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Adjustment to School as the Predictor of School Burnout in University Students

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Abstract:

Introduction: Burnout emerges as a common problem during the university period when social competition and expectations from the individual increase, and daily life becomes increasingly complicated due to augmenting stress factors. The aim of this study was to examine whether the school burnout of university students can be predicted significantly by adjustment to school.

Methods: This study used a correlational survey model to investigate the burnout levels of university students in terms of their adjustment to university life. The sample of the study comprised a total of 334 students, enrolled in four different faculties of a university in Turkey. The data of this research were collected by using the "Adjustment to University Life Scale (AULS)", "The Maslach Burnout Inventory-Student Form (MBI-SF)" and personal information form.

Results: The findings obtained in this study showed that academic, social, and personal adjustment to university life among university students negatively and significantly correlated with school burnout that students experienced. In addition, personal, social and academic adjustment variables together significantly predict each of the exhaustion, cynicism and efficacy variables.

Discussion: According to these results, academic, social, and personal adjustment to university life among university students negatively and significantly correlated with school burnout that students experienced. This situation indicates that as students' academic, social, and personal adaptation to university life increases, they will experience less emotional burnout, become less cynical of their environment, and feel less personal inefficacy. In this context, it is thought that interventions that support adaptation to university life are an important factor that will protect students from the negative effects of burnout.

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Limitations: The sample of this study is limited to 334 participants. In addition, the findings of the study are limited to the sincere response of the participants to the instruments of the study and the qualifications of the measurement tools. In other words, this research has no claim of generalizability.
Conclusions: According to the findings of the study, students with high adjustment to university life experience less academic burnout. In this context, both individual and group work to be conducted by the guidance and psychological counseling units of universities gain importance. It will be particularly beneficial to conduct studies for adjustment to university life, such as psycho-education, group psychological counseling, or peer guidance.

Key words: adjustment to university, school burnout, academic achievement, university students, school counseling.

Introduction

Every year hundreds of thousands of students coming from different cities and cultures go through various tests and step into university life in Turkey like all over the world. The number of students placed in a university in Turkey, which has about 85 million population, has been announced as 781.165 as of 2020 (Turkish Student Selection and Placement Center, 2020). Although university life is an important step for the future of individuals, it also means a change of the current lifestyle for them (Mostert & Pienaar, 2020; Özhan & Boyacı, 2018). With the onset of university life, a significant portion of the students leave their families and social environment for the first time, and they try to adjust to a new life in this process (Roksa, Deutschlander, & Whitley, 2020; Thurber, & Walton, 2012). Studies on adjustment to university, carried out in almost every part of the world, emphasize that adjustment to university life is a stressful process that challenges the individual (Gfellner & Córdoba, 2020; Holliman et al., 2019; Liran & Miller, 2019; Wider et al., 2017). In the process of adjustment to university life, while individuals experience psychological, academic and social difficulties, on the one hand, they also struggle with economic difficulties (Özhan & Boyacı, 2018; Paramo-Fernandez et al., 2017). In other words, university life, which is an important and necessary step for the future of individuals, can be a challenging process for them. Considering that university students will assume important roles in the near future of the country, it is clear that their current capacity should be investigated and developed and that they should be contributed so that they can achieve a great deal in academic and social areas of life.

Studies on adjustment to university state that variables, such as life satisfaction, perceived social support, psychological capital, family relationships, social self-efficacy, and appreciation, facilitate the individual's adjustment (Alsubaie, Stain, Webster, & Wadman, 2019; Boyacı, 2019; Holliman et al, 2019; Kim, 2019; Liran & Miller, 2019; Paramo-Fernandez et al., 2017). Knowledge of only the variables that facilitate the adjustment of the individual will not be enough to understand the process of adjustment to university in all aspects. To fully understand this process, it is also necessary to know the factors that negatively affect individuals' adjustment to university (Özhan and Boyacı, 2018) and their needs (Chacón-Cuberos et al., 2018). The change that comes with university life can bring some concerns and problems about the future. Studies show that, with the start of university life, individuals have different problems, such as concerns for being criticized, loneliness, longing for family, lack of institutional affiliation, shyness, depression, and anxiety disorders (Aslan, 2015; Kim, 2019; Liran & Miller, 2019; Mostert & Pienaar, 2020; Petersen, Louw, & Dumont, 2009). School guidance and counseling services aim to help students to cope with these difficulties.

