

The Correlation between Burnout and Speaking Skills among Iraqi EFL Preparatory students'

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Abstract

This study investigates the correlation between burnout and speaking skills among Iraqi EFL (English as a Foreign Language) preparatory school learners. Burnout, a psychological condition resulting from chronic stress, is prevalent among students facing the challenges of mastering a foreign language. this study aims at:

1. Finding out Iraqi EFL preparatory school students' burnout and speaking skills.
2. Identifying the correlation between Iraqi EFL preparatory school students' burnout and speaking skills.

The sample is represented by 300 Iraqi EFL preparatory school students who are randomly selected from the population of 5th preparatory students in the Al-Diwaniya governorate during the academic year 202^r/202^z.

To investigate how students' speaking skills a vital aspect of language learning are impacted by burnout in the context of language learning in Iraq. The study analyzes the relationship between these two variables using quantitative approaches, such as a speaking skills test and questionnaire. The results demonstrate that the study sample has effective speaking skills and that the students have a medium level of burnout. Additionally, research shows a strong inverse relationship between speaking abilities and burnout, suggesting that lower speaking ability is linked to higher degrees of burnout. Recommendations for educational approaches to address burnout and improve EFL speaking abilities are included in the paper's conclusion.

Keywords: Burnout, Speaking Skills, Iraqi Learners, Preparatory Schools



العلاقة بين الاحتراق النفسي ومهارات التحدث لدى طلبة المدارس الإعدادية العراقيين
دارسي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية

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الملخص

تستقصي هذه الدراسة العلاقة بين الاحتراق النفسي ومهارات التحدث بين طلاب المدارس الإعدادية العراقيين الذين يدرسون اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. يعد الاحتراق النفسي حالة نفسية ناتجة عن الإجهاد المزمن، وهو شائع بين الطلاب الذين يواجهون تحديات في إتقان لغة أجنبية. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى:

١. معرفة مستوى الاحتراق النفسي ومهارات التحدث لدى طلاب المدارس الإعدادية العراقيين الذين يدرسون اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية .
٢. تحديد العلاقة بين الاحتراق النفسي ومهارات التحدث لدى طلاب المدارس الإعدادية العراقيين الذين يدرسون اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية .

تمثل العينة ٣٠٠ طالبًا من طلاب المدارس الإعدادية العراقيين الذين يدرسون اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، تم اختيارهم عشوائيًا من مجتمع طلاب الصف الخامس الإعدادي في محافظة الديوانية خلال العام الدراسي ٢٠٢٤/٢٠٢٣. لدراسة كيفية تأثر مهارات التحدث لدى الطلاب، وهي جانب حيوي من تعلم اللغات، بالإرهاق الدراسي في سياق تعلم اللغات في العراق. تحلل الدراسة العلاقة بين هذين المتغيرين باستخدام مناهج كمية، مثل اختبار مهارات التحدث والاستبيان. وُتُظْهَر النتائج أن عينة الدراسة تتمتع بمهارات تحدث فعالة، وأن الطلاب يعانون من مستوى متوسط من الإرهاق الدراسي. كما تُظْهَر الأبحاث علاقة عكسية قوية بين مهارات التحدث والإرهاق الدراسي، مما يشير إلى أن انخفاض القدرة على التحدث يرتبط بارتفاع مستويات الإرهاق الدراسي. وتضمنت خاتمة البحث توصياتٍ لمناهج تعليمية لمعالجة الإرهاق الدراسي وتحسين مهارات التحدث باللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الاحتراق النفسي، مهارات التحدث، المتعلمون العراقيون، المدارس الإعدادية .



I. Introduction

Previous research has shown that burnout negatively affects various aspects of academic performance, including language learning. Burnout can reduce motivation, impair memory, and hinder cognitive function, all of which are critical to language acquisition. However, specific studies focusing on the correlation between burnout and speaking skills in EFL contexts, particularly in Iraq, remain limited.

