) and university students, in particular, people who may feel they have an excessive amount of activities (Suarez & Restrepo, 2019.) In their studies, GilMonte and Peiro (1997) defined large categories of the syndrome’s impact on people, subdividing it in emotional, attitudinal, behavioral and somatic indexes. Table 1 illustrates the categorization of this variety of symptoms.

<i>Emotional Symptoms</i>	<i>Cognitive Symptoms</i>	<i>Physical and Somatic Symptoms</i>	<i>Behavioral Changes</i>
Frustration	Low expectations pertaining to their studies	Chronic fatigue, skin and menstrual alterations, sexual dysfunctions	Self-destructive behavior: increased intake of caffeine, alcohol, tobacco, medication and drugs
Boredom	Negative and catastrophic thoughts	Absenteeism	
Irritability	Value crisis, changes in life goals	Changes in sleep habits and patterns	Hostility and aggressiveness
Pessimism, hopelessness	Creativity crisis	Headaches	School absenteeism
Difficulty with interpersonal relationships	Ideas related with failure (I can't do it, I'm not good enough, I am not good at anything...)	Changes in eating habits and body weight	
	Distraction	Isolation	Low academic performance
	Difficulty to focus attention	Episodes of cold/flu	
Avoidance of social contact		Difficulty finding meaning in what the person does	Gastrointestinal changes
		Negation or inhibition of emotions	

Table 1

Main Symptoms of the Burnout Syndrome

Source: adapted from Suarez and Restrepo, 2019, p. 19

While adapting to university, young students are more vulnerable and tend to present more risk behaviors in situations of depression or distress. Worldwide, suicide (15-19 years) is among the top five causes of death for this population, and it is the first or second cause of death for this age group in several countries (Pedraza et al., 2005.) When facing difficult situations, young people are prone to factors that affect their mental health; overall, they are asked to assume responsibilities, quickly appropriate and perform at outstanding levels in highly demanding environments (Santillan et al., 2017; Arenas et al., 2019, Glaria-Lopez et al., 2021.)

There are two types of conditions that trigger the syndrome, particularly in the academic field. The first conditions are autonomous, also known as individual variables, namely: personality, coherence, resilience and adaptative capacity. The second ones are social and pertain to context, these can be positive to an extent if they support the individual in overcoming the syndrome, for instance having a support network (partner, family, neighbors, friends and colleagues (Vega, 2005.)) A lack of social support might accentuate other stressors. Other elements of analysis are related to the work demands and overload, the amount, difficulty and time to do homework and their self-determination to do it, so as to strengthen the feelings of freedom control, self-management, sense of evaluation, competence among colleagues, disconnection between the content, among others (Lopez-Cortacans et al., 2021.)

The aforementioned may be considered causes of stress and may reach chronic levels. This is why students in the academic field are considered among the most vulnerable to experience burnout (Neumann et al., 2016; Rodriguez, et al., 2019). The need for reward and the possibility to attain it also influences stress (Caballero et al., 2010; Hederich & Caballero, 2016; Llull, 2013,) e.g., the physical environment and working demands. Economic pressure acts as another stressor for public university students. All of these factors trigger high levels of objective work overload and time pressure, which lead to decreased cognitive performance, increased affective unrest and physiological reactivity (Martinez, 2010; Castellanos, 2018.) Consequently, the analysis of this syndrome in the context of universities can prevent behaviors such as low academic performance, class attrition and program desertion by students that face the typical demands of an academic process and overload. Table 2 includes the main prior studies conducted on this topic.