In addition to problems regarding adjustment to university stated in the literature, another important problem, which negatively affects both academic achievements and well-being of students, is school burnout (Chang and Lee, 2020; Salmelo-Aro & Read, 2017). Maslach (1982) conceptualizes burnout as a multi-dimensional structure consisting of three interrelated components. The three components that make up this multidimensional structure of the phenomenon of burnout are stated to be exhaustion, cynicism, and ineffectiveness. When the current literature on the phenomenon of burnout, a concept which was first used in working life and then in the academic field, is examined (Maslach et al., 2001; Walburg, 2014), it is seen that burnout is now considered to be an important problem experienced by individuals in almost every age group (Boyacı & Özhan, 2018; Seibert, May, Fitzgerald, & Fincham, 2016). In other words, burnout is now considered not only as a phenomenon related to job but also as a phenomenon that has been studied by various fields and has implications for the lives of individuals from various parts of society (Leskovic, Vukovič, Leskovar, & Goriup, 2016; Goriup, Stričević, & Sruk, 2017).

It is emphasized by the majority of researchers that burnout experienced by students in schools and burnout experienced in business life have something in common. Although the environment in which burnout is experienced is different, school/academic burnout and burnout in job cause similar emotional, physical and psychological problems in the individual and this situation creates the phenomenon of school burnout (Asikanen et al., 2020; Salmelo-Aro et al.2009). The concept of school burnout can generally be defined as getting exhausted due

to academic demands, developing negative attitudes towards school and school activities, and the emergence of perceived inadequacy towards school, and it is sometimes conceptualized as "student burnout" or "academic burnout" in the literature (Boada-Grau et al., 2015; Salmelo-Aro & Read, 2017; Seibert et al., 2016). The burnout experienced by students at different levels of education due to school-related activities and school life negatively affects many academic and affective outcomes related to the teaching-learning process, especially the academic achievement, happiness, and well-being of the students, and it seen as a major problem in front of the individual's development process with this respect (Boyacı & Özhan, 2018; May, Bauer, & Fincham, 2015; Walburg, 2014). Burnout emerges as an even more common problem compared to the past during the university period, when social competition and expectations from the individual increase, and daily life becomes increasingly complicated by augmenting life stress factors. When the efforts made by individuals to adapt to this change push their existing potential, the likelihood of emergence of burnout rises (Dandar, Grigsby, & Bunton, 2019; Lin & Huang, 2014). This study aimed to reveal the relationship between burnout and adjustment to university. For this purpose, the following hypotheses were tested in the study. In summary, considering the argument that it is important to examine the factors related to the quality of life of university students (Čepelová & Barnová, 2020), it is important to examine the relationship between adaptation to university life and burnout. As explained in detail in the introduction, this study draws attention to supporting the adaptation to university life as a protective factor in coping with burnout, which is an important risk factor that threatens the well-being, quality of life, success, and development of university students in general.

1 Research hypotheses

H_1: Academic, social, and personal adjustment negatively and significantly predicts exhaustion, which is a component of school burnout in university students.

H_2: Academic, social, and personal adjustment negatively and significantly predicts cynicism, which is a component of school burnout in university students.

H_3: Academic, social, and personal adjustment negatively and significantly predicts efficacy, which is a component of school burnout in university students.

2 Method

2.1 The research model

This study used a correlational model to investigate the burnout levels of university students in terms of adjustment to university life. Following the nature of correlational model, this study investigated the extent to which independent variables represented as academic, social, and personal adjustment to university life predicted school burnout (Creswell, 2012; Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012).

2.2 The study group

The study group consisted of a total of 334 students, including 111 males (33.2%) and 219 females (65.6%), enrolled in four different faculties of a university in Turkey. Four students (1.2%) in the study group were determined to not have stated their gender. The ages of the students in the study group varied between 17 and 38, and the mean age was 19.81 years.

2.3 Data collection tools

The study data were collected using three data collection tools, namely, a Personal Information Form, the Adjustment to University Life Scale (AULS), and the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Student Form (MBI-SF).

2.3.1 The Personal Information Form

This form was created within the scope of this research to collect data about the demographic characteristics of the university students participating in the study. The form included items questioning demographic information, such as age, gender, and the faculty.