Speaking skills are important in the teaching of English language because language is the fundamental tool for communication and because orality is viewed as a necessary positive personal characteristic in the educational system. The more listening input students receive, the more fluent and richer their knowledge becomes (Nation, I. S. P. 2007).

One of the nations where English is taught as a foreign language and a core topic at all educational levels is Iraq, where instruction in the language begins in kindergarten and continues through the upper stages of higher education. The majority of Iraqi EFL learners lack the ability to utilize the target language for fluent communication, even after years of study in classrooms (Al – Musawi, K. M., 2019).

One of the most important aspects of studying English as a foreign language (EFL) is developing speaking abilities. These are the kinds of skills that Iraqi prep school kids need to develop in order to succeed academically and in order to have good professional prospects. Burnout, however, can result from the stress of learning a foreign language in a demanding school setting. A student's capacity to learn and perform can be severely impacted by burnout, which is typified by emotional tiredness, depersonalization, and a diminished sense of success. This is especially true for speaking assignments that call for confidence and active engagement (Richards, J. C. 2008).

Speaking ability is regarded as the most crucial element of language growth and instruction, particularly for foreign languages. Learners often believe that speaking is more difficult than other skills while learning English as a foreign language, and that speaking is also more efficient than other abilities. However, due to the use of traditional teaching methods that place an emphasis on memorization and students' passive roles as well as speaking's spontaneous character, speaking is seen to be the most difficult ability to learn in a language (Cummins, 1994, p.36).

This study aims at finding out Iraqi EFL Preparatory school students' burnout and speaking skills, as well as is going to answer the following question: Is there any correlation between burnout and speaking skills among Iraqi EFL students at the preparatory school?

II. Literature Review

2.1 Burnout

Three factors make up the idea of burnout: depersonalization, emotional weariness, and personal achievement (Maslach et al., 2001). When a person's physical and emotional reserves are exhausted, leading to a sense of emotional overstretching, they experience the stress dimension of burnout, also known as emotional fatigue. Depersonalization, which is characterized as "a negative, callous, or excessively detached response to other people," is the



interpersonal aspect of burnout. According to Maslach et al. (2001), the third component, professional accomplishment, relates to a person's sense of diminished efficacy.

2.2 Students' Burnout

Understanding the student's burnout is crucial to this study, thus rather than providing a thorough analysis of the burnout literature, For the purpose of discriminant validity, the concept of burnout is summarized in the section that follows. According to Maslach et al. (2001), burnout is a psychiatric condition that can strike people who endure ongoing emotional and interpersonal stress. Numerous researches have examined burnout models, variables that lead to burnout, and strategies to treat and prevent burnout; however, no empirical evidence has yet to demonstrate the effectiveness of these interventions (Maslach et al., 2001).

Students are at greater risk than other people because they interact directly with children and young people and because they go through special, stressful situations where they are impacted by other people in the classroom. Students are typically more stressed than other people for a variety of reasons, including unsatisfactory discipline, unsuitable physical conditions, social criticism, political and social pressure on educational institutions, inadequate rewards, packed classrooms, and disagreements between parents and teachers about the role of education (Girgin, 2010).

According to a process model of burnout supported by current research, depersonalization results from growing emotional weariness, whereas decreased personal achievement and emotional exhaustion develop concurrently (Aksit N., 2007). According to this paradigm, students' personal reactions to persistent characteristics of their study environment cause them to either "move toward increased studying efficacy or toward burnout". If students feel effective in their studies, they could therefore be able to endure emotional tiredness without burning out (Chang, 2009).

