

From Self-Leadership to Well-Being: Understanding Student Engagement and Burnout in Universities

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Abstract

The problem of burnout in university students has become a matter of concern because academic stress and psychosocial problems often affect their health and success in studies. This paper aims to explore the link between self-leadership, burnout, and student engagement, where student engagement mediates the aforementioned connections. It also evaluates the impact of self-leadership and engagement on burnout reduction and examines the mediating effect of engagement on the association between self-leadership and burnout. The data collected was in the form of a cross-sectional survey design that sampled 300 students in three faculties of the University of Sargodha. Data collection was done using the Revised Self-Leadership Questionnaire, Utrecht Work Engagement Scale-student version, and Maslach Burnout Inventory-Student Survey. SPSS was used to conduct data analysis using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and regression analysis, and mediation analysis using Process Macro. The findings showed that students had reported moderate self-leadership, engagement, and burnout levels. The results showed that the increased self-leadership had a strong connection with the increased engagement and reduced burnout. Besides, heightened interaction is associated with decreased burnout. Regression models showed that self-leadership was a strong predictor of burnout and engagement. The predicting factor of burnout was also engagement itself, where the greater the engagement, the lower the burnout levels. Nonetheless, mediation analysis reveals that whereas self-leadership has a direct negative impact on burnout and consequential positive impact on engagement, engagement has no significant mediation effect between self-leadership and burnout. The results can be used by higher education institutions to implement interventions that can promote self-leadership among students and enhance engagement as protective measures in burnout reduction.

Keywords: Self-Leadership, Burnout, Student Engagement, Higher Education

Introduction

Students attending colleges are normally subjected to academic, social, and personal related problems, and these problems add to the stress and burnout. The psychological syndrome that is described as burnout, post-academic stress after a prolonged duration, is classified into three major dimensions that comprise emotional exhaustion, lessened academic effectiveness, and cynicism (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Emotional exhaustion is the sense of being tired because of academic pressure that influences coping capability. Cynicism is manifested in the form of not working in an academic field, which in most cases comes with frustration, a sense of

meaninglessness, or demotivation. Poor academic efficacy entails the absence of self-confidence and achievement in academics.

Over the past several years, burnout among students at the university has resulted in a colorful topic in the sphere of higher learning that influences academic performance, mental condition, and health. The reasons for student burnout are usually caused by long-term academic stress and heavy workloads, the ineffective coping mechanisms (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Although a lot of literature has been devoted to external causes of burnout, greater attention has been paid to internal, self-regulatory processes that could reduce the effects of burnout. One of such capacities is self-leadership (SL), and it is the process that entails people affecting and controlling their actions, thoughts, and feelings to bring out the desired results (Manz, 1986; Houghton and Neck, 2002).

Burnout is an extreme problem, particularly for university students. One of the possible mechanisms that can be employed against burnout is self-leadership, and this is a self-regulatory process in which individuals assume control over themselves and shape them to meet some goals (Neck and Houghton, 2006). SL entails not only behavioral strategies, such as the setting of goals and self-observation, but also cognitive strategies, such as developing positive thinking styles, which cumulatively increase students' capacity to overcome academic stresses and minimize stress. The construct is then referred to as a way that the individuals influence and motivate themselves in a positive manner towards realizing personal and professional aspirations and other aspects that include ownership of cognitions, behavior, and outcomes. The advantages of being an active self-leader include such qualities as improved emotion regulation, a rise in motivation levels, and burnout resistance in students.

Empirical support also indicates that self-leadership equips students with the instruments (setting goals, positive self-talk, and self-rewards) that make them sail through the academic pressures more effectively. Self-leadership also makes a person resistant to burnout and more engaged. The concept of engagement is multidimensional and involves: vigor, dedication, and good interest in learning activities (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2003). Engagement is a familiar preventive aspect of burnout and is a constructive mental condition, which involves the students with active energy and concentration in significant academic tasks.

Another predictor of burnout is student engagement, and this refers to cognitive, affective, and behavioral interactions in academics (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2003). Engagement involves practicing a physical involvement in the curricular, social, and extracurricular spheres and is strongly known to be an integral part and parcel of academic achievement and individual growth, depending on the amount of attention, interest, optimism, and passion manifested during the learning process. Engaged students care, have interests, and dedication to their work, and therefore defend themselves against the degrading effects of academic stress. The high rates of engagement are always associated with high academic performance, high well-being, and decreased burnout rate.

The present paper determines the mediation of student engagement in the relationship between self-leadership and burnout. To sum up, the hypothesis is as follows: the high level of self-leadership correlates with the high level of academic activity that, in its turn, changes the burnout level. The more precise approximation, like the mediation effect, will help elucidate why universities can inculcate self-leadership and engagement behaviors that contribute to the well-

being and academic success of students. In theory, self-leadership may be used to enhance participation by ensuring proactive learning behaviors, thereby shielding against emotional exhaustion and disengagement. The empirical validation of this mediation process, therefore, gives viable information on what can be done by the institutions to come up with interventions that would facilitate the self-management capacity and resilience of the students.

The present study, in its turn, addresses the impact of self-leadership on burnout among university students, and the mediating variable, which is the current focus of the given study, is student engagement. The literature review gathered in the given study synthesizes the research on burnout, which is why it becomes theoretically and practically informative in relation to the guarantee of the well-being and academic performance of the students. The main concern of the study is to examine the relationship between self-leadership, student engagement, and burnout among university students. Particularly, the paper will assess the effect of self-leadership on burnout, discuss how student engagement can mitigate burnout, and find out whether student engagement can mediate the relationship.

Statement of the Problem

University students bring with them multiple academic, psychological, and social problems that put them at a high risk of burnout. Apart from its effect on students' academic performance, burnout also harms their general well-being. At the same time, the concept of self-leadership has become a major personal resource, empowering students with skills of self-regulation and positive thinking patterns to deal with stress and to keep them engaged. Similarly, student engagement is identified as an important buffer of burnout. However, although previous studies have individually investigated the relationships between these three variables, there is currently insufficient empirical evidence for the interaction between self-leadership, engagement, and burnout among university students.

