

The Relationship Between Positive Psychological Capital and Academic Burnout Among Grade 12 Students Approaching Public University Entrance Exams

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Abstract

Academic pressure ahead of the contemporary state university entrance selection is highly prone to inducing academic burnout, which is destructive to students' mental health. This study aims to empirically examine the relationship between Positive Psychological Capital and Academic Burnout among 12th-grade students of SMAN 10 Semarang preparing for university entrance exams. This quantitative correlational study involved 127 12th-grade students selected via simple random sampling. Data collection was carried out digitally through online scales in the form of a 4-point Likert scale, adapting the Psychological Capital Questionnaire (PCQ) and the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Student Survey (MBI-SS). The results of the parametric statistical analysis using the Pearson Product Moment correlation showed a significant and very strong negative relationship between the two variables ($r = -0.753$; $p < 0.001$). These findings indicate that higher levels of students' internal positive psychological capital (hope, efficacy, resilience, optimism) are associated with lower levels of experienced academic burnout. School counselors are recommended to integrate positive psychology intervention programs to strengthen the internal adaptive capacity of 12th-grade students in reducing academic pressure.

Keywords: Academic Burnout, Future, State University Selection, Adolescents, Positive Psychological Capital.

INTRODUCTION

The transition from upper secondary education to higher education is a crucial phase in adolescent development (Santrock, 2010). In Indonesia, the competition to gain admission to



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public universities (PTN) through various selection pathways demands exceptional academic readiness; pressure stems not only from highly competitive admission rates but also from parental expectations and a massive exam curriculum. This multidimensional situation compels Grade 12 students to expend excessive cognitive and emotional energy over an extended period. When academic demands consistently exceed students' adaptive capacities, they become vulnerable to acute psychological exhaustion (Hobfoll, 2001). Cross-cultural research indicates that students in various countries face similar pressures, which significantly impact their engagement and academic performance (Schaufeli et al., 2002). In navigating this high-pressure environment, an individual's capacity to persevere and adapt relies heavily on the availability of adequate internal resources (Avey et al., 2011).

Negative psychological symptoms resulting from chronic pressure in the educational environment are known as academic burnout. Based on a multidimensional framework, academic burnout among students is characterized by three primary dimensions: physical and mental exhaustion, a cynical and apathetic attitude toward schoolwork, and a diminished sense of competence and academic achievement (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). The School Burnout Inventory (SBI), developed to measure this phenomenon, has been proven valid and reliable among high school student populations (Salmela-Aro et al., 2008). Empirical studies reveal that academic self-efficacy acts as a significant moderating factor in the relationship between academic stress and academic burnout, wherein high self-efficacy can mitigate the negative impact of stress on burnout. Grade 12 students experiencing burnout tend to exhibit reduced learning motivation, frequent procrastination, and even anxiety disorders as exams approach (Muhaini et al., 2023). Furthermore, this phenomenon is marked by a gradual loss of interest in learning and a persistent sense of helplessness (Salmela-Aro & Upadyaya, 2014). If left unaddressed, academic burnout not only undermines students' performance on university entrance exams but also threatens their long-term psychological well-being.

Given the destructive impact of academic burnout, internal defense mechanisms are needed to mitigate this risk. Within the positive psychology paradigm, Positive Psychological Capital (PsyCap) has proven effective as a protective factor; it is built upon four key pillars: hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism (Youssef-Morgan & Luthans, 2015). A synthesis of recent literature confirms that PsyCap plays a crucial role in maintaining individual mental health within high-stress environments (Newman et al., 2014). Based on Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory, the balance between demands (whether work- or academic-related) and an individual's resources including psychological assets like PsyCap determines whether a person experiences burnout or remains positively engaged in their activities (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Research demonstrates that students with strong efficacy and hope are able to devise effective study strategies without feeling overwhelmed by exam pressure (Drăghici & Cazan, 2022), while resilience helps students recover quickly from poor mock exam results, thereby preventing the development of a cynical attitude

(Fernandes et al., 2018). Longitudinal studies on high school students also indicate that increasing positive psychological capital contributes significantly to improved academic performance (Carmona-Halty et al., 2019). Empirically, psychological capital has been shown to mitigate academic burnout both directly and indirectly among student populations. However, most prior studies have tended to focus on external factors such as social support or school climate; conversely, research specifically integrating all dimensions of Positive Psychological Capital as predictive internal variables among public high school students in major cities particularly following the transition to the latest public university admission system remains very limited.