Authors	Findings
Edwards et al. (1992)	Evaluates the social characteristics of the syndrome and the confrontation dimensions as predictors of anxiety and performance while in a university exam. Confrontation aimed at emotion predicted a state of anxiety in the evaluation.
Balogun et al. (1996)	Evaluates academic performance and yield of physical therapy students, 27 students were evaluated and burnout was measured using an adapted Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach & Jackson, 1993,) with 22 factor questions in three sub-scales: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and personal accomplishments. Two moments were considered. In the second moment administrative changes were implemented to the program resulting in decreased student burnout.
Balogun et al. (1996)	This study <u>inquires</u> into the suggested connection between students' academic yield and burnout. No significant correlations between the students' GPA and the score of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and personal accomplishments were found.
Taris et al. (1999)	This research examines the validity of the construct for the overall burnout measure by Schaufeli et al. (1996.) the Maslach Burnout Inventory-General Survey (MBI-GS.) First, the authors address the internal validity of the MBI-GS using data of two Dutch samples (179 software engineers and 284 members of the university staff.) The validating factor analysis revealed that the distinction between the three sub-scales of the MBI-GS was maintained. To examine external validity, the sub-scales were related to selected work characteristics. Based on the theory of resource conservation, differential patterns were predicted with effects among the correlatives and the three burnout sub-scales. Expectations were largely supported, which suggests that the meaning of the three sub-scales is very different.
Hederichet et al. 2016	Applies the MBI-Student Survey (MBI-SS) to the Colombian context in a sample of 820 students. The results, in comparison with the samples of previous exercises, exhibit greater burnout levels, lesser levels of cynicism and similar levels of self-efficacy.
Yavuz and Dogan (2014)	This research studied burnout applying the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Student Survey (MBI-SS) in 1,020 Turkish highschoolers. The three dimensions (exhaustion, cynicism, reduced efficacy) were found. Nevertheless, the results of the analysis of validating factors differed from the standard.
Wickramasinghe et al. (2018)	This study confirms the three-dimensional structure of the student burnout concept. The Sinhala version with the fifteen items of the MBI-SS is a valid and reliable instrument to assess exhaustion in the academic cycle of students in Sri Lanka. The Sinhala version with the fifteen items of the MBI-SS could be used as an assessment tool to study burnout in schools due to its brevity, relatively easy administration and psychometric soundness of its properties. Prevention in elementary.
Rodriguez et al. (2019)	Results evince that women –compared with men– suffer higher levels of academic burnout in the dimensions that were studied (exhaustion, cynicism and efficacy.)
Perez-Marmol and Brown (2019)	This is study studied burnout in a total of 225 Australian students enrolled in health care professions; results supported the unidimensional scale and the scalability of the three individual items of the MBI-SS; all of the elements in the three sub-scales fulfilled the requirements of RMM adjustment statistics.
Charry, Garzon, Pozo and Brestones (2018)	This study used the MBI-SS scale in university students in Colombia and Spain; findings support the scale's invariance for both samples and their suitable psychometric properties.

Table 2
Prior Studies on the Burnout Syndrome
 Source: compiled by the authors (2020)

In an unforeseen situation such as an academic strike, students cope with an adaptative situation of uncertainty and anxiety. This is why this study has set out to evaluate its impact on health and quality of life. The next section introduces the analysis method that was selected.

METHOD

In the seventy years in which the burnout syndrome has been studied throughout the 20th century, it has exhausted many scales that have been validated in different contexts. Personal conditions such as gender (Backović et al., 2012; Castellanos, 2018) and age, as well as personality, context and culture of institutions and organizations, family and social environments have been found to play a big part. This is why scales need to be validated; moreover, different types of healthcare occupations point to the following as having heavy workloads: healthcare, teachers at all

levels, students and homemakers. Table 3 lists some scales, although it is important to mention the need to develop new measurement scales that engage new professions and performance areas.