Understanding the direct and indirect effects of self-leadership on burnout and engagement is important for the development of interventions to increase resilience and academic motivation and reduce burnout among university students. Specifically, quantifying whether student engagement mediates the association between self-leadership and burnout can give more insight into the mechanisms of how self-leadership helps against academic stress. This research addresses this gap by empirically examining the interplay of these constructs by providing both practical implications and theoretical contributions to the development of students.

Objectives

1. To measure the relationship among self-leadership, engagement, and burnout among university students.
2. To assess the effect of student engagement in reducing burnout in university students.
3. To measure the effect of self-leadership on burnout in university students.
4. To investigate the mediation effect of student engagement in the relationship between self-leadership and burnout of university students.

Hypotheses

H₀: There is no significant correlation among self-leadership, burnout, and engagement of university students.

H02: Self-leadership has no significant effect on student engagement.

H03: Self-leadership has no significant effect on burnout among university students.

H04: Student engagement has no significant effect on burnout among university students.

H05: Student engagement does not mediate the relationship between self-leadership and burnout.

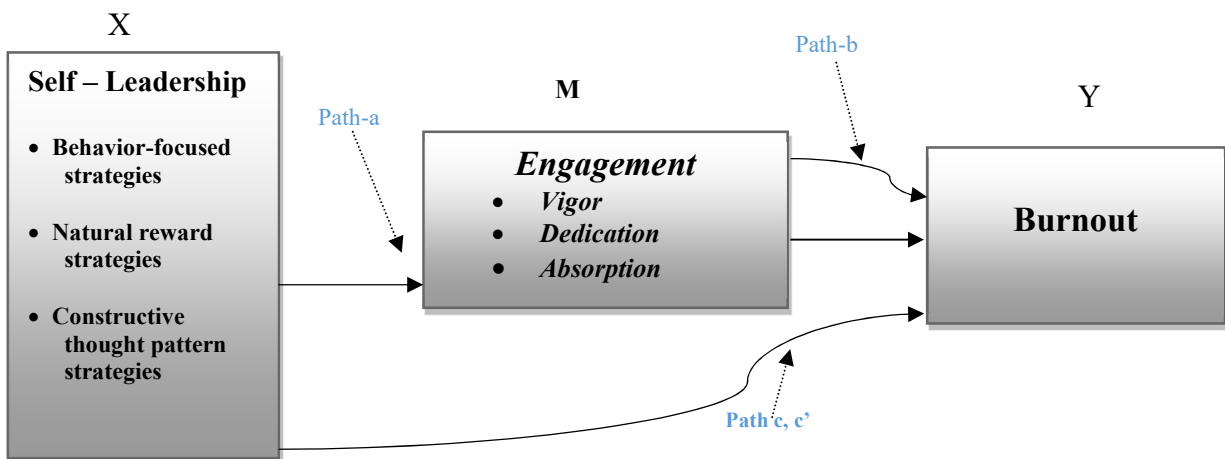
Conceptual Framework

Based on self-leadership theory, self-regulation frameworks, engagement, and burnout literature, the plausible causal chain is as follows:

Self-Leadership -Student Engagement (vigor, dedication, absorption) - Lower levels of burnout (tiredness, cynicism, lowered efficacy).

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework of the Study



Total Effect of X on Y Path $c = c' + ab$

Direct effect (unmediated) Path $c' = c - ab$

Indirect effect (mediated) Path $ab = c - c'$

Design

This study was of quantitative cross-sectional survey design. The quantitative approach is the possibility of statistical examination of the hypothesized relationships between variables, that is, self-leadership, student engagement, and burnout.

Population and Sample

The target population includes the undergraduate and graduate students from different departments of the University of Sargodha. This population was chosen because students are

susceptible to academic burnout and stress, and could be the appropriate population to investigate the effects that self-leadership and engagement have on academic burnout. In the present study, stratified random sampling was carried out to ensure representation from the different academic units, namely the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, the Faculty of Science, and the Faculty of Social Sciences. The number of participants identified was 300, which is sufficient for making reliable statistical inferences.

Research Instrument

A structured questionnaire with standardized and validated scales was used for the data collection. This research has been carried out using the Revised Self-Leadership Questionnaire (RSLQ) (Houghton & Neck, 2002), which is used to ascertain the construct of self-leadership. Utrecht Work Engagement Scale-student version (Schaufeli et al., 2002) was used to assess the level of students’ engagement. The tool is based on three dimensions, i.e., vigor, dedication, and absorption. The study has also utilized the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Student Survey (MBI-SS) to organize cynicism, emotional exhaustion, and lowered academic efficacy in a group of university students (Maslach & Jackson, 1981).

Validation of Research Instrument

Questionnaires were administered to 40 undergraduate and graduate-level students for a pilot study. The purposes of pilot testing were to establish face and content validity of instruments as well as reliability of scales using the Cronbach alpha coefficient (α). The results showed the internal consistency of the three questionnaires was highly acceptable (see Table 1). To ensure the appropriateness, accuracy, and relevance of the research tools, content validity was achieved through expert opinion. A panel of four professors in the Institute of Education was used to test the questionnaire for the evaluation of each item using a 4-point scale (where 1 = Not relevant, 4 = Highly relevant). Based on their ratings, the tools were simplified to cover the complicated wording of some items. The Ethical Review Board (ERB) of University of Sargodha gave ethical approval of the study.

Results

Data analysis was performed with the help of SPSS. Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, regression analysis, and mediation analysis with Process Macro were the techniques for analysis.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables

Variables	N	Mean	SD	α	Skewness	Kurtosis
Engagement	297	3.46	0.71	.772	-.858	-.006
Burnout	297	3.24	0.78	.851	-.681	-.615
Self-Leadership	297	3.41	0.64	.777	-.938	.550

In Table 1, the descriptive statistics of engagement, burnout, and self-leadership are presented. The mean engagement score for the 297 students was 3.46 (SD = 0.71). Distribution was slightly skewed to the left (skewness = -0.858) and roughly normal (kurtosis = -0.006). Burnout had a mean of 3.24 (SD = 0.78) with a slight positive skew (skewness = 0.609) and a flatter than normal distribution (kurtosis = -0.615). Self-leadership was found to have a mean = 3.41 (SD = 0.64) with a small positive skew (skewness = 0.409) and moderate kurtosis (0.550). Overall, the descriptive statistics are a summary of the central tendencies and the distributional characteristics of the study variables.