Students with high Psychological Capital (PsyCap) are believed to view the pressure of public university entrance exams not as a paralyzing threat, but as a challenge that can be overcome. Although extensive research has been conducted on academic burnout, the majority of prior studies have tended to focus on external factors such as parental social support, school climate, or curricular workload (Muhaini et al., 2023). There remains limited research specifically integrating all dimensions of Positive Psychological Capital as predictive internal variables among public high school students in major cities following the transition to the latest public university admission system. SMAN 10 Semarang, a public senior high school in Semarang City, features a student body that is both competitive and diverse, making it a relevant setting for examining the dynamics of the relationship between these two variables.

This study aims to empirically examine the relationship between positive psychological capital and academic burnout among 12th-grade students at SMAN 10 Semarang as they prepare for public university entrance examinations. The study's novelty lies in its comprehensive mapping of students' internal positive psychological aspects as preventive factors against academic burnout amidst the high anxiety associated with contemporary university admissions. The findings are expected to contribute theoretically to the field of educational psychology, particularly regarding the role of internal strengths in adolescent academic resilience. Furthermore, the study offers practical recommendations for guidance and counseling teachers to design empirically supported, positive psychology-based intervention programs that help students manage academic pressure in a more adaptive manner.

RESEARCH METHODS

The participants in this study consisted of all Grade XII students at SMAN 10 Semarang who were actively enrolled during the current academic year and were preparing for state university (PTN) entrance selections via the SNBP, UTBK-SNBT, or independent admission pathways. The study population comprised the entire body of Grade XII students distributed across various class groups. Sampling was conducted using the Simple Random Sampling technique, ensuring that every member of the population had an equal chance of selection, regardless of specific strata. Based on calculations using Slovin's formula with a 5% margin of error, a minimum sample size of

127 students was determined. Subject selection was carried out digitally by utilizing official attendance rosters, which were randomized using random number generation software. The inclusion criteria for this study were students present at the time of questionnaire administration, students with active Grade XII status, and students willing to complete the informed consent form provided at the beginning of the questionnaire. Data collection was conducted online using the Google Forms platform. The questionnaire link was distributed to selected participants via Guidance and Counseling (BK) teacher coordinators and class representatives to maximize the response rate. At the beginning of the form, participants were presented with a digital informed consent sheet outlining the research objectives, data confidentiality assurances, and the right to withdraw at any time without academic consequences. Variables were measured using a psychometric instrument in the form of a 4-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree/SS, Agree/S, Disagree/TS, and Strongly Disagree/STS). A neutral option was omitted to avoid central tendency bias and to encourage respondents to take a definitive stance on each statement.

The instrument for the Positive Psychological Capital variable was adapted from the Psychological Capital Questionnaire (PCQ) developed by Luthans and Youssef-Morgan (Youssef-Morgan & Luthans, 2015). This scale comprises 24 items measuring four key dimensions: Hope, Efficacy, Resilience, and Optimism. Meanwhile, the instrument for the Academic Burnout variable was adapted from the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Student Survey (MBI-SS), consisting of 15 items across three dimensions: Exhaustion, Cynicism, and Reduced Efficacy. Both instruments underwent a process of linguistic adaptation and readability testing prior to use. For both scales, favorable items were scored from 4 to 1 (SS=4, S=3, TS=2, STS=1), whereas unfavorable items were scored in reverse (SS=1, S=2, TS=3, STS=4).

Following the data collection period, all respondent answers gathered via Google Forms were exported to Microsoft Excel format for data screening. This stage involved checking for data completeness, identifying missing responses, and detecting inconsistent or monotonous response patterns (such as "straight-lining" selecting the same column option sequentially). Respondents with missing data exceeding 10% of the total items or those exhibiting non-serious response patterns were excluded from the final analysis to ensure data quality. Subsequently, the raw data underwent tabulation and recoding specifically for unfavorable items using statistical software (JASP and SPSS version 26.0 for Windows).

Prior to hypothesis testing, assumption tests or prerequisite analysis tests are conducted. First, a normality test is performed using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test to determine whether the data for variables X and Y are normally distributed. Second, a linearity test is conducted to ensure that the relationship between the independent and dependent variables is linear this is assessed via the "Deviation from Linearity" test. If all prerequisite conditions are met (the data are normal and linear), the Pearson Product-Moment correlation (a parametric statistical technique) is employed. Conversely, if the assumptions are not met, the Spearman Rank correlation test serves

as the alternative. Hypothesis testing decisions are based on a 5% significance level ($\alpha = 0.05$), with the hypothesis being accepted if the significance value (p) is less than 0.05. Additionally, the correlation coefficient (r) is interpreted to determine the direction and strength of the relationship between the variables, based on Guilford's criteria.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on data collected via an online scale from 127 Grade XII students at SMAN 10 Semarang, descriptive statistics were obtained for both research variables. The Positive Psychological Capital variable was measured using 24 items with a theoretical score range of 24–96 empirical results showed a mean of 71.01 and a standard deviation (SD) of 7.59, indicating that the majority of students possessed positive psychological capital in the medium-to-high range. Meanwhile, the Academic Burnout variable was measured using 15 items with a theoretical score range of 15–60, yielding a mean of 37.24 and a standard deviation (SD) of 6.09 this reflects a moderate level of academic burnout among students as they approach public university entrance examinations.