2.3 Factors Contributing to Burnout

Numerous researches have looked at the possible causes of student burnout. According to Allodi, M. W., & Fischbein, S. (2012), study demands and resource scarcity are particularly significant factors. Study overload, personal conflict, a lack of control, coping strategies, social support, skill utilization, autonomy, and participation in decision-making are listed as potential precursors. Chang created a similar and comprehensive list of potential causes of burnout based on the results of numerous empirical studies: low student/school socioeconomic level, organizational rigidity, study overload, lack of resources, inadequate student training, limited student engagement in decision-making, packed classrooms, and unfavorable study environments are all contributing factors to the lack of social support from coworkers and administrators. Numerous factors discussed in the literature are environmental in nature and outside the students' control. Because suggested remedies focus the burden of change on specific pupils and burnout is assessed on an individual emotional level, there is a mismatch in the research about the elements that contribute to burnout, which are regarded to be mostly environmental (Chang, 2009).

According to Chang (2009), Although academics have recognized the significance that environmental factors play in the process of burnout, burnout research has been "limited



to students' feelings of emotional exhaustion," ignoring factors that influence the distinct emotions that can contribute to emotional exhaustion. This could be the cause of the failure of individual intervention strategies to treat and prevent student burnout, according to empirical study. More potent burnout prevention and treatment plans may result from examining how students engage with the situational circumstances of their studies, particularly the educational institution in light of contemporary changes. It is true that social, political, and/or economic issues contribute to the stress associated with learning (Allodi, M. W., & Fischbein, S., 2012).

2.4 Burnout in Education

Burnout was first examined in relation to occupational health, but it is now well acknowledged that it is a serious problem in educational environments. Symptoms of burnout among students include persistent exhaustion, dissatisfaction, and a helpless feeling. Depersonalization is "a negative, callous, or excessively detached response to other people" and is one aspect of burnout. The added cognitive load needed to acquire a new language might aggravate these symptoms in EFL learners, especially in settings with high expectations and few resources (Atila, E., 2014).

Given that burnout is considered a "no distinct stress-related phenomenon" (Farber, 2000, p. 676) and that stress is the precursor to emotional tiredness, research recommends that educators adopt individual measures to manage the symptoms of stress.

The impacts of student burnout in EFL classes were studied by Küçükoğlu (2014), who found that burnout had some detrimental effects. In particular, students who were emotionally worn out were less productive, which in turn made them less eager to prepare lessons and even less motivated to attend class. Since students build a connection between themselves and their professors, language acquisition becomes less effective when they burn out. Demotivation results from memory loss, energy depletion, and loss of interest in the topic. Students' motivation is directly impacted; failure happens because students' motivation is connected to success. It is natural that students who are burned out would have a bad attitude about their studies. The success of English language learners is at risk because of this negative. The interaction between teachers and students has a detrimental impact on language acquisition. Students who experience burnout stop believing in their ability to learn, become intolerant of disruptions in the classroom, lose interest in preparing for class, and stop feeling motivated to study. Students grow to feel negatively about their instructors and peers. In an atmosphere where students utilize language for communication to convey their thoughts and feelings, language development takes place. Küçükoğlu (2014) states that teachers must encourage this since accomplishment is contingent upon students not facing the risk of emotional tiredness and burnout.

2.5 Speaking Skills

Speaking is the most productive skill in the oral form. Like the other skills, it is not as simple as it initially appears and involves more than simply word pronunciation. Speaking is a productive ability that involves many different components, including grammar, strategy, psycholinguistics, and discourse, according to Cephe, P. T. (2010). According to him, speaking is more than just making the right sounds, picking the right words, and building



sentences correctly. A common goal of language learners is to become more proficient speakers as quickly as feasible. Spoken language is mostly used to socialize individuals. Unlike written language, spoken language is generated and processed in real time, which means that both the speaker and the listener have a limited amount of time to prepare and produce their words as well as process what they hear. The ability of a student to talk is essential to their long-term development. Because spoken language is necessary for everything from casual conversation to formal public speaking, learners frequently evaluate their success in learning a language depending on how much they think their spoken language competence has increased (Demirel, E. E., & Cephe, P. T. , 2015) .