Table 2

Item Analysis for University Students' Engagement

Statements	SD %	D %	U%	A %	SA %	Mean	SD	Interpretation
I feel bursting with energy while doing my work as a student.	3.0	13.8	27.9	38.4	16.8	3.52	1.02	High
I feel capable and energetic when I study or go to class.	2.0	15.8	25.6	41.8	14.8	3.52	0.99	High
I am passionate about my studies.	2.7	16.5	26.6	33.3	20.9	3.53	1.08	High
My studies inspire me a lot.	2.0	14.8	23.2	39.4	20.5	3.62	1.03	High
I feel like going to class when I start my day.	2.7	18.2	39.7	28.6	10.8	3.27	0.97	Moderate
I feel happy when I am learning deeply.	2.7	19.5	19.9	40.4	17.5	3.42	1.08	Moderate
I feel proud of my studies.	3.0	11.8	22.9	39.4	22.9	3.67	1.05	High
I am deeply involved in my studies.	1.3	12.5	41.8	34.0	10.4	3.40	0.88	Moderate
I get carried away when I am involved in studying.	3.7	9.8	33.3	38.7	14.5	3.51	0.98	High

Note: 1.00 to 1.80 (very low level); 1.80 to 2.61 (low level); 2.61 to 3.42 (moderate level); 3.43 to 4.23 (high level); and 4.23 to 5.00 (very high level) (Alkharusi, 2022).

Item-level descriptive statistics of student engagement are shown in Table 2. Mean scores were 3.27 to 3.67 with an SD of 0.88 to 1.08, indicating overall moderate engagement. For example, students were proud of their studies (M = 3.67, SD = 1.05) and inspired by their academic work (M = 3.62, SD = 1.03), which is, moderately high engagement. In contrast, lower mean scores were found for items such as motivation to come to class in the morning (M = 3.27, SD = 0.97). Overall, these results suggest students experience moderate to high levels of energy, enthusiasm, and involvement in their studies (but with variation among specific items when it comes to engagement).

Table 3

Item Analysis for Burnout of University Students

Statements	SD %	D %	U%	A %	SA %	Mean	SD	Interpretation
I feel mentally exhausted.	0.0	1.3	64.6	27.9	6.1	3.39	0.62	Moderate

Everything I do needs a great deal of effort.	0.0	1.0	46.1	52.2	0.7	3.53	0.53	High
At the end of the day, I find it hard to recover my energy.	0.0	1.7	26.9	65.3	6.1	3.76	0.58	High
I lack the energy to start a new day in the morning.	0.0	2.4	19.5	60.9	17.2	3.93	0.68	High
I want to be active; however, I am unable to manage.	0.0	3.7	38.7	50.8	6.7	3.61	0.67	High
I quickly feel tired when I exert myself.	0.0	1.3	49.8	45.1	3.7	3.51	0.59	High
I feel mentally exhausted and drained at the end of my day.	0.0	1.3	25.6	64.0	9.1	3.81	0.60	High
I struggle to find any interest in my research work.	0.0	0.7	14.8	25.6	49.8	3.52	0.88	High
I feel hatred towards my task.	1.3	13.8	44.1	36.7	4.0	3.28	0.80	Moderate
I feel indifferent about my assignments.	0.0	16.8	36.7	38.7	7.7	3.37	0.85	Moderate
I'm pessimistic about what my work means to others.	0.0	8.4	41.4	42.4	7.7	3.49	0.76	High
I have trouble remaining focused.	2.0	17.2	26.6	40.4	13.8	3.43	1.00	Moderate
I have trouble thinking clearly.	0.7	8.8	52.5	34.0	4.0	3.32	0.72	Moderate
I forget and am distracted.	0.7	7.4	35.0	43.8	13.1	3.61	0.83	High
I struggle to concentrate.	0.7	14.5	33.3	40.4	11.1	3.47	0.90	Moderate
I make mistakes because I think about other things.	1.7	25.6	25.9	41.4	5.4	3.23	0.95	Moderate
I can't control my emotions.	0.0	22.6	35.0	37.7	4.7	3.25	0.86	Moderate
I don't recognize myself, the way I react emotionally.	1.0	19.5	63.3	12.1	4.0	2.99	0.72	Moderate
I become irritable when things don't go as I think.	1.0	10.8	35.4	31.0	21.9	3.62	0.98	High
I get upset without knowing why.	3.7	24.2	32.7	29.0	10.4	3.18	1.03	Moderate
I overreact unintentionally.	3.0	7.1	30.3	35.4	24.2	3.71	1.01	High

Table 3 displays the results of the descriptive statistics of the items related to burnout among university students. Mean scores over the items were between 2.99 and 3.93, with SDs between 0.53 and 1.03, corresponding to generally moderate to high levels of burnout. For example, students indicated they had a hard time recovering energy at the end of the day ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 0.58$) and having energy in the morning ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 0.68$), both indicating high levels of burnout. Similarly, fatigue and tiredness of mind at the end of the day also earned a

relatively high mean ($M = 3.81$, $SD = 0.60$). By contrast, lower scores were found for things like not recognizing yourself in emotional reactions ($M = 2.99$, $SD = 0.72$), which suggests burnout was less strongly endorsed in this dimension. Overall, the results indicate that burnout is typically moderate to high for students, and especially intense in areas associated with fatigue and energy depletion.

Table 4.

