Exploring the Relationship Between Motivation and Factors for Burnout Among Students

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ABSTRACT

Student motivation plays a pivotal role in determining academic engagement and overall psychological well-being. In the context of modern higher education, the increasing academic demands placed on students have led to heightened instances of burnout, characterized by emotional exhaustion and psychological detachment. Burnout not only undermines academic performance but also affects students' persistence in their studies. Despite evidence linking motivation and burnout, limited research exploring how specific motivational dimensions influence burnout among students in higher education. Guided by McClelland's Theory of Needs and the Motivation–Burnout conceptual framework adapted from Pintrich and De Groot (1990) and Campos (2011), this study aimed to explore the levels of learners' motivation specifically the value, expectancy, and affective components and their relationship with emotional exhaustion and disengagement. This study used a 5-point Likert Scale instrument consisting of 4 sections. Section A has 8 items on descriptive statistics. Section B has 23 items on Motivational; section C has 8 items on Exhaustion and section D has 8 items on Disengagement. A cross-sectional survey was conducted with 206 students from both public and private institutions across Science & Technology and Social Sciences & Humanities programs. The study found that students demonstrated high levels of academic motivation, particularly to performance evaluation. Nonetheless, moderate levels of emotional exhaustion and disengagement were also reported. Correlation analysis revealed a positive relationship between motivational factors and burnout components, particularly when external achievement goals drove motivation. These findings highlight the importance of addressing not only the cognitive drivers of motivation but also the emotional well-being of students. The study suggests that targeted interventions such as motivation-based teaching strategies, time management training, and mental health support can be effective in reducing burnout and sustaining academic engagement.

Keywords—academic, engagement, disengagement, motivation, burnout

INTRODUCTION

Background of Study

In contemporary learning environment, psychological elements such as motivation and burnout have a significant impact on students' performance. The internal or external factors that propel students to start, continue, and succeed in their education are referred to as motivation (Pintrich & De Groot, 1990). It has a significant impact on how engaged, persistent, and satisfied students are with their education. High-motivated students frequently employ efficient learning strategies, exhibit more academic resilience, and persistently strive towards their

academic objectives (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). However, burnout can negatively impact a student's overall performance because it entails emotions of emotional tiredness, disengagement, and academic failure (Campos et al., 2011). Students who experience chronic stress or academic pressure become less motivated, which might result in signs of burnout.

The importance of exploring the relationship between these two concepts has increased due to changes in academic settings. This is especially true with the rise of competitive grading systems and the shift to remote learning following the COVID-19 pandemic. The students now experience a clash between intrinsic motivation (e.g., mastery, curiosity) and extrinsic motivations (e.g., parent expectations, grades). University students with high extrinsic motivation, such as those focused on grades or external approval, were more likely to experience emotional exhaustion and disengagement when their performance fell below expectations (Husain et al., 2025). Individuals with high intrinsic motivation or clear purpose, however, are better equipped to deal with learning pressures. In Malaysian contexts, however, there is little empirical work in which both constructs motivation and burnout are taken up within a single framework. Most of the existing research has tackled them in isolation, thereby overlooking the possibility that specific motivational orientations will both buffer and contribute to academic burnout.

The theoretical model of McClelland's Theory of Needs (1965) adds richness to this question. The theory assumes individuals are motivated by three needs: achievement, affiliation, and power. When students' psychological needs, i.e., the need to be competent, connected, or autonomous go unmet, they can become disengaged from learning or academically burnt out. This theoretical model is upheld by (Wang et al., 2024), which demonstrated how academic self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation, and emotional support interact to serve as a buffer to burnout. Thus, the current study finds itself in a real gap in previous literature by examining how far the quality and magnitude of student motivation relate to different symptoms of burnout involving exhaustion and disengagement.

Problem Statement

Prepare your paper in full-size format on US letter size paper (8.5 by 11 inches). Despite previous research confirming that motivation and burnout are both powerful determinants of student outcomes, few studies have dared to explore the way in which the two constructs co-relate, specifically in Malaysian higher education. Previous research has proven that intrinsic motivation results in increased participation and long-term academic fulfillment, whereas extrinsic motivation, as powerful as it is in the short term, is linked to performance anxiety and emotional exhaustion (Abu Bakar et al., 2023). Even with such findings, there has been little research aimed at determining how students' perceptions of motivation are linked with the two main symptoms of burnout: exhaustion and disengagement. This is especially worrying considering the fact that most Malaysian students are exposed to performance-based learning environments where external appreciation comes first over autonomy of learning.

In addition, the existing literature has a tendency to study burnout within the framework of external stressors like workload or institutional pressure (Xu & Wang, 2023), instead of studying them in terms of internal drivers such as goal orientation or perceived self-efficacy. There is a need to find out why different motivational factors, i.e., intrinsic goals, task value beliefs, and self-efficacy either safeguard or leave students vulnerable to burnout risk. Although (Wang et al., 2024) emphasized the role of motivation and emotional support in lowering burnout, their findings require replication at the local level and further investigation in specific education contexts. McClelland's theory of motivation also suggests that unsatisfied needs in circumstances that do not favor autonomy or affiliation can enhance disengagement (Davis & McClelland, 1962).

Hence, it is the purpose of this research to satisfy the above gaps by examining the motivational profile of students and their exhaustion and disengagement experiences. Specifically, it focuses on whether students perceive themselves as being motivated, the way they feel the two dimensions of burnout, and whether the burnout symptoms are significantly correlated with motivation. Through the use of theoretical and empirical literature as the foundation of its investigation, this research aims to contribute important information regarding educational practices that can be utilized to support the sustenance of motivation and alleviation of burnout among Malaysian undergraduate students.

Objective of the Study and Research Questions

This study is done to explore motivation and sources of burnout. Specifically, this study is done to answer the following questions.

1. How do learners perceive their motivation for learning?
2. How do learners perceive exhaustion in learning?
3. How do learners perceive disengagement in learning?
4. Is there a relationship between motivation and burnout causes?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework of the Study

This study is grounded in McClelland's Theory of Needs, which identifies three primary motivational drivers that are acquired through life experiences and shape individual behavior (Davis & McClelland, 1962). In the context of student learning, these needs directly influence engagement and academic performance. These needs have a direct impact on academic performance and student involvement in the learning environment. The drive for excellence, mastery, and goal attainment that students have is related to the need for achievement (nAch). Students with a strong drive for success (nAch) typically choose challenging assignments and perceive constructive feedback as a valuable reward for their work. However, according to recent studies, people with high levels of nAch are more likely to suffer from severe stress and emotional weariness in educational settings that make unreasonable demands or do not adequately acknowledge students' achievements (Zhang et al., 2025).