2.3.2 The Adjustment to University Life Scale (AULS)

This scale was developed by Aslan (2015) to obtain information about the level of adjustment to university life in university students. The Turkish form of the scale, which was developed as a result of validity and reliability studies conducted on university students, consists of three components, each of which has 20 items and is named as personal adjustment, social adjustment, and academic adjustment. The scale has a total of 60 items and a 5-point Likert-type rating structure and yields three different scores regarding the adjustment of students to university life. Increased scores obtained from the subscales of the scale refer to increased adjustment, while low scores indicate decreased adjustment. This structure of the AULS, which consists of three subscales and 60 items, explains 78.16% of the total variance regarding adjustment to university life. Besides, in the confirmatory factor analysis conducted during the development study of the scale, the goodness of fit index values of the scale was calculated as ($\chi 2/df$)=3.39, CFI=.93, IFI=.93, SRMR=.07, and RMSEA=.08. In

the reliability analyses, Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency coefficient of the scale was found as α=.92 for personal adjustment, α=.89 for social adjustment, and α=.93 for academic adjustment. The reliability of the scale was re-analyzed for the study group of this research. Accordingly, Cronbach's Alpha of the scale was found as α=.87 for personal adjustment, α=.82 for social adjustment, and α=.88 for academic adjustment. Sample items related to the scale are as follows: *"I1: I feel like a part of this university."; "I2: I attend classes willingly."; "I3: I spend efforts to make new friends at this university."*

2.3.3 The Maslach Burnout Inventory-Student Form (MBI-SF)

This scale was developed by Schaufeli et al. (2002) to determine the burnout levels of university students, and it was adapted to the Turkish context by Çapri, Gündüz, and Gökçakan (2011). During the adaptation study by Çapri et al. (2011), the Turkish form of the scale was determined to have 13 items under three components, namely, exhaustion (5 items), cynicism (4 items), and efficacy (4 items). The scale has a 5-point Likert-type rating structure. Three separate burnout scores of university students can be calculated through the scale. In the confirmatory factor analysis performed during the adaptation study of the scale, the goodness of fit index values of the scale was calculated as ($\chi 2/df$)=2.87, CFI=.98, GFI=.97, AGFI=.95, SRMR=.037, and RMSEA=.049. In the adaptation study of the scale, Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficients calculated for the scale were reported as α=.76 for exhaustion, α=.82 for cynicism, and α=.61 for efficacy. The reliability of the scale was re-analyzed for the study group of this research. Accordingly, the reliability coefficient (Cronbach's Alpha) of the scale was calculated as α=.84 for exhaustion, α=.86 for cynicism, and α=.65 for efficacy. Sample items related to the scale are as follows: *"I1: I feel emotionally fed up with my lessons."; "I2: Since I started my education, my interest in lessons has decreased."; "I3: I can effectively solve the problems I encounter in my lessons."*

2.4 Data collection and analysis

The data collection process of the research was carried out at the beginning of the spring semester of the 2019-2020 academic year. The research process started with obtaining the necessary legal permissions. Afterward, the research data were collected by a single researcher in the classroom using a paper-pencil test format. Before starting to collect research data, firstly, the participants were informed about the problem, purpose, and importance of the research, and the necessary instructions regarding the research were presented. After that, the data collection tools used in the research were administered to students who volunteered to participate in the study. It took the students about 20 minutes to fill out the data collection tools used in the study. At the end of these processes,

the data collection tools of the research were administered to a total of 356 students, and the data collection process was completed.

After the data collection process was completed and the data were entered into a database file, the data set was examined in terms of whether there were missing and/or erroneous data. In the analysis and evaluation of missing data, the rate of acceptable unanswered items was determined as 5% (Creswell, 2012). At this point, the data of 12 students containing more than 5% unanswered items were removed from the data set. Then, the extreme values and the normality of the distribution in the data set were examined. Univariate extreme values in the data set were analyzed using histogram graphs, box graphs, and calculated z scores with the IBM SPSS software package. On the other hand, multivariate extreme values deviating from the normal distribution were analyzed by calculating Mahalanobis distance coefficients. Accordingly, the data of a total of 10 students determined to be extreme values were excluded from the data set of the study. After these analyses, the research data set was found to include no more extreme values and to have normal distribution as can be seen from the kurtosis and skewness coefficients given in Table 1. Eventually, the analysis of the research data was carried out based on the hypotheses on the final study group consisting of 334 participants.

In the analysis of the data, first, descriptive statistics related to the variables included in the hypotheses formed within the scope of the research were calculated, and then the correlations between these variables were examined with Pearson's product-moment correlation analysis. After determining that there were significant correlations between variables, separate regression models were established for each of the dependent variables of exhaustion, cynicism, and efficacy to test whether these variables were significantly predicted by predictive variables of personal adjustment, social adjustment, and academic adjustment. The mentioned analyses were carried out using IBM SPSS 22 software package, and the significance value was accepted as $p<.05$ in the interpretation of the results of the analysis.