Authors	Scale
Emener-Luck (1979)	Emener-Luck Burnout Sale (ELBOS)
Jones (1980)	Staff Burnout Scale
Pines et al. (1981)	Tedium Measure
Maslach and Jackson (1981)	Maslach Burnout Inventory
Gillespie (1984)	Burnout indicators
Kremer and Hofman (1985)	Burnout Scale
Matthews (1986)	Matthews Burnout Scale for Employees
Seidman and Zager (1986)	Teacher Burnout Scale
Garden (1987)	Energy Depletion Index
García (1991, 1995, 2000)	Burnout mental effects
Aveni and Albani (1992)	Predicting Variables of Burnout
Holland and Michael (1993)	Holland Burnout Assessment Survey
	Rome Burnout Inventory
Venturi, Dell'Erba and Rizzo (1994)	
Moreno et al. (2001)	Faculty's questionnaires on Burnout
Schaufeli, Martinez, Pinto, Salanova and Bakker (2002)	Utrecht Work Engagement Scale, employees (UWES) and students (UWES-S) versions
Carlotto and Câmara (2006)	
Hederich-Martinez and Caballero-Dominquez (2016)	Burnout syndrome predictors in students enrolled in a nursing technical course

Table 3
Burnout Scales

Source: adapted from Garcas (1997), Serrano et al. (2017).

This study chose to apply the MASLACH BURNOUT INVENTORY-STUDENT SURVEY scale, which has been applied by Yavuz and Dogan (2014), and Wickramasinghe et al., (2018): it is considered a validated measurement instrument, it has been previously applied and validated in Latin America by Schaufeli et al. (2002), Carmona et al. (2019) and Serrano et al. (2019), and in Colombia by (Charry, Garzon, Pozo & Bretones, 2018), the latter added the UTRECHTWORK ENGAGEMENT SCALE FOR STUDENTS (UWES-S) (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003).

The inclusion of the UWES-S is interesting because it measures academic engagement, a multidimensional and dynamic concept that integrates students' critical thinking, information analysis capacity and persistence to achieve their accomplishments and well-being. It is characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption (Öncü, 2015). Schaufeli et al. (2002) assert that "engagement refers to a more persistent, affective and cognitive driven state that does not focus solely on specific objects, events, individuals or behaviors" (p.465). Both instruments were validated by Schaufeli et al. (2002).

In consideration of the academic interruption generated by a strike, it was decided to undertake a study among public university students in Colombia to assess the impact of the 4-month long strike that started in September 2019 and ended in January 2020, which completely halted classes. Twelve universities were involved in the strike (out of 32 in the State University System – SUE, for its Spanish acronym), some institutions had to postpone the semester, affecting almost 100,000 students (El Espectador, 2018). Students resumed activities by mid-

January and February 2020, finishing the second term in March 2020. This survey was applied in the last week of January and in February 2020, it was disseminated in student social networks and it was presented as a web-based questionnaire. A total of 276 questionnaires were received, four were eliminated after the revision deemed them incomplete. The analysis was conducted with 272 respondents.

The questionnaire was designed using the following dimensions to measure the degree of impact of the burnout syndrome in students during the strike. Students provided their answers according to the level of feelings experienced throughout their academic activities:

D1: Exhaustion

1. 1. I feel emotionally drained by my studies
1. I feel exhausted at the end of the day in the university
1. I feel tired when I wake up in the morning and I have to attend another day in the university
1. Studying or attending class is a strain on me
1. I feel tired due to my studies

LENGTH AND COMMITMENT

D2: Loss of Interest (Cynicism)

1. 1. I am less interested in my studies since the strikes began
1. I have become less enthusiastic about my studies
1. I have become more skeptical about the prospective usefulness of my studies
1. I have wondered if my studies are important

D3: Professional Efficacy

1. 1. I can effectively solve problems deriving from my studies
1. I think I effectively contribute to the classes I attend
1. In my opinion, I am a good student
1. I feel encouraged when I attain my study objectives
1. I have learned many interesting things throughout my studies
1. In class I feel sure I can do things effectively

UTRECHT WORK ENGAGEMENT FOR STUDENTS (UWES-S)

D4: Vigor

1. 1. When I am studying I feel mentally strong
1. I can carry on studying for a long time
1. When I am studying I feel full of energy
1. When I am studying I feel strong and vigorous
1. May I combine my academic activities with those pertaining to the revindication of rights (strike, assembly, etc.)?

