

# The Relationship Between Engagement and Burnout Among Pre-schoolers' in China

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## ABSTRACT

This study looked into the relationship between students' engagement and burnout in preschools in China. According to this study, there is a strong inverse relationship between engagement and burnout. Among them, the assumption of vigour and engagement is not accepted, and there is little correlation between them. The two factors which are dedication and absorption have a huge impact on engagement and the relationship between them is very significant. For burnout, the three factors have a very significant impact on burnout which are exhaustion, cynicism and efficacy. Finally, this study suggests that preschool teachers should find ways to make students engaged in learning and reduce burnout in order to improve Chinese pre-schoolers' learning attitudes and effectiveness. Besides, teachers also should seek to control students' exhaustion, cynicism and efficacy in order to create a positive learning environment and help students to develop active motivation for learning.

**Key words:** engagement, burnout, pre-schoolers', positive learning

## INTRODUCTION

Research on engagement and burnout firstly focused on studying the social services, business management, and healthcare sectors. Since then, it has been extensively expanded into other fields. However, there has not been a lot of research on student involvement and burnout in schooling, particularly for preschoolers. How engaged they are in their learning and how much burnout they experience is a new topic that has received insufficient attention from researchers. This decline in attention to students has led to many problems in student management in many preschools. However, preschools, society and the country need to increase their attention to students and gain a deeper understanding of their physical and mental health. The Chinese government has formulated a series of policies and plans, such as the *Compulsory Education Law of the People's Republic of China* and the *National Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010 - 2020)*. Social forces are also encouraged to actively participate in the cause of preschool education, increase

support and investment in preschool institutions, and improve the strength of preschool teachers and teaching standards. This shows the importance that the Chinese government places on preschool education, making it extremely necessary for this study to be conducted.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to analyze the relationship between engagement and burnout in preschool students. By examining the relationship between engagement and fatigue in preschoolers, we can better understand children's behavioral and emotional states and provide guidance and suggestions to educators and parents regarding the management of children's behavior and emotions. Understanding the relationship between child engagement and fatigue can also contribute to a better understanding of children's emotional and behavioral development and can help educators and parents better understand children's behavioral and emotional development and how to help children develop positive and healthy behaviors and emotional management skills.

Previously, preschools were also looking for ways to increase students' interest in learning. For example, there are several strategies that are frequently used and often discussed, such as using rewarding teaching, hiring highly qualified and competent teachers, and establishing a sensitive mechanism to ensure the management and quality improvement of preschool education. However, the results are unsatisfactory and there are still many problems in preschools that have not been effectively addressed. For example, preschool teachers usually suppress students' opinions and perspectives. When teachers emphasize their own views and opinions rather than listening to and valuing students' perspectives, students may feel disrespected. It would cause students to lose motivation to get participated. Secondly, teachers overuse rewards and punishments. The use of rewards and punishments can promote students' motivation, but long-term over-reliance on these methods may have negative effects. Students may become overly focused on rewards and punishments rather than truly engaged in learning activities. Thirdly, uninteresting and boring learning activities are designed by the teachers. If the learning activities are not interesting and challenging, students may feel bored and disinterested, which leads them to lose interest and motivation to participate. And finally, teachers may ignore the diversity and individuality of students. Each student has different interests, needs, personalities and learning styles. Ignoring these differences may result in some students feeling unable to engage in learning activities.

In summary, the relationship between student engagement and burnout should be researched and analyzed as early as possible in the current particular context, so as to promote more active integration of preschool students into the classroom, increase their motivation to learn, and address some of the aforementioned problems in preschool teaching.

The main purpose of this research is to analyze the relationship between engagement and burnout among students in preschools in China. The study aims to investigate and discuss the factors that affect students' engagement (vigour, dedication, and absorption) and burnout (exhaustion, cynicism, and efficacy) to achieve the ultimate goal (Trowler, 2010). This study uses quantitative research to test the hypotheses and collects data through questionnaires. Two commonly

used software tools, SPSS and Smart PLS were used for data collection and data analysis respectively.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Student Engagement**

Student engagement is a term used to describe an individual's interest and enthusiasm for school, which impacts their academic performance and behaviour.

### **Student Burnout**

Burnout may lead to mental distress in the form of anxiety, depression, frustration, hostility or fear. Prior research has shown that burnout can lead to lower commitment, higher turnover, absenteeism, reduced productivity, low morale, and lower human consideration (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993; Maslach & Pines, 1977; Maslach, 1978).

## **THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ENGAGEMENT AND BURNOUT AMONG STUDENTS**

Through the study of the previous literature, it was found that so far there was limited literature that studies the relationship between student engagement and burnout. Many researchers have studied the relationship between student engagement and student performance, as well as the relationship between student burnout and academic performance. For example, Nowack and Hanson (1983) found that there is a relationship between college students' burnout and other grades which was a weak negative correlation; McCarthy et al. (1990) found that there was a significant but low negative correlation between college students' burnout levels and their average grades. Many researchers have discovered the subtle relationship between them (Xu, 2013).