On the other hand, students who are motivated by the need for affiliation (nAff) get their energy from their social networks and a feeling of community and often rely on peer interaction for motivation. Social isolation and a lack of support networks have been linked to lower motivation levels and higher levels of student burnout in the context of distance learning and the closure of educational institutions as a result of the global COVID-19 pandemic (Xu & Wang, 2023).

The need for power (nPow) is an individual's urge to influence or control their learning environment. This need can be met through opportunities for independence, decision-making, and leadership in academic activities. Students with high levels of nPow may feel restricted, irritated, and alienated in circumstances that limit their autonomy (Helfajrin & Ardi, 2020). McClelland emphasises that unfulfilled psychological requirements in the educational setting can lead to diminished motivation and the development of burnout symptoms among students.

In parallel, current research on academic burnout has revealed a number of internal and external stressors that have a negative influence on the mental health and resilience of students in higher education. Burnout is often regarded as having three basic dimensions: emotional weariness, depersonalisation, and diminished academic ability. According to a systematic review conducted by (Zhang et al., 2025), variables such as high academic burden, poor time management, and pressure to earn outstanding marks are key contributors to student burnout symptoms.

Furthermore, students with poor self-efficacy were found to be more likely to experience mental fatigue and disengagement from learning activities (Pham Thi & Duong, 2024). According to the research, the sort of motivation has a significant impact on student well-being. Extrinsic drive, such as the desire for external recognition or academic performance, is linked to an increased risk of burnout. In contrast, intrinsic motivation based on personal interests and fulfilment functions as an effective buffer against academic stress (Helfajrin & Ardi, 2020).

In addition, social support is vital in the relationship between motivation and burnout. Peer and family emotional support can help to alleviate the psychological effects of academic stress. Furthermore, internal protective factors including gratitude, mindfulness, and a feeling of purpose have been proven to be useful in lowering burnout symptoms and enhancing students' stress resilience (Wang et al., 2024).

Overall, this theoretical perspective suggests that motivation and burnout are two interrelated constructs. Burnout is more likely to occur when students' psychological needs such as achievement, relatedness, or power are not met, whether due to environmental pressures, lack of social support, or a mismatch between personal and academic goals. Understanding these dynamics is important for educators and educational institutions in their efforts to foster sustainable motivation and support students' overall well-being.

In general, this theoretical viewpoint implies that burnout and motivation are two interrelated constructs. When students' psychological needs such as power, achievement, or relatedness are not satisfied, burnout is more likely to happen. In order to promote long-lasting motivation and enhance students' general wellbeing, educators and educational institutions must have a solid understanding of these processes.

Past Studies

Past Studies on Students' Learning Motivation

Student motivation is a focus of educational study due to its impact on academic achievement, engagement, and psychological health. Numerous research in recent years has highlighted the importance of intrinsic motivation, self-efficacy, and perceived relevance of learning activities in shaping students' learning behaviours and outcomes.

Research by (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020) examine self-efficacy and goal-setting in academic motivation. According to a literature-based conceptual study, students who believe in their talents are more likely to persevere despite hurdles and achieve their academic goals. The study also stressed the need to provide students with proximal goals in order to improve motivation and effort management.

A study by (Azila-Gbettor et al., 2021) investigated how self-efficacy and autonomous motivation affect student involvement in higher education. The study included undergraduate students from a variety of fields and discovered that self-efficacy was a strong predictor of student involvement as well as a mediating factor in the relationship between motivation and learning outcomes. These findings emphasise the significance of developing students' internal views about their academic ability as a foundation for greater motivation and active participation in the learning process.

In line with this viewpoint, (Hanus & Fox, 2015) examined the long-term impact of gamification on student motivation and academic achievement in a university classroom setting. Using a longitudinal study design, the findings show that gamification-based learning environments boost student engagement and pleasure in the short term while having mixed impacts on the long-term sustainability of intrinsic motivation. According to the study, while gamification can increase initial motivation, its effectiveness may decrease over time if it is not matched with meaningful and authentic learning objectives.

Other research by (Li et al., 2021)looked at achievement goal orientation among Chinese medical students and its relationship to academic well-being. The study discovered that mastery-based goal orientation was associated with academic success and reduced levels of stress, whereas performance-avoidance goal orientation was associated with higher levels of worry and burnout. These findings support the concept that developing mastery-oriented motivation can lead to more durable academic development and emotional stability, especially in high-intensity study programs such as medical education.

In order to ascertain the relationship between academic motivation and instructional design, 326 Saudi Arabian undergraduate students participated in a blended learning study (Alammary, 2019). The findings demonstrated that students were more motivated when they felt that blended courses were more flexible, relevant, and interactive. The study concluded that learner motivation is positively impacted by well-designed blended learning environments.

Conclusively, a mediation study was performed by (Hafizoglu & Yerdelen, 2019) to investigate the influence of student motivation in the relationship between views of the classroom environment and science achievement. The study found that supportive classroom environments, such as task orientation and teacher encouragement,

improve student motivational factors like task value and self-efficacy. Academic success in science is subsequently positively impacted by this rise in motivational factors. The researchers came to the conclusion that one of the most important external factors in sustaining students' academic achievement is a learning environment that fosters motivation.

In conclusion, prior studies have demonstrated that a combination of exterior elements like classroom atmosphere, instructional design, and peer relationships, as well as internal elements such as self-efficacy, intrinsic interest, and achievement goals, affect students' motivation to learn. Students are more likely to persevere, actively participate, and attain favourable learning outcomes if they have faith in their academic skills and are exposed to pertinent, encouraging, and meaningful learning experiences. On the other hand, relying too much on external rewards or learning in unsupportive and unacknowledged settings can lower engagement and raise the risk of burnout. In order to promote long-term and balanced academic growth, these findings emphasise the necessity of creating educational experiences that incorporate the cognitive and emotional components of student motivation.

Past Studies on Burnout Sources

Many studies have been conducted to investigate the underlying causes of student burnout, with a focus on academic stress, self-efficacy, motivation, and social support. These studies aim to discover how environmental and psychological factors influence students' emotional well-being and academic engagement.