From a descriptive perspective, it is relevant to state that the respondents are students in Colombian public universities, with an average of 21 years of age (Figure 1). For 57% of them, facing an academic

strike impacts their academic progress. The financial situation of 22% of them is affected. While 9% believes it disturbs the completion of their degree. Although studies conducted have not established a relationship between the age and the syndrome, in this group of students it is evident that age is linked with the expectation of finishing their studies and moving onwards in their professional development, which is also a source of constant pressure and stress in their lives (Figure 2).

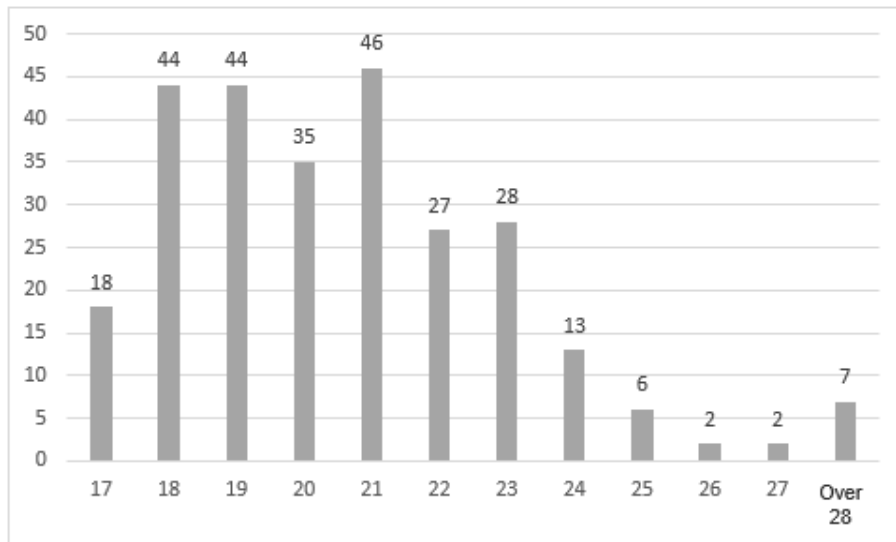


Figure 1
Ages of Participants in the Study.
Source: compiled by the authors (2020)

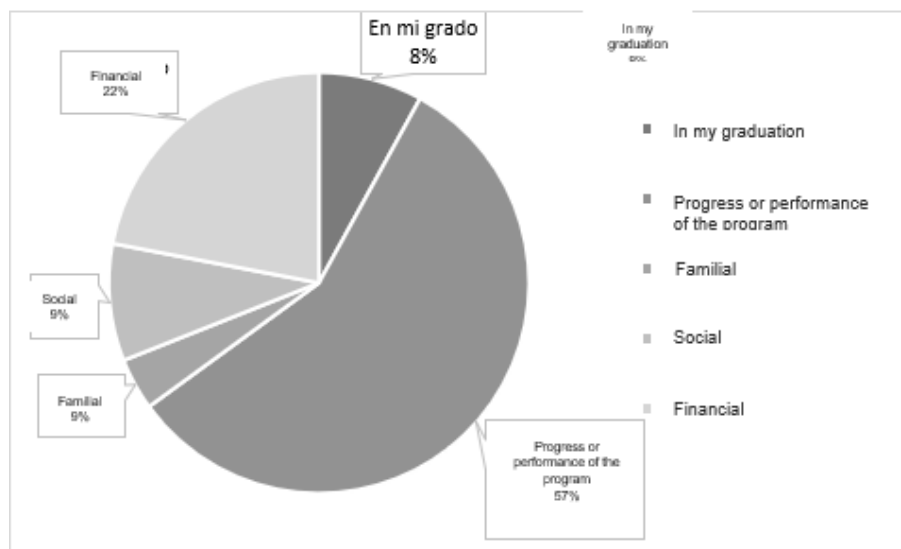


Figure 2
Participants' Age
Source: compiled by the authors (2020)

In terms of the origin of the students in the sample, it was found that 47% of them are from Medellin and 31% from Bogota (Figure 3).