Item Analysis for Self-Leadership of University Students

Statements	S D %	D %	U %	A %	S A %	Mean	SD	Interpre- tion
I create specific goals for my performance.	0	8.4	39.1	37.7	14.8	3.59	0.84	High
I keep track of how well I am doing at work.	0	7.7	23.2	45.1	23.9	3.85	0.87	High
I work toward specific goals I set for myself.	2.4	14.1	35.4	31.0	17.2	3.43	1.01	Moderate
I visualize myself performing a task successfully before I start it.	2.7	18.9	19.2	45.1	14.1	3.49	1.04	High
I picture a successful performance in my mind before I do it.	2.4	9.1	42.1	32.7	13.8	3.46	0.92	High
When I complete a task, I reward myself with something special.	2.4	14.8	31.3	34.7	16.8	3.49	1.01	High
Sometimes I talk to myself out loud to work through problematic situations.	2.7	10.4	41.8	35.0	10.1	3.39	0.90	Moderate
I try to evaluate the accuracy of my beliefs about the problematic situations.	3.4	13.1	32.0	33.7	17.8	3.42	1.04	Moderate
I evaluate my own beliefs and assumptions when I face a difficult situation.	2.0	14.1	30.0	36.7	17.2	3.53	1.00	High

Table 4 presents item-level descriptive statistics for self-leadership in university students. Mean scores were 3.39 to 3.85 with SD scores between 0.84 and 1.04, which indicated students generally reported moderate to high levels of self-leadership. For example, students reported that they make a point of keeping track of their performance ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 0.87$), which is a relatively higher level of self-regulation. In contrast, lower scores were found for items such as talking to oneself in difficult situations ($M = 3.39$, $SD = 0.90$), that is, more moderate endorsement. Other items, such as setting personal goals ($M = 3.59$, $SD = 0.84$) and assessing personal beliefs in problem situations ($M = 3.49$, $SD = 1.04$), also showed moderate levels of agreement. Overall, these findings indicate that while students exhibit some effective self-leadership strategies, their use is still at a moderately higher level.

Table 5
 Pearson Correlation for Self-Leadership, Burnout, and Engagement of University Students

SN	Variables	Engagement	Burnout	Self-Leadership
1	Engagement	1	-.235**	.765**
2	Burnout	-.235**	1	-.312**
3	Self-Leadership	.765**	-.312**	1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 5 discusses the Pearson correlations between self-leadership, burnout, and engagement in university students. Engagement was negatively related to burnout, $r(297) = -.24$, $p < .01$, suggesting that students who had more engagement reported less burnout. Self-leadership was found to be highly positively related with engagement, $r(297) = .77$, $p < .01$, indicating that self-leadership and engagement have a positive correlation such that the higher the self-leadership, the higher the perceived engagement. In addition, self-leadership also has a negative correlation with burnout, $r(297) = -.31$, $p < .01$, showing that students with higher levels of self-leadership had lower levels of burnout. Overall, these results point to the high level of interrelationships between the three constructs.

Table 6
 Regression Coefficients of Self-leadership on Burnout of University Students

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig	R ²
(Constant)	4.536	.234		19.391	.000	.097
Self-Leadership	-.381	.068	-.312	-5.642	.000	

a. Dependent Variable: Burnout

Table 6 presents the regression findings on the influence of self-leadership on the occurrence of burnout among the university students. The results of the analysis showed that there was a significant negative association between self-leadership and burnout, $B = -0.38$, $SE = 0.07$, $b = -.31$, $t(295) = -5.64$, $p < .001$. This result suggests that the higher the level of self-leadership in students, the lower their level of burnout, with 1 unit increase in the self-leadership of students being associated with a decrease in the level of burnout by 0.38 units. This model explained about 9.7% of the variance in burnout ($R^2 = .097$), which indicates that while self-leadership does play an important role in reducing burnout, there are other factors that contribute to the overall experiences of burnout among students.

Table 7
 Regression Coefficients for Effects of Self-Leadership on Engagement of University Students

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig	R ²
(Constant)	.555	.145		3.835	.000	.586
Self-Leadership	.853	.042	.765	20.426	.000	

a. Dependent Variable: Engagement

The results showed that self-leadership was a significant predictor of engagement and was positive, $B = 0.85$, $SE = 0.04$, $b = .77$, $t(295) = 20.43$, $p < .001$. This suggests that for every one unit increase in self-leadership, engagement has increased by 0.85 units, and it would appear there is a significant and direct relationship between these variables. The model accounted for about 58.6% of the variance in engagement ($R^2 = .59$), which shows that self-leadership is a significant determinant of student engagement.

Table 8

Regression Coefficients for Effects of Engagement on Burnout of University Students

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig	R ²
(Constant)	4.130	.219		18.863	.000	.055
Engagement	-.257	.062	-.235	-4.153	.000	

a. Dependent Variable: Burnout

The results suggested that engagement was a significant negative predictor of burnout, $B = -0.26$, $SE = 0.06$, $b = -.24$, $t(295) = -4.15$, $p < .001$. This finding indicates that higher levels of engagement are associated with lower levels of burnout, so that a one-unit increase in engagement was associated with a 0.26-unit reduction in burnout scores. The model accounted for 5.5% of the variance in burnout ($R^2 = .06$) indicating that although engagement is a significant factor in reducing burnout, most of the variance can likely be explained by other variables that were not included in the model.

Table 9

Indirect Effects of Engagement on the Relationship Between Self-Leadership and Burnout Calculated Through Process Macro Bootstrapping Method

Paths	Effects	SE	t	95%CI L.L., U.L.	P
Direct Effects (c')					
Sflead → Burt	-.389	.11	-3.707	[-.5963, -.1827]	.003
Sflead → Engt	.853	.042	20.43	[.7705, .9348]	.000
Indirect Effects (ab)					
Sflead → Engt → Burt	.086	.08		[-.1563, .1684]	NS
Total Effects (c)					
Sflead → Burt + Sflead → Engt → Burt	-.381	.067	-5.64	[-.5138, -.2480]	.000

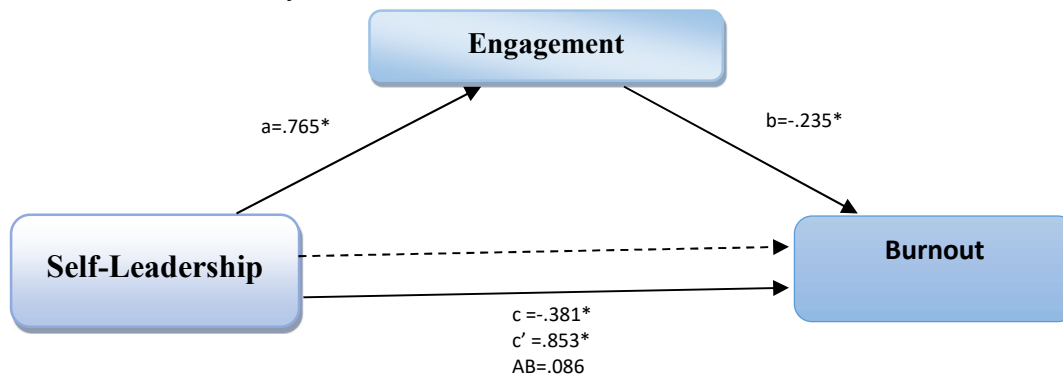
Note: Sflead= *Self-Leadership*; Burt= *Burnout*; Engt=*Engagement*.