A study by (Chong et al., 2025) focused into the relationship between academic self-efficacy, time management, and student burnout. This study explored how students' views about their potential to succeed and time management skills influence their experience with academic burnout. A total of 312 undergraduate students from Malaysian public universities participated in the study. The researchers conducted a quantitative survey with a standardised questionnaire. According to the findings, students who had stronger academic self-efficacy and better time management abilities had less emotional weariness and depersonalisation. This study underscores the necessity for academic interventions that improve students' self-efficacy and time management skills in order to reduce burnout.

The study by (Wang et al., 2024) then examined social support and psychological stress as relevant factors. Their research investigated how perceived social support, and appreciation mediated the association between academic stress and burnout. Four hundred university students from various faculties participated in the survey. Validated measures of academic stress, burnout, and protective characteristics appreciation were among the tools utilised. The results demonstrated that the detrimental effects of academic stress on burnout were lessened by appreciation and strong peer and family support. This implies that improving social connectivity and emotional resilience may protect students from the symptoms of burnout.

Next, the study by (Abu Bakar et al., 2023) looked into the relationship between extrinsic and intrinsic incentive types and burnout levels among higher education students. This study examined how the students' mental states changed depending on whether they were learning for internal or external rewards. There were 250 diploma and degree students from Malaysian technical schools who responded. According to the results of a mixed-method study that included focus group interviews and surveys, students who were predominantly motivated by extrinsic factors such as grades or parental approval, reported feeling more emotionally exhausted and disengaged than students who were motivated by intrinsic causes. In contrast to an excessive focus on performance indicators, the inference is that learning environments should encourage curiosity and personal development.

Furthermore, the study by (Chong et al., 2025) examined the reasons of burnout in a variety of student demographics, including those in the disciplines of education, engineering, and medicine. Five hundred students from a variety of academic fields made up their sample. They discovered that the main stressors were a heavy workload, ambiguous expectations, and strained relationships between lecturers and students using a thorough burnout questionnaire and interviews. Their results highlighted the value of comprehensive stress-reduction plans and academic support networks.

In conclusion, this research shows that burnout is a complex problem that is impacted by both external (such as

workload, support networks) and internal (such as self-efficacy, motivation type) aspects. Researchers agree that burnout is not caused by a single factor but rather by a combination of personal traits and environmental stressors. In the context of my current research, these findings support the notion that student motivation, whether driven by affiliation, achievement, or power needs, can either reduce or raise the risk of burnout. In contrast to earlier research that focused on stress, motivation, and support systems independently, this study aims to integrate these elements into a comprehensive model that links McClelland's motivational theory to the causes of student burnout.

Conceptual Framework of the Study

McClelland (1965) states that as motivation, people have three needs they want to fulfil. The first is need for power and this is the feeling of autonomy they have over what they know, or they do not know. Next, they is the need for achievement. This need pushes a person to succeed in what they are doing. The lats is need for affiliation. If this need is not met, the person feels exhausted and most of all, disengaged. In terms of learning, learners need to feel connected to the learning task and the people around them to be motivated (Hanim Rahmat et al., 2021).

Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework of the study. This study explores the relationship between motivation in learning and two types of burnout: exhaustion and disengagement. According to (Pintrich & De Groot, 1990), learners are motivated by factors such as value components, expectancy components and affective components. Value components refer to the learners' intrinsic and extrinsic goal orientation as well as task value beliefs. Expectancy components refer to students' perception of self-efficacy and control beliefs for learning. According to (Campos et al., 2011), learners can be burnout by exhaustion and disengagement. This study explores if there is a relationship between motivation and exhaustion. It also investigates motivation and disengagement.

METHODOLOGY

This quantitative study is done to explore motivation and burnout among undergraduates. A convenient sample of 206 participants responded to the survey. The instrument used is a 5 Likert-scale survey .Table 1 below shows the categories used for the Likert scale; 1 is for Never, 2 is for Rarely, 3 is for Sometimes, 4 is for Very Often and 5 is for Always.

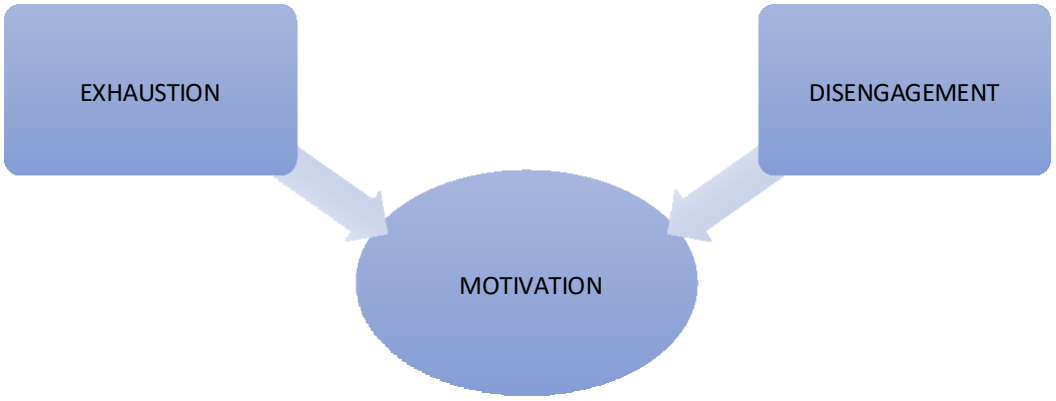

Fig. 1 Conceptual Framework of the Study Relationship between Motivation and Burnout Sources

TABLE I Likert Scale Use

1	Never
2	Rarely
3	Sometimes
4	Very Often
5	Always

TABLE II Distribution of Items in the Survey

SECT	CATEGORY	CONSTRUCT	SUB-CATEGORY	No Of Items	Total Items	Cronbach Alpha
B	MOTIVATIONAL SCALE (Pintrich & DeGroot,1990)	(i)) VALUE COMPONENT	(i) Intrinsic Goal Orientation	4	12	.831
			(ii) Extrinsic Goal Orientation	3		
			(iii) Task Value Beliefs	5		
		(ii)EXPECTANCY COMPONENT	(i) Students' Perception of Self- Efficacy	5	7	.842
			(ii)Control Beliefs for Learning	2		
		(iii)AFFECTIVE COMPONENTS			5	.873
C	BURNOUT (Campos,et.al, 2011)	(i)BURNOUT-EXHAUSTION			8	.796
		(ii)BURNOUT-DISENGAGEMENT			8	
			TOTAL NO OF ITEMS		40	.893

Table 2 shows the distribution of items in the survey. The instrument is replicated from (Pintrich & De Groot, 1990) and (Campos et al., 2011) to reveal the variables in table 3 below. Table 2 also shows the reliability of the survey. The analysis shows a Cronbach alpha of .831 for Value components, .842 for Expectancy components, .873 for Affective components and .796 for burnout. The overall Cronbach alpha for all 40 items is .893; thus, revealing a good reliability of the chosen/used instrument. Further analysis using SPSS is done to present findings to answer the research questions for this study.