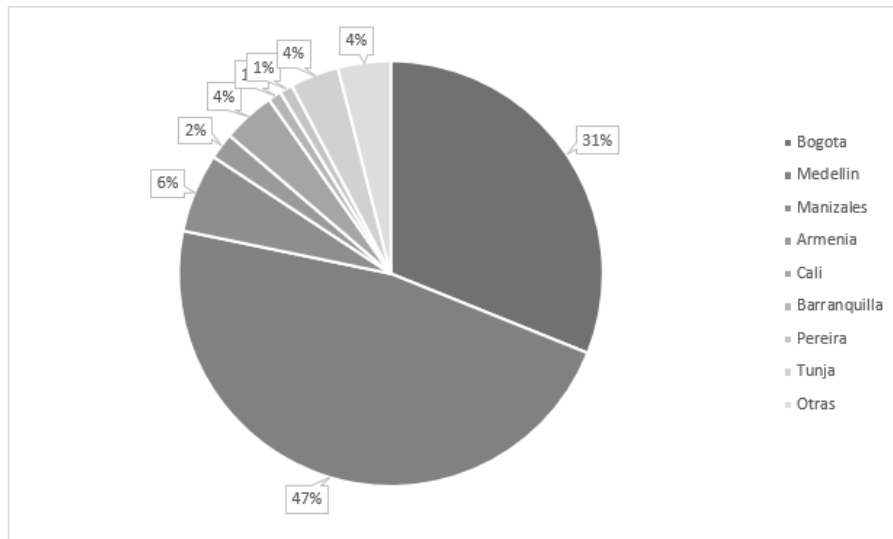


Figure 3
City in Which the Students in the Sample Study
Source: compiled by the authors (2020)

RESULTS

The most relevant aspects of the survey's results were subject to descriptive interpretation, factor analysis and analysis of variance. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin and Bartlett's tests (Table 3) assessed the statistical significance of the instrument used to collect information, showing a relationship of the variables and a significance below 0.05, which helps conclude that the factor analysis model is feasible from a statistical standpoint.

	KMO	Approx. Chi-squared	gl	Sig.
MBI-SS	0.856	3239.546	190	0.000

Table 4
KMO and Bartlett's Test
Source: compiled by the authors (2020)

Likewise, the dimensions corresponded to the structure proposed in the methodology. The total explained variance is of 67.51. The following is the Rotated Component Matrix.

Rotated Component Matrix

	Component			
	1	2	3	4
How often do I feel? [I feel emotionally drained by my studies]	-0.079	0.797	-0.037	0.256
How often do I feel? [I feel exhausted at the end of the day in the university]	0.197	0.794	-0.075	0.130
How often do I feel? [I feel tired when I wake up in the morning and I have to attend another day in the university]	0.036	0.853	-0.041	0.093
How often do I feel? [Studying or attending class is a strain on me]	-0.165	0.748	-0.076	0.289
How often do I feel? [I feel tired due to my studies]	-0.154	0.822	-0.133	0.272
How often do I feel? [I am less interested in my studies since the strikes began]	0.080	0.143	-0.148	0.816
How often do I feel? [I have become less enthusiastic about my studies]	-0.142	0.361	-0.141	0.769
How often do I feel? [I have become more skeptical about the prospective usefulness of my studies]	-0.159	0.203	0.085	0.769
How often do I feel? [I have wondered if my studies are important]	0.040	0.192	0.070	0.621
How often do I feel? [I can effectively solve problems deriving from my studies]	0.695	0.050	0.045	0.023
How often do I feel? [I think I effectively contribute to the classes I attend]	0.757	-0.123	0.202	-0.054
How often do I feel? [In my opinion, I am a good student]	0.805	-0.106	0.078	0.022
How often do I feel? [I feel encouraged when I attain my study objectives]	0.768	0.084	0.164	-0.088
How often do I feel? [I have learned many interesting things throughout my studies]	0.616	0.255	0.363	-0.198
How often do I feel? [In class I feel sure I can do things effectively]	0.739	-0.121	0.371	-0.025
How often do I feel? [When I am <u>studying</u> I feel mentally strong]	0.558	-0.295	0.606	0.024
How often do I feel? [I can carry on studying for a long time]	0.411	-0.184	0.697	0.064
How often do I feel? [When I am <u>studying</u> I feel full of energy]	0.444	-0.202	0.769	0.068
How often do I feel? [When I am <u>studying</u> I feel strong and vigorous]	0.429	-0.172	0.739	0.084
How often do I feel? [May I combine my academic activities with those pertaining to the revindication of rights (strike, assembly, etc.)?]	-0.068	0.152	0.661	-0.265