Table 9 presents the mediation analysis testing the indirect effect of engagement on the relationship between self-leadership and burnout, using the PROCESS macro with bootstrapping. The direct effect of self-leadership on burnout was significant, $B = -0.39$, $SE = 0.11$, $t(295) = -3.71$, 95% *CI* [-0.60, -0.18], $p = .003$, indicating that higher self-leadership predicted lower burnout. Self-leadership also significantly predicted engagement, $B = 0.85$, $SE = 0.04$, $t(295) =$

20.43, 95% CI [0.77, 0.93], $p < .001$. However, the indirect effect of self-leadership on burnout through engagement was not significant, $B = 0.09$, $SE = 0.08$, 95% CI [-0.16, 0.17], ns. The total effect of self-leadership on burnout remained significant, $B = -0.38$, $SE = 0.07$, $t(295) = -5.64$, 95% CI [-0.51, -0.25], $p < .001$. These results suggest that while self-leadership directly reduces burnout, engagement does not mediate this relationship.

Figure 2

Direct and Indirect Paths of Mediation Model



Discussion

The results of the descriptive statistics show that the students in university have a moderate to high degree of engagement, burnout, and self-leadership, with results of the mean around or over the midpoint of the scale. The engagement scores indicate that students overall feel somewhat energized in their work. At the same time, some level of stress or exhaustion is also indicated by moderately high burnout levels. These results coincide with previous studies, which found moderate levels of these variables in university students and highlight the role of self-leadership in engagement and burnout. Moderate to high scores on the burnout measure indicate high but not critical burnout, consistent with recent surveys (Goh et al., 2024). These results are in line with recent trends around the world, where it was reported that there has been a growing prevalence of academic burnout stemming from academic pressures in addition to financial stress. These results suggest that mental fatigue and fast exhaustion were not negligible issues, as would be consistent with the dimension of burnout (emotional exhaustion, cynicism, depleted efficacy) according to Maslach & Leiter (2016). Parker et al. (2023) conducted a study in more than 90 countries worldwide and concluded that more than 60% of university students experienced moderate to high levels of burnout, and exhaustion was the most common symptom of burnout. Perfectionism and fear of failure were the connections between academic burnout and Garcia et al. (2024), who found that academic burnout was associated with perfectionism and fear of failure, especially in competitive programs (medicine, engineering).

It was found that university students demonstrate moderate to high levels on the self-leadership scale, especially in cognitive strategies, such as belief evaluation and self-talk. These results are consistent with the emerging literature in self-regulation in academic environments but also indicate gaps in the proactive self-management of students. These results indicate that students use basic strategies of self-leadership but are inconsistent or advanced in their use, supporting the findings of Neck et al. (2023), that self-leadership skills are underdeveloped at early adulthood.

Wunsch et al., (2023) found that positive self talk is beneficial to academic resilience but only 38% of students use it regularly when faced with stress. Hwang et al. (2025) showed that students who have a habit of questioning assumptions have a higher GPA. A recent study by Marques-Quinteiro et al. (2022) found that only 29% of students regularly set weekly academic goals, which denotes weak adoption of action-oriented strategies.

The results show a significant negative relationship between engagement and burnout, implying that the higher the engagement, the lower the burnout in university students. The negative correlation between engagement and burnout is consistent with current work in occupational health psychology. Engaged employees defined by absorption, dedication, and vigor (Schaufeli, 2021) experience less burnout due to their positive work effect and resilience. In a meta-analysis by Lesener et al in 2023, engagement was confirmed as a shield against burnout, especially in high-stress professions. Findings of a meta-analysis of 62 studies exposed that engagement always decreases the risk of burnout, at least in the academic setting with a high level of stress (Lesener et al., 2023). Goh et al. (2024) found that there was 34% less emotional exhaustion experienced by students who are engaged because of greater focus on their tasks and resilience.

A strong positive correlation between Self-Leadership and Engagement was found, which means that people with greater self-leadership (eg, self-regulation, goal-setting and proactive behaviour) are more likely to be engaged. This underlies the importance of self-directed strategies for motivation and commitment to work tasks. The strong positive relationship indicates that people who use the self-leadership strategies are more engaged. Marques-Quinteiro et al. (2022), self-leadership contributes to work engagement through the promotion of proactive behavior and psychological empowerment. The result showed that self-leadership was significantly negatively correlated to burnout, demonstrating that higher self-leadership is correlated with lower burnout, implying that self-leadership may operate as a buffer against burnout. This finding suggests that self-leadership helps individuals manage stress and prevent burnout. Van den Heuvel et al. (2024) found that people with strong self-leadership skill experienced lower levels of burnout as a result of better coping strategies (e.g. cognitive reframing, time management). Garcia et al. (2024) attributed self-leadership to the decrease of emotional exhaustion in the workplace, this is because it contributes to feeling control over the demands of work.

Self-leadership has a significant predictive relationship with lower levels of burnout in university students. This result coincides with the emerging literature on self-regulation and student well-being and identifies further areas for research. Self-leadership decreases moderately with the effect around the same level as in meta-analytic averages (Van den Heuvel et al., 2024). Garcia, A., Gunderson, L., Lin, X., Turner, L., Garvey, G., Chan, M., Forster, J. *Gest. Change BI* 13 (2) 1582-1604 DOI: 10.1159/ Page 1582 2024 Self-leadership moderates' emotional exhaustion among science, technology, engineering, and mathematics college learners: a mediating role of proactive coping. A strong, statistically significant effect of self-leadership on engagement of university students, with self-leadership explaining 58% of the variance in engagement. This finding is consonant with and an extension of recent literature regarding self-regulation and academic motivation.