It has been demonstrated that students are more likely to learn when they are able to express their ideas clearly. Students who don't acquire good skills of communication will be negatively impacted for the remaining time of their lives. The development of reading and writing abilities also heavily depends on the capacity to communicate in English. We employ our verbal language skills when we read, write, and comprehend (Shabani, M. B., 2013).

To receive, generate, and process information, speaking is "an oral expression which contains the use of right patterns of rhythm and intonation." "The process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal or non-verbal symbols in a variety of contexts" is the precise definition of speaking. Zyoud (2016), p. 3. Speaking is "the active production skill and use of oral production and it is the capacity of someone to communicate orally with others," according to Conrad and Dunek (2012, p.74). According to Conrad and Dunek, speech is a tool for ideas transformation, emotional expression, explaining findings and conversations, and listening to others. The ability to communicate orally and in writing in a foreign language, including its literature, is thought to be the primary goal of learning a foreign language (vural, 2013, p. 16).

2.6 Speaking Skills of EFL Learning

Speaking abilities, which include fluency, pronunciation, and the capacity to form logical, contextually relevant sentences, are an essential part of learning a language. Speaking fluency is frequently regarded by EFL learners as the most difficult component of language acquisition as it requires real-time language processing and output. Speaking skills development in Iraq is made more difficult by the extra obstacles that students frequently encounter, such little exposure to native speakers and little interactive language practice (Nation, I. S. P. 2007).

According to Koutsompou (2015), the primary goal of incorporating literature into EFL classes is to form the learning environment "interactive, as it can be demonstrated that an interactive class can positively influence students' communicative abilities and leave a lasting impression." To evaluate students' development, it is important to remember that students need to master grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and intonation in order to communicate effectively. Reading aloud to kids may help them improve their speaking and listening abilities, therefore literary works can also be an effective and inspiring way to teach speaking and listening (Pardede,2011, p. 22).

Engaging in classroom activities helps students develop their speaking abilities more quickly and emphasizes the need of practicing pronunciation. It also inspires them to

understand the material more clearly. Activities in the classroom can take many different forms, such as role-playing, dramatization, oral reading improvisation, reenactment, general class discussion, small-group work, and planned material presentation (Li, R. L., 2010).

Phat (2013, p. 676) lists some productive methods to enhance the students' speaking skills. The instructor might use literary materials to help the students develop their speaking skills:

- **Making connections;** Students are expected to discuss their ideas and make connections between what they have read in the literary texts and their personal experiences.
- **Debate,** Students are urged to confidently present their points in order to improve their language proficiency.
- **Role play,** with this exercise, students may improve their language skills, creativity, and communication abilities. They will be able to read and listen to texts, retell stories in their own terms, and create original dialogue.
- **Presentation,** In order to improve their speaking abilities in addition to their language proficiency, students are encouraged to give presentations on the literary work.

2.7 Related studies

Allodi and Fischbein (2012) carried out a second study in Sweden to investigate the burnout of high school students. The study included 749 high school students from Sweden. The findings showed that there were gender differences: younger students had weaker study control, and female students were more worn out and unhappy with their study than male students. As a result, Allodi and Fischbein find out that the female students have a high level of burnout while the male students have a medium level of burnout, which is the same as the result found out in this study.

According to (Akman, Özden & Çörtü, 2010) study in Turkey. Due to a variety of causes, students who experience burnout become hesitant to study and perform daily tasks. Determining the elements that have an impact on the degree of burnout experienced by students who study in varied groups is crucial for providing assistance and developing solutions. Negative attitudes about students, their peers, and their studies are brought on by problems in the classroom. This pessimistic outlook causes burnout. so (Akman, Özden & Çörtü, 2010) study find out that the Turkish students suffer from burnout in a medium level the same as this study.

III. Methodology

3.1 Population and Sampling

Iraqi EFL fifth preparatory school students who attended in the Al-Diwaniya governorate during the academic year 2023–2024 make up the study's population. Three



hundred male and female learners, chosen at random from the fifth preparatory school group, make up the sample.