FINDINGS

Demographic Analysis

TABLE II Percentage for Demographic Profile

Question	Demographic Profile	Categories	Percentage (%)
1	Gender	Male	59%
		Female	41%
2	Semester	Part 1 - 4	53%
		Part 5 and above	47%
3	Cluster	Science & Technology	62%
		Social Sciences & Humanities	38%
4	Institution	Public Institution	76%
		Other	24%

Table 3 shows the percentage distribution of the demographic profile of respondents for a study examining the relationship between motivation and factors that contribute to burnout among students. The data indicate a predominance of male participants, comprising 59% of the sample, while female respondents represented 41%. Most respondents (53%) were in the early stages of their studies (Part 1–4), while the remaining 47% were at a more advanced stage of their studies (Part 5 and above). From an academic perspective, the majority of respondents were Science and Technology program students (62%) compared to Social Sciences & Humanities (38%). Additionally, 76% of the respondents were from public institutions, with 24% from other types of institutions, such as private colleges or universities

Descriptive Statistics

Findings for Motivational Components

This section outlines the descriptive results associated with the value component of motivation, which deals with

the way learners make sense of the importance and purpose of their learning activities. In the context of this study, the value factors are broken down into three subcategories: intrinsic goal orientation, extrinsic goal orientation, and task value beliefs. Each of these sub-factors yields insight into the reasons students are motivated to engage in learning activities whether based on internal satisfaction, external rewards, or the perceived applicability of the content they are learning. Data were assessed using Likert-scale items, with means and standard deviations calculated to clarify the overall trends in students' motivational profiles.

(A) INTRINSIC GOAL ORIENTATION (4 ITEMS)

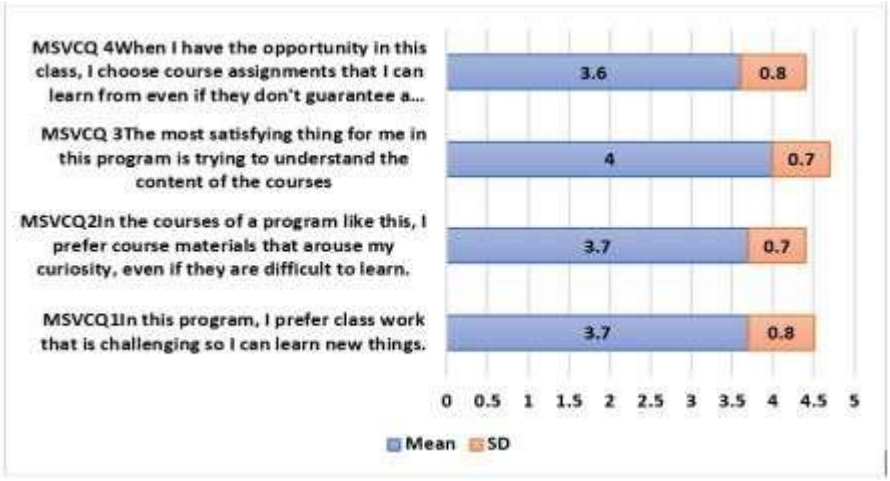

Fig. 2 Mean for Intrinsic Orientation

The results on intrinsic goal orientation reveal that students display a moderate to high level of internal motivation toward their learning activities. Out of the four items evaluated, the most highly rated item was "The most satisfying thing for me in this program is trying to understand the content of the courses" (M = 4.0, SD = 0.7). This result would suggest that many students are satisfied with understanding course content and learning for the sake of knowledge. The other items emphasizing challenge, curiosity, and meaningful learning instead of grades obtained relatively similar ratings, which range from 3.6 to 3.7. Notably, the item on choosing assignments that facilitate learning over those guaranteeing a good grade scored the lowest (M = 3.6, SD = 0.8). This could indicate an underlying fear of some students for results based on performance measures. Overall, the findings indicate that while students enjoy learning and value personal growth, there is the possibility of competing issues linked with academic evaluation.

(b) EXTRINSIC GOAL ORIENTATION (3 items)

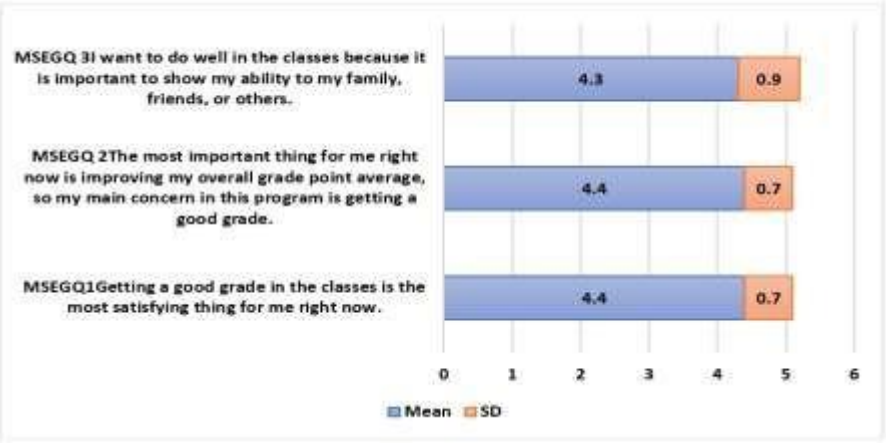

Fig. 3 Mean for Extrinsic Orientation

Conversely, extrinsic goal orientation was the most prominent source of motivation for the participants. The three items on this subscale had high mean scores, with two items reaching a score of 4.4 and one item reaching

a score of 4.3. The statements that received the most support were "Getting a good grade in the classes is the most satisfying thing for me right now" and "The most important thing for me right now is improving my overall grade point average," both of which reflect a strong emphasis on academic achievement. These results show that a large majority of students are most likely to be motivated by external goals, such as earning high grades and receiving recognition from family and peers. The consistency of high scores across all items in this category indicates that extrinsic motivation plays a driving role in students' academic behaviors and choices. Although such motivation can promote academic persistence, it also entails the risks inherent in students' self-worth becoming overly dependent on their performance outcomes.