Research has consistently found that high levels of engagement are associated with lower levels of burnout among students. When students are engaged in their academic study, they are more likely to feel energized and motivated, and less likely to experience feelings of fatigue and emotional exhaustion. In contrast, when students experience burnout, they tend to disengage from their academic study and may feel apathetic or detached from the learning process.

Furthermore, engagement can act as a protective factor against burnout. Students who are highly engaged in their academic study tend to have greater resilience and coping strategies, which can help them to better manage the stressors that contribute to burnout. On the other hand, students who are not engaged may be more vulnerable to burnout, as they lack the positive emotional and behavioral resources needed to cope with the demands of academic life.

Moreover, burnout can lead to reduced engagement over time. When students experience burnout, they may become disenchanted with their academic study and lose motivation, leading to reduced engagement. This can create a negative cycle, where decreased engagement leads to increased burnout, which in turn leads to further disengagement. In conclusion,

engagement and burnout are strongly related to each other among students. High levels of engagement can act as a protective factor against burnout, while burnout can lead to reduced engagement over time. It is important for educators and policymakers to recognize the importance of fostering engagement among students, as it can have significant implications for their academic success and well-being.

### **RESEARCH MODEL AND HYPOTHESIS**

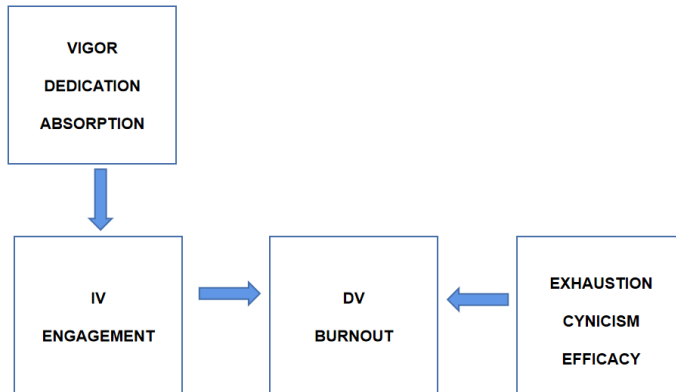


Figure 1 Conceptual framework

- H<sub>1</sub>: There is a significant relationship between vigour and engagement.
- H<sub>2</sub>: There is a significant relationship between dedication and engagement.
- H<sub>3</sub>: There is a significant relationship between absorption and engagement.
- H<sub>4</sub>: There is a significant relationship between exhaustion and burnout.
- H<sub>5</sub>: There is a significant relationship between cynicism and burnout.
- H<sub>6</sub>: There is a significant relationship between efficacy and burnout.
- H<sub>7</sub>: There is a significant relationship between engagement and burnout.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The information from this research poll is based on quantitative research and primary data analysis. It covers all pertinent research paradigms and methodologies. The research framestudy, research questions, research purpose, formulation of hypotheses, research design, target population, data analysis tools, data collecting, data analysis, data validity, and data reliability are all covered by the study's research design, methodology, and framestudy. The most crucial aspect of this research framestudy is that it has no mediator factors and a direct association between the independent and dependent variables, allowing it to directly advance the major concepts and research goals. Structured questions are used in this study's questionnaire survey approach to gather main data. As the primary data source for this investigation, only primary data were gathered online.

## **Target Population**

The target population of this study is the students from preschools from several representative cities in China, including two preschools in Shanghai, two preschools in Hefei, and five preschools in Hangzhou. The children in the preschools are basically three to six years old, and since the children are still too young to complete the online questionnaire independently, the questions in questionnaires would be read by the preschool teachers and the students will give a circle to the answer and choose the one they want. Therefore, even though the students cannot read the questions, they can understand what these questions mean and they can make the final decision accordingly.

## **Sample and Sampling Procedure**

In this study, the aim to investigate the relationship between engagement and burnout among preschoolers in China. To collect primary data, this study will need to select a sample of preschoolers who will participate in the survey. The sample should be representative of the population of preschoolers in China, which means that every preschooler in the population should have an equal chance of being selected. To achieve this, this study would use a random sampling technique which is cluster sampling, involving dividing the population into clusters or groups, such as preschools, and then randomly selecting clusters. After selecting the clusters, we can then randomly select participants from within each cluster. Only in this way can we analyze the students in school comprehensively. And the advantage of using the questionnaire is that the researcher can get all the complete answers in a short time. This method allows the researcher to reach a large number of respondents in a short time (Sekaran and Bougie,2010).