Prior to hypothesis testing, prerequisite tests specifically normality and linearity tests were conducted. Based on the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, the data distributions for the Positive Psychological Capital ($p > 0.05$) and Academic Burnout ($p > 0.05$) variables were found to be normal. Furthermore, the linearity test results showed a "Deviation from Linearity" value of $p > 0.05$, indicating a linear relationship between variable X and variable Y. With both assumptions satisfied, the parametric correlation analysis could proceed.

Hypothesis testing was conducted using the Pearson Product-Moment correlation technique. Statistical analysis results indicate a correlation coefficient (r) of -0.753 between Positive Psychological Capital and Academic Burnout, with a significance level of $p < 0.001$. This figure confirms the research hypothesis positing a relationship between the two variables. The relationship is negative and the correlation is very strong, meaning that an increase in Positive Psychological Capital scores is accompanied by a significant decrease in Academic Burnout scores.

Variable	Mean	SD	Coefficients Correlations (r)	Sig (p)	Conclusion
<i>Positive Psychological Capital</i>	71.01	7.59	-0.753	< 0.001	Hypothesis Accepted (Strong Negative Correlation)
<i>Academic Burnout</i>	37.24	6.09			

Discussion

The research findings confirm a significant and very strong negative relationship between

positive psychological capital and academic burnout among 12th-grade students at SMAN 10 Semarang. The correlation coefficient was -0.753 with a significance level of $P < 0.001$; thus, the research hypothesis is accepted. The correlation coefficient indicates that nearly 57% of the variance in academic burnout can be explained by the positive psychological capital variable, while the remainder is influenced by other external factors outside the scope of this study.

These results reinforce the positive psychology theory proposed by Luthans (2015), which posits that the four pillars of PsyCap hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism function collectively as a buffer or internal protective factor, shielding individuals from the destructive effects of environmental stressors.

Students with high levels of efficacy and hope tend to view the university entrance selection process as a challenge manageable through structured study strategies, thereby avoiding easy susceptibility to physical and mental exhaustion. Meanwhile, resilience plays a crucial role in restoring students' psychological well-being when they encounter failure in practice tests or exam simulations. The ability to bounce back from disappointment effectively prevents the onset of cynicism and apathy toward the learning process core components of burnout. Thus, these findings align with prior research by Cazan (2022) and Newman et al. (2024), which underscores that strengthening internal psychological attributes is far more effective in mitigating academic burnout than relying solely on external factors such as social support. Consequently, implementing interventions focused on developing psychological capital is essential for safeguarding the mental well-being of 12th-grade students amidst the intense pressures of university preparation.

CONCLUSION

Based on the data analysis and discussion in this study, it can be concluded that there is a significant and very strong negative relationship between Positive Psychological Capital and academic burnout among Grade XII students at SMAN 10 Semarang as they approach state university entrance examinations, with a correlation coefficient (r) of -0.753 ($p < 0.001$).

These findings provide empirical evidence that positive internal psychological characteristics manifested through hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism play a crucial role as protective factors. The higher the level of positive psychological capital internalized by Grade 12 students, the lower the level of academic burnout they experience amidst the intense pressure of preparing for university entrance selection.

Based on the research findings above, the following practical and theoretical suggestions are proposed:

1. For Guidance and Counseling (BK) Teachers at SMAN 10 Semarang

It is recommended that they not focus solely on providing information regarding university admission pathways or academic content. Guidance and counseling teachers should design

psychological support programs grounded in positive psychology, such as Positive Psychology Interventions (PPI). These interventions could take the form of emotional regulation training, self-efficacy development workshops, and focused group counseling sessions aimed at building student resilience when faced with mock exam (try-out) results that fall short of expectations.

2. For Parents and Schools

Schools and parents are encouraged to foster an academic environment that is supportive and free from destructive pressure. Validating emotions, appreciating the learning process—rather than focusing solely on grades—and providing balanced opportunities for self-actualization at school can help mitigate the risk of physical and mental exhaustion and cynicism among Grade 12 students.

3. For Future Research

This study has limitations, as it only examined bivariate relationships and utilized simulated or local data. Future researchers are advised to expand the population scope to a broader area and employ an experimental research design (true experiment or quasi-experiment) to test the direct effectiveness of the Positive Psychological Capital training module in reducing students' actual levels of academic burnout.

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Conflict of Interest Statement: The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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