(c) TASK VALUE BELIEFS (5 items)

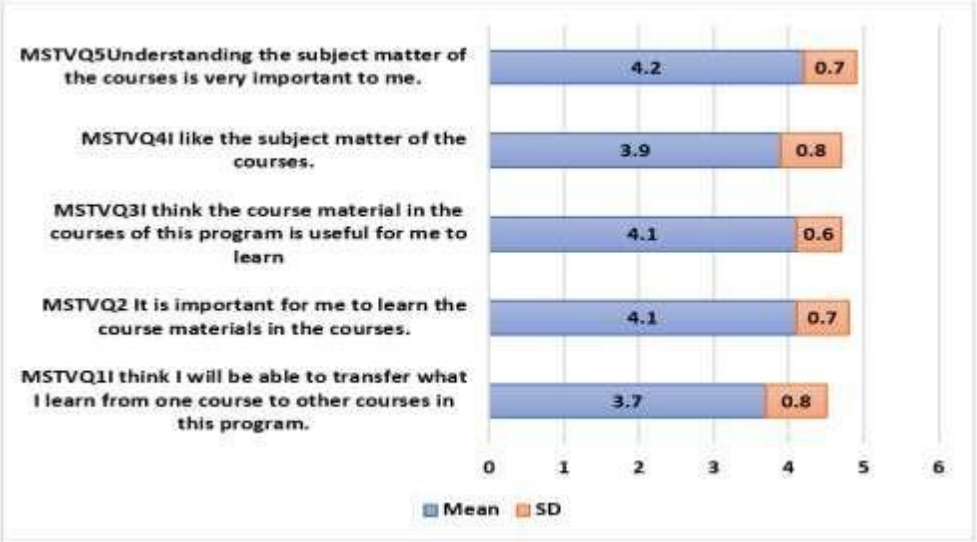

Fig. 4 Mean for Task Value Beliefs

The analysis of task value beliefs continues to support the idea that students recognize the importance and usefulness of their academic work. The most highly rated item within this domain was "Understanding the subject matter of the courses is very important to me" (M = 4.2, SD = 0.7), closely followed by items emphasizing the usefulness and relevance of course content (M = 4.1). These findings suggest that students view their learning experiences as valuable and relevant to their academic studies and possibly their future professional careers. In contrast, the lowest rated item, "I think I will be able to transfer what I learn from one course to other courses in this program" (M = 3.7, SD = 0.8), indicates that a group of students may lack confidence in the transferability of their knowledge across subjects. This issue could be addressed through the inclusion of more interdisciplinary learning activities focused on real-world applications.

Nevertheless, overall feedback within this subscale continues to be positive, indicating that students are not solely motivated by ends but enjoy the substance and meaning of their academic coursework as well. In summary, findings for the value component reflect a complex but promising motivational profile. Respondents in this study have a strong extrinsic motivation for academic achievement that is complemented by strong intrinsic interests and a strong appreciation for their studies. However, the dominance of extrinsic motivation emphasizes the importance of maintaining a healthy balance between internal goals and external targets. These findings are consistent with previous research, which has highlighted the value of both intrinsic and extrinsic factors in the development of academic motivation. Regarding the general context of this study, the presence of strong value-oriented motivation can play an important role in protecting students against burnout, as a clear sense of purpose and relevance in their academic endeavors can enhance resilience even in the context of high-stress academic programs.

d) EXPECTANCY COMPONENT (7 items)

Expectancy components are categorized into (a) students' perception of self-efficacy and (b) control beliefs for learning.

e) STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF SELF-EFFICACY (5 items)

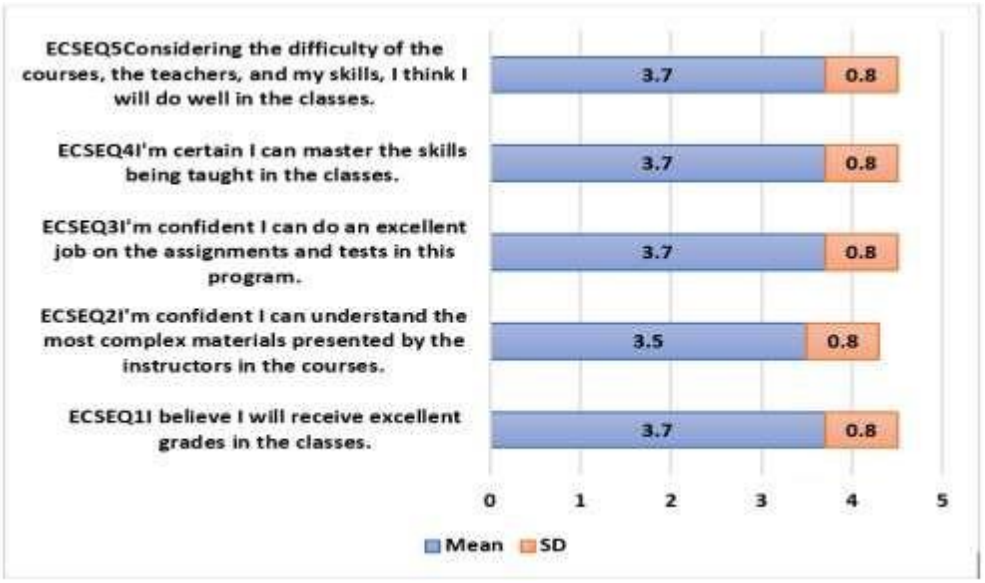

Fig. 5 Mean for Students' Perception of Self-Efficacy

The results in Figure 5 show that students had a moderately high level of self-efficacy, with mean scores ranging from 3.5 to 3.7 across all five categories. Strong confidence in their academic abilities and adaptability is indicated by the mean score of 3.7 for four of the items: belief in getting excellent grades (ECSEQ1), confidence in finishing assignments and tests (ECSEQ3), mastering taught skills (ECSEQ4), and performing well despite challenges (ECSEQ5). The somewhat lower mean of 3.5 for ECSEQ2, which is related to comprehending complicated course materials, however, indicates a relative lack of cognitive self-confidence when confronted with more challenging material. This indicates the need for improved teaching assistance or more understandable explanations of difficult ideas. Although the overall view is optimistic, some students may still lack confidence and need extra encouragement or learning interventions, as indicated by the consistent standard deviation of 0.8 across all measures, which indicates modest variability in students' perceptions of their own efficacy.