3 Findings

3.1 Descriptive statistics

Pearson's correlation coefficients were calculated to reveal the correlations between the variables in the regression models established in the study. In addition, descriptive statistics regarding these variables were also done. The results of the correlation analysis and descriptive statistics regarding the research variables are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Correlation values between the variables and descriptive statistics

	1	2	3	4	5	6
(1) Exhaustion	---	.76**	.30**	-.45**	-.54**	-.43**
(2) Cynicism		---	.31**	-.49**	-.55**	-.45**
(3) Efficacy			---	-.43**	-.47**	-.55**
(4) Social adjustment				---	.65**	.50**
(5) Personal adjustment					---	.57**
(5) Academic adjustment						---
$\bar{X}$	13.72	9.18	11.50	73.26	65.14	68.26
Ss.	4.70	3.89	3.02	9.24	12.25	13.13
Kurtosis	-.24	.49	-.24	.54	-.10	-.24
Skewness	.70	.99	-.30	-.55	-.38	-.07

**p < .001

In this study, the status of school burnout experienced by university students has been conceptualized under three components, namely; exhaustion, cynicism, and efficacy. As seen in Table 1, moderate and significant negative correlations were found between university students' score from the exhaustion component, which is the first component of burnout, and social (r=-.45, p<.01), personal (r=-.54, p<.01), and academic (r=-.43, p<.01) adjustment scores. Similarly, there was a moderate and significant negative correlation between the cynicism scores of the students in the study group and their social (r=-.49, p<.01), personal (r=-.55, p<.01), and academic (r=-.45, p<.01) adjustment scores. The efficacy scores, which represent the third component in the conceptualization of burnout, had a moderate and significant negative correlation with social (r=-.43, p<.01), personal (r=-.47, p<.01), and academic (r=-.55, p<.01) adjustment scores, being consistent with the other two burnout components. This shows that as the adjustment to university life increases, students experience less burnout, and the sense of emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced efficacy that students who have adapted to university life more socially, personally, and academically will fall.

3.2 Inferential statistics

Multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to analyze whether university students' adjustment to university life significantly predicted burnout. In this analysis, the variables representing the basic components of burnout, namely; exhaustion, cynicism, and efficacy were separately predicted (dependent) variables, while social, personal, and academic adjustment, which were the components of adjustment to university life, were independent (predictive) variables. Thus, three different regression models established separately for each

dependent variable were tested. The results of the analyses are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Prediction of burnout by adjustment to university life

Predicted	*Predictive*	*B*	*β*	*t*	*p*	*R*	R^2	*F*
Exhaustion	Constant	31.70		18.29	.000	.567	.322	52.25**
	Personal Adj.	-.14	-.35	-5.47	.000			
	Social Adj.	-.07	-.14	-2.30	.022			
	Academic Adj.	-.06	-.16	-2.84	.005			
Cynicism	Constant	25.30		18.03	.000	.592	.351	59.40**
	Personal Adj.	-.11	-0.33	-5.25	.000			
	Social Adj.	-.08	-0.19	-3.25	.001			
	Academic Adj.	-.05	-0.16	-2.95	.003			
Efficacy	Constant	23.30		21.36	.000	.590	.348	58.59**
	Personal Adj.	-.04	-.17	-2.66	.008			
	Social Adj.	-.04	-.12	-2.06	.040			
	Academic Adj.	-.09	-.39	-7.07	.000			

**p < .01

As seen in Table 2, the variables of social, personal, and academic adjustment predicted the exhaustion variable negatively and significantly (R=.567, R^2=.322, p<.01). Accordingly, the variables of social, personal, and academic adjustment together explained 32.2% of the total variance of the burnout variable. The standardized regression coefficients (β) and t values indicated that the relative importance level of the predictive effects of independent variables on exhaustion was personal adjustment (β=-.35, t=-5.47), academic adjustment (β=-.16, t=-2.84), and social adjustment (β=-.14, t=-2.30), respectively.

Like exhaustion, cynicism, which was another predicted (dependent) variable of the study, was negatively and significantly predicted by the variables of social, personal, and academic adjustment (R=.592, R^2=.351, p<.01). Accordingly, the variables of social, personal, and academic adjustment together explained 35.1% of the total variance of cynicism variable. The standardized regression coefficients (β) and t values revealed that the relative importance level of the predictive effects of independent variables on cynicism was personal adjustment (β=-.33, t=-5.25), social adjustment (β=-.19, t=-3.25), and academic adjustment (β=-.16, t=-2.95), respectively.

Like the two other dependent variables, efficacy, which was the third and last predicted (dependent) variable of the study, was negatively and significantly predicted by the variables of social, personal, and academic adjustment (R=.590, R^2=.348, p<.01). Accordingly, the variables of social, personal, and academic

adjustment together were found to explain 34.8% of the total variance of the efficacy variable. The standardized regression coefficients (β) and t values indicated that the relative importance level of the predictive effects of independent variables on efficacy was academic adjustment (β=-.39, t=-7.07), personal adjustment (β=-.17, t=-2.66), and social adjustment (β=-.12, t=-2.06), respectively.