The sample size required for this study is based on G-power analysis. In the G-power analysis, there are four independent variables with an alpha error probability of 0.05, indicating a minimum sample size of 138; for an alpha error probability of 0.01, it shows a sample size of 174. Therefore, the sample size between 138 respondents and 174 respondents is a suitable sample size for this study. To avoid losing the data in the collected questionnaires, the researchers distributed 174 questionnaires to the operators.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

To analyze the data collected in this study, the social science statistical software package (SPSS) and partial least squares equation modelling (PLS-SEM) of the SMART PLS version 3.0 path modelling approach will be used. SPSS is used to type in the collected data, and SMART PLS is used for data analysis.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Table1 The relationship between hypotheses with actual results

HYPOTHESIS	FINDINGS
Vigor and Engagement	Not Supported
Dedication and Engagement	Supported
Absorption and Engagement	Supported
Exhaustion and Burnout	Supported
Cynicism and Burnout	Supported
Efficacy and Burnout	Supported
Engagement and Burnout	Supported

The findings of this study as shown in Table 1 indicate that the vigour factor within the H<sub>1</sub> hypothesis was not supported, which indicates that among preschoolers in China, there is no significant relationship between vigour and students, engagement. In this study, the student's vigour performance is feeling mentally strong, continuing for a very long time when I am studying, bursting with energy, feeling strong and vigorous and then getting up in the morning, will feel like going to class (Martin & Bolliger, 2018). The study demonstrates that there is relatively little correlation between vigour and engagement. This can be explained by the possibility that, rather than vigour, other factors, such as the student's peers, level of liking for the teacher, and level of desire for the course, may have an impact on how engaged the students are in their learning. This demonstrates that there is no significant association between vigour and engagement, and that vigour is not the cause of the relationship.

The two factors of dedication and absorption within the H<sub>2</sub> and H<sub>3</sub> hypotheses were accepted, which indicates that among preschoolers in China, there is a significant relationship between dedication and students' engagement, as well as absorption and students' engagement. In this study, students' dedication performance feels meaning and purpose, studies can inspire us, enthusiastic about studies, feel proud of studies, and feel challenged (Langelaan et al., 2006). The students' absorption is expressed as feeling that time is passing fast, and they will forget everything around them when studying, feel happy when studying intensively, and get carried away by their studies (Kuh, 2009). The findings of this study were consistent with previous studies, indicating that there was a significant relationship between Dedication, Absorption and Engagement (Wilmar, 2002). Research has shown that dedication and absorption have a significant positive relationship with engagement. When preschoolers are dedicated and absorbed in their study, they are more likely to be fully engaged, motivated, and committed to achieving the goals of the learning activities. They are also more likely to experience a sense of meaning and purpose in their study, leading to higher job satisfaction and reduced turnover. Furthermore, preschoolers who are dedicated and absorbed in their study tend to be more productive, creative, and innovative. They are more likely to take initiative, solve problems, and contribute to the overall success of the organization. If the

teachers focus on creating a study environment that fosters dedication and absorption, such as providing opportunities for growth and development, recognizing and rewarding preschoolers for their achievements, and promoting a positive learning environment. This can lead to higher levels of engagement and better education outcomes.

The findings of this study indicate that the three factors of burnout which are exhaustion, cynicism and efficacy within the H<sub>4</sub>, H<sub>5</sub> and H<sub>6</sub> hypotheses are accepted, which indicated that among preschooler in China, there was a significant relationship between exhaustion, cynicism and efficacy and students' burnout. In this study, the performance of students' exhaustion felt emotionally drained by their studies, felt used up at the end of a day at university, tired when getting up in the morning, Studying or attending a class is a strain, felt burned out from studies (Gonzalez-Roma et al., 2006). Students' cynicism manifested as becoming less interested in studies, becoming less enthusiastic about studies, becoming more cynical about the potential usefulness, doubt the significance of studies (Demerouti et al., 2010). The student's efficacy performance was that they can effectively solve the problems that arise in studies and believe that they make an effective contribution to the classes that they attend, feel stimulated when achieving study goals, learned many interesting things and feel confident. The study shows that the relationship between exhaustion, cynicism efficacy and burnout was significant. The findings of this study were consistent with previous studies, indicating that there was a significant relationship between exhaustion, cynicism efficacy and burnout (Wilmar, 2002). Teachers create a positive and supportive environment that promotes well-being, resilience, and positive coping skills. This can involve providing opportunities for play, rest, and relaxation, offering emotional support and encouragement, and promoting a growth mindset that emphasizes effort, progress, and learning. Additionally, parents and educators work together to identify and address sources of stress or pressure that may be contributing to burnout and provide appropriate support and resources to help children cope and thrive. Therefore, the results of this study showed that controlling Exhaustion, Cynicism and Efficacy were very important for reducing the burnout of students.