Findings indicate that engagement is not a significant mediator for self-leadership and burnout among university students. This finding raises some theoretical assumptions and is concordant with emerging studies on alternative pathways between self-leadership and burnout.

While the JD-R model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2023) views engagement as a mediator between self-leadership and burnout, this study indicates that self-leadership may operate through other mechanisms. Van den Heuvel et al. (2024) have found self-leadership to reduce burnout, especially through stress reappraisal, in a sample of 10 universities. Garcia et al (2024) also found a non-significant engagement mediation on STEM students, with self-efficacy as a better mediator.

Conclusion

It was concluded that students generally reported moderate to high levels of self-leadership, engagement, and burnout, and that higher levels of self-leadership were strongly correlated with higher engagement and lower burnout. Further, the more engaged, the less likely you are to burn out. Regression analyses exhibited that self-leadership was a significant predictor for both burnout and engagement, and increased self-leadership was associated with reduced burnout and increased engagement. Engagement itself was also a significant predictor of burnout, as higher engagement correlated with lower burnout. However, the results of mediation analysis suggested that while self-leadership decreased burnout and increased engagement, engagement did not mediate significantly between self-leadership and burnout. The non-significant mediation role of engagement indicated that self-leadership reduced burnout independently of engagement in this study. Researchers should consider other psychological mechanisms and boundary conditions (e.g., stress levels, cultural factors) to refine theory and practice. Overall, the current study emphasizes the value of creating self-leadership among students, which can directly reduce burnout and increase engagement, although the mediating effect of engagement in this interplay seems limited in the current sample.

Implications for Practitioners

The findings of this study offer explicit direction for those working within the world of higher education, such as faculty, academic directors, student support officers, and university administrators. Student affairs and counseling units can create and administer training programs that teach students effective self-leadership skills, such as self-monitoring, goal setting, time management, and positive self-talk. These are skills that directly reduce burnout and increase engagement and can be incorporated into orientation programs. The faculty members could incorporate self-leadership concepts into coursework, especially when they are dealing with project-based learning, internships, or even capstone projects, where they can make independent decisions and are responsible for themselves.

Practitioners in student support can proactively address the prevention of burnout by teaching self-leadership skills before periods of high stress, such as examinations. Group coaching and peer-support programs can assist students in maintaining motivational drive and dealing with stress in a more effective manner. Through proactive development of self-leadership among students, practitioners can overcome burnout as a perceived and real mental health issue, as well as a preventive one. This approach is consistent with the study's finding that self-leadership directly reduces burnout and increases engagement, making it an area with a high impact for intervention.

Recommendations

Modules on self-leadership, self-regulation, and goal setting may be incorporated into first year general courses in order to assist students in developing independent learning and coping strategies early in their academic endeavors. Workshops, seminars, and counseling services may

be set up in order to focus on stress management, time management, and self-motivation to reduce academic burnout. Interactive, problem-based, and collaborative learning approaches may be incorporated in order to keep students interested, dedicated, and absorbed in coursework. Researchers may conduct research over long time periods to monitor changes in self-leadership, engagement and burnout over academic years. This would help in the determination of causal relationships and long-term trends.

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From Self-Leadership to Well-Being: Understanding Student Engagement and Burnout in Universities

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Abstract

The problem of burnout in university students has become a matter of concern because academic stress and psychosocial problems often affect their health and success in studies. This paper aims to explore the link between self-leadership, burnout, and student engagement, where student engagement mediates the aforementioned connections. It also evaluates the impact of self-leadership and engagement on burnout reduction and examines the mediating effect of engagement on the association between self-leadership and burnout. The data collected was in the form of a cross-sectional survey design that sampled 300 students in three faculties of the University of Sargodha. Data collection was done using the Revised Self-Leadership Questionnaire, Utrecht Work Engagement Scale-student version, and Maslach Burnout Inventory-Student Survey. SPSS was used to conduct data analysis using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and regression analysis, and mediation analysis using Process Macro. The findings showed that students had reported moderate self-leadership, engagement, and burnout levels. The results showed that the increased self-leadership had a strong connection with the increased engagement and reduced burnout. Besides, heightened interaction is associated with decreased burnout. Regression models showed that self-leadership was a strong predictor of burnout and engagement. The predicting factor of burnout was also engagement itself, where the greater the engagement, the lower the burnout levels. Nonetheless, mediation analysis reveals that whereas self-leadership has a direct negative impact on burnout and consequential positive impact on engagement, engagement has no significant mediation effect between self-leadership and burnout. The results can be used by higher education institutions to implement interventions that can promote self-leadership among students and enhance engagement as protective measures in burnout reduction.

Keywords: self-leadership, burnout, student engagement, higher education

Introduction

Students attending colleges are normally subjected to academic, social, and personal related problems, and these problems add to the stress and burnout. The psychological syndrome that is described as burnout, post-academic stress after a prolonged duration, is classified into three major dimensions that comprise emotional exhaustion, lessened academic effectiveness, and cynicism (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Emotional exhaustion is the sense of being tired because of academic pressure that influences coping capability. Cynicism is manifested in the form of not working in an academic field, which in most cases comes with frustration, a sense of meaninglessness, or demotivation. Poor academic efficacy entails the absence of self-confidence and achievement in academics.

Over the past several years, burnout among students at the university has resulted in a colorful topic in the sphere of higher learning that influences academic performance, mental condition, and health. The reasons for student burnout are usually caused by long-term academic stress and heavy workloads, the ineffective coping mechanisms (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Although a lot of literature has been devoted to external causes of burnout, greater attention has been paid to internal, self-regulatory processes that could reduce the effects of burnout. One of such capacities is self-leadership (SL), and it is the process

that entails people affecting and controlling their actions, thoughts, and feelings to bring out the desired results (Manz, 1986; Houghton and Neck, 2002).