3.2 Instruments

Two instruments are employed in the current study to collect data that are specific to the study sample, which is Iraqi EFL preparatory school students. These instruments are:

1. *Burnout questionnaire*: The Maslach Burnout Inventory-Student Survey (MBI-SS) was adopted for the context of EFL learners to measure the levels of burnout among the students (see appendix A).
2. *Speaking Proficiency test*: A Standardized University of Cambridge ESOL Examination for English for Speakers of Other Languages as the speaking test was adopted to assess students' speaking skills. The test evaluated fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, and coherence (see appendix B).

3.3 Reliability

For the aim of administering the questionnaire and test in a pilot study, a sample of forty EFL fifth preparatory school students from the General Directorate of Education/Al-Diwaniya is chosen at random. This process is used to determine:

1. How clear the questions and instructions are in the test and questionnaire;
2. How much time participants devote to completing the instruments.

The test is deemed trustworthy since the reliability coefficient (0.89) is higher than (0.67) when the Kewder Richardson equation 20 is applied to the sample scores. This is a good and reasonable value.

3.4 Face Validity of the Instruments

Experts' subjective assessments of the instrument's appearance and relevance, such as whether the items appear to be pertinent, logical, unambiguous, and clear, are referred to as face validity (Oluwatayo, 2012). A set of academics with backgrounds in ELT and Applied Linguistics reviews both the test and the questionnaire to confirm the face validity of the tools. The jury members verified to the 100% validity of each instrument. However, in accordance with the jury members' suggestions, a few minor adjustments are made to the final edition of the test and questionnaire.



IV.RESULTS

4.1 First Aim Result

The research sample is given the burnout questionnaire in order to accomplish the first goal. The sample scores have an arithmetic mean of 99.901 and a standard deviation of 31.930. The significance of the difference between the arithmetic mean and the theoretical mean is ascertained using the T-test for a single sample, which is (101). The computed t-value (1.096) is less than the critical t-value (1.96) with a degree of freedom (299), indicating that the difference is not statistically significant at the level of significance (0.05). This suggests that the sample's level of burnout is medium. The study sample takes a Speaking Proficiency test, and the findings show an arithmetic mean of 27.604 with a standard deviation of 9.454. Since the computed t-value (6.597) is greater than the crucial one (1.96) with a degree of freedom (299), the difference is determined to be statistically significant at the level of significance (0.05). This outcome demonstrates the study sample's effective speaking abilities. Refer to table (1).

Table (1)
Arithmetic M, STD, and t-value of the Burnout questionnaire and speaking skills Test

Variable	Sam.	Mean	SD	Theoretica l Mean	T – Test		Significant (0.05)
					Compute d Value	Tabulated Value	
Burnout	٣٠٠	٩٩.٩٠١	٣١.٩٣٠	١٠١	١.٠٩٦	١.٩٦	Not Sig.
speaking skills	٣٠٠	٢٧.٦٠٤	٩.٤٥٤	٢٥	٦.٥٩٧	١.٩٦	Significant

4.2 Second Aim Result

To achieve the second aim of the study which is “Identifying the relationship between burnout with speaking skills among Iraqi EFL preparatory school students”.

A Pearson correlation formula is used to identify this correlation. A correlation coefficient of -0.446 is revealed. The correlation's relevance is determined using the t-test, which yields a computed value of (-8.631), which is greater than the critical value (1.96) at the significance level (0.05).

The analysis revealed a significant negative correlation between burnout levels and speaking proficiency. This suggests that students with higher levels of burnout tended to have lower speaking skills. Specifically, students who reported higher emotional exhaustion and depersonalization scored lower on fluency and pronunciation, while those with a reduced sense of accomplishment struggled with coherence and accuracy in their speech. Table (2).