f) CONTROL BELIEFS FOR LEARNING (2 items)

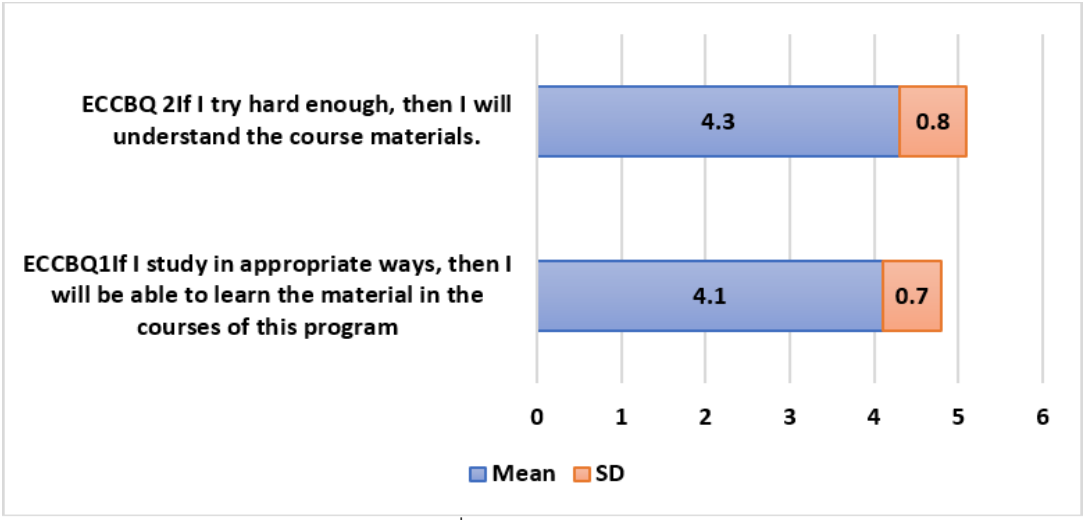

Fig. 6 Mean for Control Beliefs for Learning

Figure 6 shows the mean for control beliefs for learning. The highest mean is item 2 (mean=4.3, SD=0.8) which states that students felt when they tried hard, they would understand the course materials. Next, item 1 (mean=4.1, SD=0.7) states that the students felt if they studied in appropriate ways, they would be able to learn the materials.

g) AFFECTIVE COMPONENT - reversing (5 items)

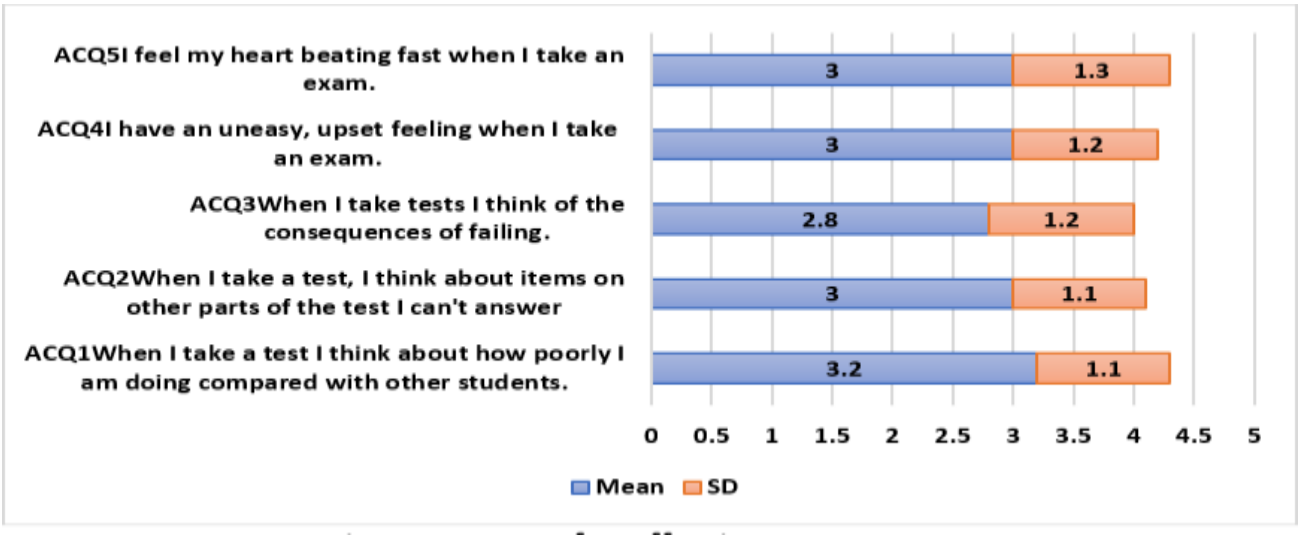

Fig. 7 Mean for Affective Components

The findings in Figure 7 demonstrate that, with mean scores ranging from 2.8 to 3.2, students exhibit a moderate level of affective responses, mostly negative emotions during exams. Students who reported negatively comparing themselves to others during examinations had the highest mean (3.2) for ACQ1, suggesting a propensity for negative self-evaluation. With a mean score of 3.0, items ACQ2, ACQ4, and ACQ5 indicate that students frequently feel nervous about questions they haven't been able to answer, feel uneasy, and exhibit bodily symptoms like elevated heart rate during tests. Concerns about the repercussions of failing are shown in ACQ3, which had the lowest mean score (2.8). Students' emotional reactions vary quite a bit, as evidenced by the standard deviations, which range from 1.1 to 1.3. Overall, the findings imply that affective components such as test anxiety and fear of failure are present among students at a moderate level, potentially impacting their confidence and performance during assessments.

Findings for Exhaustion

This section presents data to answer research question 2- How do learners perceive exhaustion in learning?