Burnout is an extreme problem, particularly⁴³ for university students. One of the possible mechanisms that can be employed against burnout is self-leadership, and this is a self-regulatory process in which individuals assume control over themselves and shape them to meet some goals (Neck and Houghton, 2006). SL entails not only behavioral strategies, such as the setting of goals and self-observation, but also cognitive strategies, such as developing positive thinking styles, which cumulatively increase students' capacity to overcome academic stresses and minimize stress. The construct is then referred to as a way that the individuals influence and motivate themselves in a positive manner towards realizing personal and professional aspirations and other aspects that include ownership of cognitions, behavior, and outcomes. The advantages of being an active self-leader include such qualities as improved emotion regulation, a rise in motivation levels, and burnout resistance in students.

Empirical support also indicates that self-leadership equips students with the instruments (setting goals, positive self-talk, and self-rewards) that make them sail through the academic pressures more effectively. Self-leadership also makes a person resistant to burnout and more engaged. The concept of engagement is multidimensional and involves: vigor, dedication, and good interest in learning activities (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2003). Engagement is a familiar preventive aspect of burnout and is a constructive mental condition, which involves the students with active energy and concentration in significant academic tasks.

Another predictor of burnout is student engagement, and this refers to cognitive, affective, and behavioral interactions in academics (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2003). Engagement involves practicing a physical involvement in the curricular, social, and extracurricular spheres and is strongly known to be an integral part and parcel of academic achievement and individual growth, depending on the amount of attention, interest, optimism, and passion manifested during the learning process. Engaged students care, have interests, and dedication to their work, and therefore defend themselves against the degrading effects of academic stress. The high rates of engagement are always associated with high academic performance, high well-being, and decreased burnout rate.

The present paper determines¹² the mediation of student engagement¹³ in the relationship between self-leadership and burnout. To sum up, the hypothesis is as follows: the high level of self-leadership correlates with the high level of academic activity that, in its turn, changes the burnout level. The more precise approximation, like the mediation effect, will help elucidate why universities can inculcate self-leadership and engagement behaviors that contribute to the well-being and academic success of students. In theory, self-leadership may be used to enhance participation by ensuring proactive learning behaviors, thereby shielding against emotional exhaustion and disengagement. The empirical validation of this mediation process, therefore, gives viable information on what can be done by the institutions to come up with interventions that would facilitate the self-management capacity and resilience of the students.

The present study, in its turn, addresses⁴⁶ the impact of self-leadership on burnout among university students, and the mediating variable, which is the current focus of the given study, is student engagement. The literature review gathered in the given study synthesizes the research on burnout, which is why it becomes theoretically and practically informative in relation to the guarantee of the well-being and academic performance of the students. The main concern of the study is to examine the relationship between self-leadership¹³, student engagement, and burnout among university students. Particularly, the paper will assess the effect of self-leadership on burnout, discuss how student engagement can mitigate burnout, and find out whether student engagement can mediate the relationship.

Statement of the Problem

University students bring with them multiple academic, psychological, and social problems that put them at a high risk of burnout. Apart from its ⁶¹ effect on students' academic performance, burnout also harms their general well-being. At the same time, the concept of self-leadership has become a major personal resource, empowering students with skills of self-regulation and positive thinking patterns to deal with stress and to keep them engaged. Similarly, student engagement is identified as an important buffer of burnout. However, although previous studies have ⁵³ individually investigated the relationships between these three variables, there is currently insufficient ⁵³ empirical evidence for the interaction between self-leadership, engagement, and burnout among university students.

Understanding the ³⁷ direct and indirect effects of self-leadership on burnout and engagement is important for the development of interventions to increase resilience and academic motivation and reduce ⁶⁷ burnout among university students. Specifically, quantifying whether student engagement mediates the association between self-leadership and burnout can give ⁵⁷ more insight into the mechanisms of how self-leadership helps against academic stress. This research addresses this gap by empirically examining the interplay of these constructs by providing both practical implications and theoretical contributions to the development of students.

Objectives

1. To measure the ¹³ relationship among self-leadership, engagement, and burnout among university students.
2. To assess the ⁵¹ effect of student engagement in reducing burnout in university students.
3. To measure the ⁴² effect of self-leadership on burnout in university students.
4. To investigate the mediation effect of student engagement in the relationship between self-leadership and burnout of university students.

Hypotheses

³ **H₀₁:** There is no significant correlation among self-leadership, burnout, and engagement of university students.

³⁰ **H₀₂:** Self-leadership has no significant effect on student engagement.

H₀₃: Self-leadership has no significant effect on burnout among university students.

H₀₄: Student engagement has no significant effect on burnout among university students.

⁴¹ **H₀₅:** Student engagement does not mediate the relationship between self-leadership and burnout.

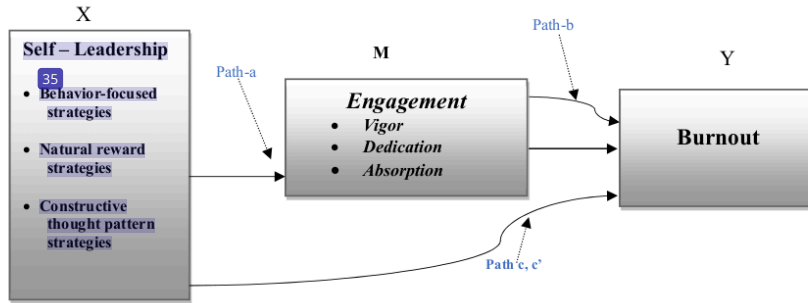
Conceptual Framework

Based on self-leadership theory, self-regulation frameworks, engagement, and burnout literature, the plausible causal chain is as follows:

Self-Leadership - Student Engagement (vigor, dedication, absorption) - Lower levels of burnout (tiredness, cynicism, lowered efficacy).

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework of the Study



Total Effect of X on Y Path $c = c' + ab$
Direct effect (unmediated) Path $c' = c - ab$
Indirect effect (mediated) Path $ab = c - c'$

Design

This study was of quantitative cross-sectional survey design. The quantitative approach is the possibility of statistical examination of the hypothesized relationships between variables, that is, self-leadership, student engagement, and burnout.

Population and Sample

The target population includes the undergraduate and graduate students from different departments of the University of Sargodha. This population was chosen because students are susceptible to academic burnout and stress, and could be the appropriate population to investigate the effects that self-leadership and engagement have on academic burnout. In the present study, stratified random sampling was carried out to ensure representation from the different academic units, namely the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, the Faculty of Science, and the Faculty of Social Sciences. The number of participants identified was 300, which is sufficient for making reliable statistical inferences.