Table 5
Rotated Component Matrix
Source: compiled by the authors (2020)

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The analysis of variance (Annex 1) was conducted to validate the results of the Maslach Burnout instrument, in terms of the dimensions considered for the burnout syndrome among the student population, it showed that there are no significant differences between each consideration proposed in the questionnaire; students, regardless of the city of origin and academic program they are enrolled in, feel the same amount of stress throughout the academic strike. The presence of the burnout syndrome is evident in this group of study, therefore it is necessary to define prevention and action measurements to minimize future effects.

Total variance shows a concentration of results that focuses on exhaustion perceived by students, variables which are highly coincidental with the sample, four components account for 67.51%. The relationship

of each item in the survey for each component is found in the rotated component matrix.

A relationship between the items assumed for the burnout syndrome exists, therefore there is coherence in the study and what the students manifest. The rotated component matrix helps observe the correlation of variables for each the input of the burnout syndrome dimensions, confirming that this instrument is consistent with what was found in the literary review.

In terms of feeling tired (exhaustion,) 34% of the students mention feeling tired every day, which is understandable seeing as the academic activity does not stop during the day or the weekend. The dimension of cynicism is noteworthy because students do not lose interest in their studies. Considering themselves to be good students (efficacy) is validated with the encouragement they feel for achieving their objectives, which could be considered a motivational factor for them during the reinforcement, an activity that teachers could develop to minimize the syndrome. Consequently, it is indispensable to undertake research to become familiar with this problem (Rodriguez et al., 2019) and anticipate actions to assist students who are dealing with frustration.

Two types of support alternatives are recommended, initially at individual level as training to improve self-esteem and assertiveness, use of time and social topics. Interventions should also be offered to those who don't have the syndrome, to prevent it and prepare them to support others that may be experiencing difficulties. In future cases of academic strike, educational institutions should provide communication mechanisms to encourage the feeling of belonging in the institution and establish communication channels with personnel that is prepared to help those in need. The events experienced by education in 2020-2021 demonstrated that virtual channels are helpful means to stay close to students and parents and to strengthen the bond with studying. Similarly, reflection and motivation activities pertaining to the professional future can be fostered through experiences dialogues (prior availability of the suitable personnel) with the goal of boosting motivation.

This study approaches students' reality when faced with uncertainty, there is a need to conduct more focused studies, e.g., per city or per progress of the studies, in order to generate specific strategies for needs that were found and to lessen the impact of academic burnout. Also by incorporating the schools' teachers, making the existence of the syndrome evident.

The questionnaire expounds that students have the need to be made aware when fulfilling their objectives, to have a sense of encouragement and as a motivation conditioner (44%). Consequently, there is a recommendation to set up communication actions between teachers and students to timely communicate achievements, failures and improvement actions to involve students in their training process.

Future studies should evaluate the impact that academic strikes have in terms of the potential to use new technologies to keep students moving forward with their academic progress. Another line of research could

assess changes in the journey for teachers and students' experience amid the pandemic of SARS-CoV-2 19, since there is evidence that indicates that it drives tensions in educational environments (Silas & Vazquez, 2020; Rojas et al., 2020; Chen, 2020; Daumiller, 2021)

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