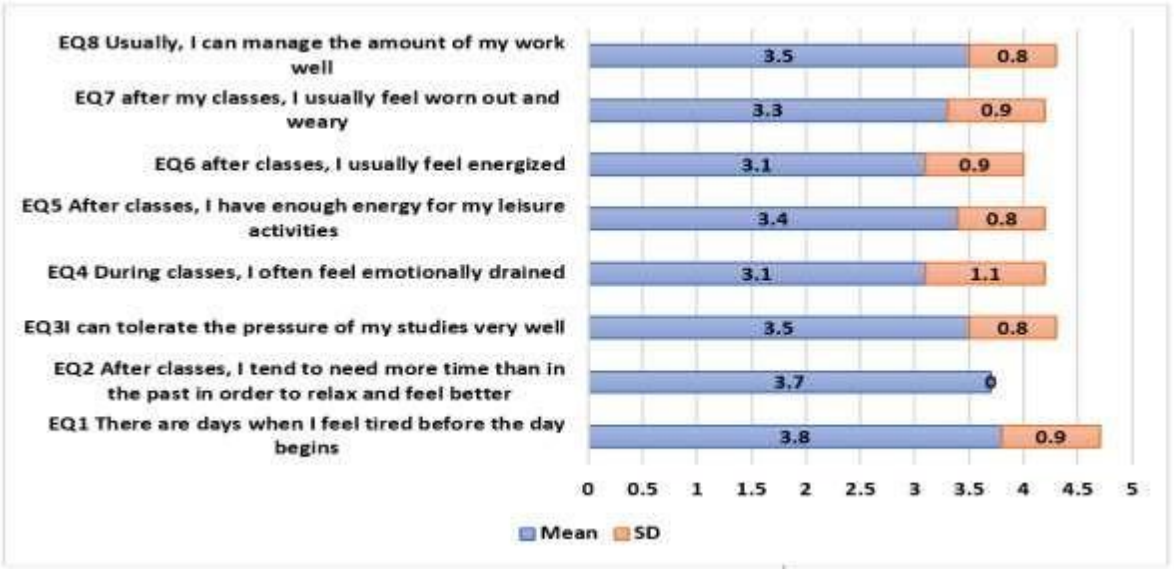

Fig. 8 Mean for Exhaustion

The findings in Figure 8 reveal that students experience a moderate to high level of exhaustion related to their learning activities, with mean scores ranging from 3.1 to 3.8. Academic fatigue is evident in the fact that many

students experience fatigue before the day even starts, as evidenced by the highest mean (3.8) for EQ1. This is further supported by EQ2 (mean = 3.7), which indicates that students now require more time to unwind after classes than they did in the past. After-class items like EQ4, EQ6, and EQ7 that measure energy and emotional states have lower mean scores (range from 3.1 to 3.3), indicating that a sizable portion of students frequently experience emotional exhaustion, fatigue, and a lack of energy for leisure. However, students in EQ3 and EQ8 (both at 3.5) reported handling pressure and workload fairly well, reflecting somewhat more positive perceptions. The fact that all of the categories had consistently moderate values, however, shows that students' physical and mental health are seriously impacted by fatigue, which may also impair their motivation and general academic performance.

Findings for Disengagement

This section presents data to answer research question 3- How do learners perceive disengagement in learning?

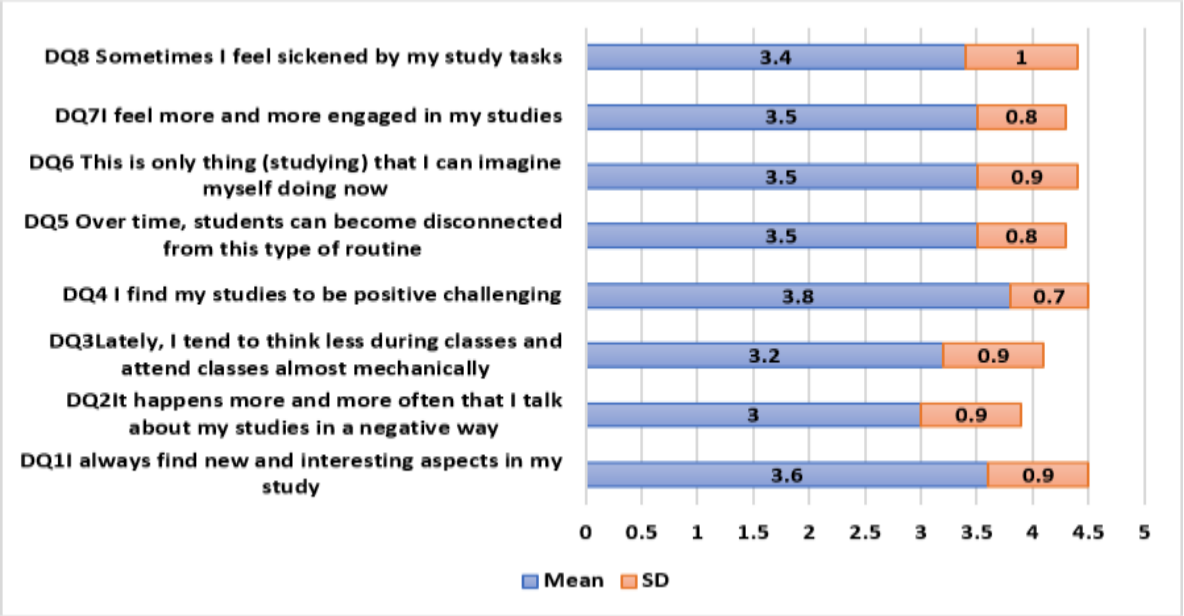

Fig. 9 Mean for Disengagement

As presented in Figure 9, mean scores ranging from 3.0 to 3.8 indicate that students generally experience a moderate level of disengagement from learning activities. The statement "I find my studies to be positive challenging" had the highest mean (3.8, SD = 0.7), showing that students generally find their academic tasks mentally engaging and positively demanding. The next item with the highest mean score was “I always find new and interesting aspects in my study” (mean = 3.6, SD = 0.9), which reflects the existence of a constant academic curiosity among the respondents. The next three items DQ5, DQ6, and DQ7 each recorded an identical mean score of 3.5, with SD ranging from 0.8 to 0.9, reflecting the balance between emotional attachment and routine involvement among students. The lowest mean score was recorded for the item “It happens more and more often that I talk about my studies in a negative way” (mean = 3.0, SD = 0.9), indicating that fewer students openly admitted to frequently speaking negatively about their studies. Overall, the study results reflect a tendency for students to maintain moderate to positive engagement in learning, however, there are also early signs of psychological withdrawal and routine-based fatigue that should not be ignored.