Table (2)
The relationship between Burnout with speaking skills

Samp.	The value of the correlation coefficient between Burnout with speaking skills	T – Test		Significant (0.05)
		Computed Value	Tabulated Value	
٣٠٠	-٠.٤٤٦	-٨.٦٣١	١.٩٦	Significant

V. Discussion of Results

The findings of this study underscore the detrimental impact of burnout on EFL learners' speaking skills. In the context of Iraqi preparatory schools, where students face considerable academic pressure and often lack adequate support, burnout emerges as a significant barrier to language learning. The negative correlation between burnout and speaking proficiency suggests that addressing burnout could lead to improvements in students' speaking abilities.

The results of this study highlight the negative effects of burnout on the speaking abilities of EFL students, especially in the unique setting of Iraqi preparatory schools. High academic standards, limited funds, and inadequate emotional and psychological care for students are some of the difficult conditions under which these schools frequently function. Burnout can become a widespread problem in these settings, showing up as learners' diminished feeling of personal achievement, depersonalization, and emotional tiredness.

In short, the study's findings suggest that mitigating burnout is not just about improving academic outcomes but also about supporting the overall well-being of students. By addressing the root causes of burnout and implementing comprehensive support strategies, educators in Iraqi preparatory schools can potentially enhance EFL learners' speaking proficiency, thereby contributing to their academic and personal development in more meaningful ways.

VI. Conclusions

The outcomes obtained allow for the following conclusions to be made: Students in Iraqi EFL preparatory schools experience a moderate level of burnout. They are also proficient speakers. There is a statistically significant inverse relationship between students' understanding of speaking abilities and their level of burnout.

This study demonstrates a significant negative correlation between burnout and speaking skills among Iraqi EFL preparatory school learners. The findings suggest that burnout is a critical factor hindering students' ability to develop effective speaking skills. Addressing burnout through targeted educational interventions is essential for improving language proficiency and overall academic success in EFL contexts.

Moreover, the negative correlation between burnout and speaking skills highlights the need for targeted interventions that address the emotional and psychological comfort for students. Language learning, especially speaking, requires confidence and a low-anxiety environment where students feel comfortable practicing without the fear of making mistakes.



Burnout can lead to a loss of confidence, lead to reluctance to participate in speaking activities and ultimately hinder language acquisition.

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Appendix A

Students` Burnout Questionnaire

Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey (MBI-ES) (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996) was used to collect the quantitative data in the current study. This survey consists of 20 items which relate to burnout.

No.	Statements	Never	Rarely	sometimes	Most of the Time	Always
1	I feel emotionally drained from my study.					
2	I feel used up at the end of the study day.					
3	I feel fatigued when I get up in the morning and have to face another day on the study.					
4	I can easily understand how I feel about things.					
5	I feel I treat some students as if they were impersonal objects.					
6	Studying with students all day is really a strain on me.					
7	I deal very effectively with the problems I face in my study.					
8	I feel burned out from my study.					
9	I feel I'm positively influencing other people's lives through my work.					
10	I've become more callous toward the study since I started studying.					
11	I worry that the study is hardening me emotionally.					
12	I feel very energetic.					
13	I feel frustrated by my study.					
14	I feel I'm working too hard on my study.					
15	I don't really care what happens to Study development.					
16	Studying with teachers directly puts too much stress on me.					
17	I can easily create a relaxed atmosphere to myself.					
18	I feel exhilarated after working closely with my colleagues.					
19	In my study, I deal with emotional problems very calmly.					
20	I feel colleagues blame me for some of their problems.					



Appendix B
Speaking Proficiency Test

Answer the following questions

No	The questions
1	What is your full name?
2	What are you doing in the morning when you wake up ?
3	What do you usually do in your spare time?
4	What kind of film do you like to see and why?
5	Can you describe your house?
6	Why do you study English?
7	Who's your idol? Why?
8	Tell me about your daily routine?
9	Talk about the activities you do on holidays?
10	What are your likes and dislikes?
11	What do you like about your country?