The evaluation of the three regression models established in line with the research hypotheses together showed that the variables of exhaustion, cynicism, and efficacy, which are the components of school burnout in university students, were predicted significantly by the personal, social, and academic adjustment variables, which are the components of adaptation to university life. Moreover, it can be said that the predictive power of personal, social, and academic adjustment variables on the components of burnout was cynicism, efficacy, and exhaustion, respectively. When all these results are evaluated together, it is possible to say that students who adjust to university life more personally, socially, and academically may experience less school burnout. In other words, adjustment to university life can function as a significant protective factor that can reduce the occurrence of burnout.

4 Discussion

The findings obtained in this study showed that academic, social, and personal adjustment to university life among university students was negatively and significantly correlated with school burnout that students experienced. At the same time, academic, social, and personal adjustment to university life significantly explained exhaustion, cynicism, and efficacy, which are the components of burnout (Çapri et al., 2011; Dandar, 2019; Kim, 2019; Pisarik, 2009). This situation indicates that as students' academic, social, and personal adaptation to university life increases, they will experience less emotional burnout, become less cynical of their environment, and feel less personal inefficacy. Like the results of the current study, some studies in the literature emphasize that increased adjustment capacity of the individual will decrease burnout (Asikainen et al., 2020; Chang & Lee, 2020; Walburg, 2014).

According to the literature, academic burnout results from two factors, namely, inadequate resources of the individual and maladjustment (Kim, 2019; Walburg, 2014). The first of these means that the student does not have enough potential to do what is expected of them at school and to successfully complete the tasks at school (Aguayo et al., 2019; Dandar et al., 2019). Another factor that causes students to experience school burnout is the discrepancy between the student's wishes, in other words, expectations from himself/herself and the expectations of their family, friends, and teachers (Chacón-Cuberos et al., 2020). The findings of the current study also supported this situation. According to the results of the

study, personal and social adjustment negatively predicted the individual's burnout.

Difficulties encountered along with university life can cause different problems, such as depression, anxiety, and stress (Mostert & Pienaar, 2020; Wider et al., 2017). As a result of these problems, the individual can become estranged from school and can be exhausted academically. The findings of the current study showed consistency with the literature in this respect, too (Páramo-Fernández et al., 2017; Holliman et al., 2019; Gfellner & Córdoba, 2020). In this context, the need for preventive studies to be conducted by psychological counselors working in school guidance and psychological counseling services is increasing every other day. Mercan and Yıldız (2011), who investigated the psychological guidance needs of freshmen at university, stated that they wanted to benefit from psychological support services in coping with stress, increasing academic achievement, career planning, communication skills, social anxiety, problem solving, anger control, and time management.

Conclusions and recommendations

In conclusion to the results of the current study, academic, social and personal adjustment to university life was negatively and significantly correlated with school burnout that students experienced. Besides, exhaustion, cynicism, and ineffectiveness, which are the components of school burnout, were also significantly predicted by school burnout. According to the findings of the current study, students with high adjustment to university life experience less academic burnout. In this context, both individual and group work to be conducted by the guidance and psychological counseling units of universities gain importance. It will be particularly beneficial to conduct studies for adjustment to university life, such as psycho-education, group counseling, or peer guidance (Boyacı, 2016; Boyacı & Özhan, 2018). It is important to support the findings of the current research with experimental studies on this topic. Therefore, researchers who are planning to conduct a study on this topic can conduct experimental studies and test the effectiveness of the results.

In addition to the significant results revealed by this study, it is also considered to be important regarding the sample group. The review of the literature has shown that there are relatively few studies on adjustment to university life in university students and related factors. At this point, this study is also considered important in terms of increasing the knowledge on adjustment to school, which has an important place in school guidance and psychological counseling services. In addition, this study was not limited to the first-year university students but covered all.

Universities in many countries of the world have switched to distance education, especially due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This is considered very valuable in

terms of students' health but receiving distance education in the first year may create a risk factor for university students in terms of adjustment to university (Moorhouse, 2020). This is because students in this period face two different and important tasks, such as adjusting to the distance education system and the university education process at the same time. For this reason, it is recommended that guidance and psychological counseling services to be carried out in universities should be conducted accurately, adequately, and timely, especially during the pandemic process. While these studies are carried out, making use of distance education opportunities and technology is considered valuable in terms of reaching more students at the same time.

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