Exploratory Statistics

Findings for Relationship between motivation and burnout causes. This section presents data to answer research question 4- Is there a relationship between motivation and burnout causes?

To determine if there is a significant association in the mean scores between motivation and burnout causes, data is anlaysed using SPSS for correlations. Results are presented separately in Table 4 and 5 below.

TABLE IV Profile Correlation between Motivation and Exhaustion

		MOTIVATION	EXHAUSTION
MOTIVATION	Pearson (Correlation	1	.424**
	Sig (2-tailed)		.000
	N	206	206
EXHAUSTION	Pearson (Correlation	.424**	1
	Sig (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	206	206

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 4 shows there is an association between motivation and exhaustion. Correlation analysis shows that there is a moderate significant association between motivation and exhaustion (r=.424**) and (p=.000). According to Jackson (2015), coefficient is significant at the .05 level and positive correlation is measured on a 0.1 to 1.0 scale. Weak positive correlation would be in the range of 0.1 to 0.3, moderate positive correlation from 0.3 to 0.5, and strong positive correlation from 0.5 to 1.0. This means that there is also a moderate positive relationship between motivation and exhaustion.

TABLE V Correlation between Motivation and Disengagement

		MOTIVATION	DISENGAGEMENT
MOTIVATION	Pearson (Correlation	1	.426**
	Sig (2-tailed)		.000
	N	206	206
DISENGAGEMENT	Pearson (Correlation	.426**	1
	Sig (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	206	206

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 5 shows there is an association between motivation and disengagement. Correlation analysis shows that there is a moderate significant association between motivation and disengagement (r=.426**) and (p=.000). According to Jackson (2015), coefficient is significant at the .05 level and positive correlation is measured on a 0.1 to 1.0 scale. Weak positive correlation would be in the range of 0.1 to 0.3, moderate positive correlation from 0.3 to 0.5, and strong positive correlation from 0.5 to 1.0. This means that there is also a moderate positive relationship between motivation and disengagement.

CONCLUSION

Summary of Findings and Discussions

This study explores the relationship between motivation levels and key factors contributing to burnout specifically burnout and disengagement among Malaysian higher education students. The findings indicate that the majority of students exhibit high levels of extrinsic motivation, driven primarily by academic achievement and grades. At the same time, intrinsic motivations such as curiosity and genuine interest in understanding course content are also presented. These finding aligns with previous research by Abu Bakar et al. (Abu Bakar et al., 2023), which found that students tend to be more diligent in their academic pursuits when external rewards are present. However, while extrinsic motivation can enhance academic performance, its effect is often short-term and may not lead to sustained engagement or long-term learning outcomes.

Students reported experiencing moderate to high levels of fatigue even before beginning their academic activities. Emotional exhaustion following learning sessions and a noticeable decline in energy were commonly reported, often requiring extended recovery periods. These findings are consistent with the research of (Chong et al., 2025) and (Wang et al., 2024), which identified poor time management, insufficient emotional support,

and the constant demands of academic tasks as primary contributors to student fatigue. The persistence of such fatigue not only undermines students' academic performance but also poses significant risks to their overall well-being.

In addition, students reported that their learning experiences stimulated intellectual curiosity and interest. However, this was accompanied by signs of passive learning, including routine class attendance without meaningful engagement and emotional detachment from the learning process. These patterns suggest a degree of psychological disengagement among students. This finding is consistent with the study by (Helfajrin & Ardi, 2020), which found that disengagement often arises when students' fundamental psychological needs—such as autonomy, competence, and a sense of belonging are unmet. Similarly, Davis and McClelland's (1962) theory reinforces the notion that declines in motivation and increased withdrawal occur when essential needs, including achievement and social connection, are not adequately supported within the learning environment.

Finally, this study identified a positive correlation between motivation and both burnout and disengagement. This finding aligns with the model proposed by (Zhang et al., 2025), which highlights that intrinsic motivation, when coupled with adequate emotional support, serves as a protective factor against burnout. Furthermore, the study supports the observation by (Pham Thi & Duong, 2024) that students with lower self-efficacy are more susceptible to emotional exhaustion. This is reflected in the present findings, where respondents demonstrated only moderate confidence in managing academically demanding tasks, indicating a potential vulnerability to burnout in the absence of strong self-belief.

Implications and Suggestions for Future Research

Theoretical and Conceptual Implications

The findings of this study support McClelland's Needs Theory, which states that students are motivated by needs such as achievement, relatedness, and autonomy. When these needs are not met in the learning environment, students are at risk of burnout or loss of interest. The study also emphasizes that motivation is not simply the value placed on learning, but also involves self-confidence and the ability to manage emotions such as stress and anxiety. Consistent with the motivation-burnout conceptual model, the findings show that although students value academic achievement, emotional responses such as burnout, anxiety, and isolation indicate that motivation alone is not sufficient to prevent burnout without emotional support and a supportive environment.

Pedagogical Implications

Today's students are often motivated by extrinsic motivation, driven by the desire to attain academic excellence and fulfill institutional expectations. However, an overemphasis on performance-oriented goals may contribute to emotional fatigue and a sense of psychological detachment. Consequently, educators should guide students not only in mastering content but also in understanding its personal relevance and value. Integrating an understanding of student motivation and burnout risk into teaching practices can promote more enduring learning outcomes and enhance the overall educational impact.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research could investigate the dimensions of motivation and burnout across various academic programs, levels of study, and institutional types to identify emerging patterns among diverse student populations. While this study focused on undergraduates, expanding the sample to include postgraduate students or learners from different cultural and institutional backgrounds would enhance generalizability. A longitudinal design could also be adopted to explore how students' motivation and burnout evolve over time. Additionally, integrating qualitative methods such as interviews or focus groups would offer richer insights into students' lived academic and emotional experiences. Future studies should also examine the influence of institutional support systems, peer networks, and pedagogical practices on mitigating burnout. Based on the present findings, researchers could pilot and evaluate targeted interventions such as motivation-based workshops or resilience training programs to assess their effectiveness in improving students' academic engagement and psychological well-being.

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