The findings of this study indicate that the H<sub>7</sub> hypothesis is accepted, which indicates that there is a significant relationship between student engagement and burnout in preschoolers in China. Engagement is defined as a student's positive attitude toward learning in this study, and burnout is a student's negative attitude toward learning (Cole et al., 2012) in their efforts to achieve learning goals and tasks. This result shows that there is a significant and negative correlation between engagement and burnout. In other words, improving students' engagement can effectively control their burnout.

## **CONCLUSION**

### **Theoretical Implications**

The present study explored the relationship between engagement and burnout among preschoolers in China. The findings provide several theoretical implications that can inform future research and practice in the field of early

childhood education. Firstly, the study supports the notion that engagement and burnout are two distinct constructs that can coexist in preschoolers. While engagement is characterized by positive affect, interest, and involvement in activities, burnout is associated with negative emotions, exhaustion, and disengagement. By examining these two constructs separately, the study contributes to a better understanding of the complex nature of preschoolers' experiences in educational settings. Secondly, the study highlights the importance of considering cultural and contextual factors when examining engagement and burnout in preschoolers. China's education system is known for its high academic expectations and pressure, which may influence preschoolers' engagement and burnout differently than in other cultures. The findings suggest that future research should examine how cultural and contextual factors may shape preschoolers' experiences of engagement and burnout, and how this may impact their developmental outcomes. Thirdly, the study provides implications for early childhood education practice. The findings suggest that educators should focus on creating a positive and supportive learning environment that fosters engagement and prevents burnout. This can involve providing opportunities for play, rest, and relaxation, promoting a growth mindset, and offering emotional support and encouragement. Therefore, this study contributes to our understanding of engagement and burnout among preschoolers in China, and provides theoretical implications for future research and practice in the field of early childhood education.

### **Managerial Implications**

The present study has several managerial implications for practitioners and policymakers in the field of early childhood education in China. Firstly, the findings suggest that educators and caregivers should focus on creating a positive and supportive learning environment that promotes engagement and prevents burnout among preschoolers. This can involve designing developmentally appropriate activities, providing opportunities for play and exploration, and offering emotional support and encouragement. It is also important to recognize and address potential sources of stress or pressure that may contribute to burnout among preschoolers, such as academic expectations or social demands. Secondly, the study highlights the importance of providing appropriate training and support for educators and caregivers in promoting engagement and preventing burnout among preschoolers. This can involve providing professional development opportunities and resources that focus on effective teaching strategies, child-centered approaches, and positive behavior management techniques. Additionally, policymakers can support these efforts by providing funding and resources for early childhood education programs and initiatives. Thirdly, the study emphasizes the need for a more holistic and integrated approach to early childhood education that takes into account the diverse needs and experiences of preschoolers. This can involve collaborating with families, communities, and other stakeholders to create a comprehensive and inclusive educational system that supports children's cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development. Therefore, this study provides managerial implications

that can inform the development of effective strategies and policies for promoting engagement and preventing burnout among preschoolers in China. These implications can guide practitioners and policymakers in creating a positive and supportive learning environment that fosters the healthy development and well-being of young children.

### **LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

While this study provides valuable insights into the engagement and burnout levels of preschoolers in China, several limitations need to be acknowledged. Firstly, the sample size of this study is relatively small, comprising of only preschool students from a limited number of preschools in three cities in China. This small sample size may limit the generalization of the findings to the larger population of preschoolers in China. Therefore, caution should be exercised when interpreting the results of this study, as they may not be representative of the wider population of preschoolers in China. Secondly, the use of a self-reported questionnaire may have resulted in response bias. As preschoolers may have limited reading and writing abilities, they may have had difficulty in accurately understanding and answering the questions on the questionnaire. Moreover, the preschoolers' responses may have been influenced by social desirability bias, which may have resulted in the over-reporting of positive emotions and under-reporting of negative emotions. Thirdly, the study only assessed engagement and burnout levels among preschoolers and did not consider other factors that may have impacted these levels. Factors such as teacher-student relationships, parental involvement, and the quality of the learning environment may have influenced preschoolers' engagement and burnout levels. Therefore, future studies should take into account these factors in their research design. Therefore, this study has provided valuable insights into the engagement and burnout levels of preschoolers in China. However, caution should be exercised when interpreting the results of this study, as several limitations need to be acknowledged. Future studies should consider these limitations and design their research to address them.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

For future research recommendations, the first is to use a larger and more diverse sample. The current study had a relatively small sample size, comprising preschoolers from only a limited number of preschools in three cities in China. Future research could consider using a larger and more diverse sample of preschoolers from different regions in China to increase the generalization of the findings. The second is to Include other relevant variables. The current study only assessed engagement and burnout levels among preschoolers. However, other variables such as teacher-student relationships, parental involvement, and the quality of the learning environment may influence preschoolers' engagement and burnout levels. Future research could include these variables in their study

design to gain a more holistic understanding of the factors that impact preschoolers' well-being.

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