Research Instrument

A structured questionnaire with standardized and validated scales was used for the data collection. This research has been carried out using the Revised Self-Leadership Questionnaire (RSLQ) (Houghton & Neck, 2002), which is used to ascertain the construct of self-leadership. Utrecht Work Engagement Scale-student version (Schaufeli et al., 2002) was used to assess the level of students' engagement. The tool is based on three dimensions, i.e., vigor, dedication, and absorption. The study has also utilized the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Student Survey (MBI-SS) to organize cynicism, emotional exhaustion, and lowered academic efficacy in a group of university students (Maslach & Jackson, 1981).

Validation of Research Instrument

Questionnaires were administered to 40 undergraduate and graduate-level students for a pilot study. The purposes of pilot testing were to establish face and content validity of instruments as well as reliability of scales using the Cronbach alpha coefficient (α). The results showed the internal consistency of the three questionnaires was highly acceptable (see Table 1). To ensure the appropriateness, accuracy, and relevance of the research tools, content validity was achieved through expert opinion. A panel of four professors in the Institute of Education was used to test the questionnaire for the evaluation of each item using a 4-point scale (where 1 = Not relevant, 4 = Highly relevant). Based on their ratings, the tools were simplified to cover the complicated wording of some items. The Ethical Review Board (ERB) of University of Sargodha gave ethical approval of the study.

Results

Data analysis was performed with the help of SPSS. Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, regression analysis, and mediation analysis with Process Macro were the techniques for analysis.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables

Variables	N	Mean	SD	α	Skewness	Kurtosis
Engagement	297	3.46	0.71	.772	-.858	-.006
Burnout	297	3.24	0.78	.851	-.681	-.615
Self-Leadership	297	3.41	0.64	.777	-.938	.550

In Table 1, the descriptive statistics of engagement, burnout, and self-leadership are presented. The mean engagement score for the 297 students was 3.46 (SD = 0.71). Distribution was slightly skewed to the left (skewness = -0.858) and roughly normal (kurtosis = -0.006). Burnout had a mean of 3.24 (SD = 0.78) with a slight positive skew (skewness = 0.609) and a flatter than normal distribution (kurtosis = -0.615). Self-leadership was found to have a mean = 3.41 (SD = 0.64) with a small positive skew (skewness = 0.409) and moderate kurtosis (0.550). Overall, the descriptive statistics are a summary of the central tendencies and the distributional characteristics of the study variables.

Table 2

Item Analysis for University Students' Engagement

Statements	SD %	D %	U %	A %	SA %	Mean	SD	Interpretation
I feel bursting with energy while doing my work as a student.	3.0	13.8	27.9	38.4	16.8	3.52	1.02	High
I feel capable and energetic when I study or go to class.	2.0	15.8	25.6	41.8	14.8	3.52	0.99	High
I am passionate about my studies.	2.7	16.5	26.6	33.3	20.9	3.53	1.08	High
Good studies inspire me a lot.	2.0	14.8	23.2	39.4	20.5	3.62	1.03	High
I feel like going to class when I start my day.	2.7	18.2	39.7	28.6	10.8	3.27	0.97	Moderate
I feel happy when I am learning deeply.	2.7	19.5	19.9	40.4	17.5	3.42	1.08	Moderate
I feel proud of my studies.	3.0	11.8	22.9	39.4	22.9	3.67	1.05	High
I am deeply involved in my studies.	1.3	12.5	41.8	34.0	10.4	3.40	0.88	Moderate
I get carried away when I am involved in studying.	3.7	9.8	33.3	38.7	14.5	3.51	0.98	High

Note: 1.00 to 1.80 (very low level); 1.80 to 2.61 (low level); 2.61 to 3.42 (moderate level); 3.43 to 4.23 (high level); and 4.23 to 5.00 (very high level) (Alkharusi, 2022).

Item-level descriptive statistics of student engagement are shown in Table 2. Mean scores were 3.27 to 3.67 with an SD of 0.88 to 1.08, indicating overall moderate engagement. For example, students were proud of their studies ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 1.05$) and inspired by their academic work ($M = 3.62$, $SD = 1.03$), which is, moderately high engagement. In contrast, lower mean scores were found for items such as motivation to come to class in the morning ($M = 3.27$, $SD = 0.97$). Overall, these results suggest students experience moderate to high levels of energy, enthusiasm, and involvement in their studies (but with variation among specific items when it comes to engagement).

Table 3

Item Analysis for Burnout of University Students

Statements	SD %	D %	U %	A %	SA %	Mean	SD	Interpretation
7 I feel mentally exhausted.	0.0	1.3	64.6	27.9	6.1	3.39	0.62	Moderate
11 Everything I do needs a great deal of effort.	0.0	1.0	46.1	52.2	0.7	3.53	0.53	High
19 At the end of the day, I find it hard to recover my energy.	0.0	1.7	26.9	65.3	6.1	3.76	0.58	High
11 I lack the energy to start a new day in the morning.	0.0	2.4	19.5	60.9	17.2	3.93	0.68	High
I want to be active; however, I am unable to manage.	0.0	3.7	38.7	50.8	6.7	3.61	0.67	High
44 I quickly feel tired when I exert myself.	0.0	1.3	49.8	45.1	3.7	3.51	0.59	High
I feel mentally exhausted and drained at the end of my day.	0.0	1.3	25.6	64.0	9.1	3.81	0.60	High
47 I struggle to find any interest in my research work.	0.0	0.7	14.8	25.6	49.8	3.52	0.88	High
7 I feel hatred towards my task.	1.3	13.8	44.1	36.7	4.0	3.28	0.80	Moderate
I feel indifferent about my assignments.	0.0	16.8	36.7	38.7	7.7	3.37	0.85	Moderate
I'm pessimistic about what my work means to others.	0.0	8.4	41.4	42.4	7.7	3.49	0.76	High
I have trouble remaining focused.	2.0	17.2	26.6	40.4	13.8	3.43	1.00	Moderate
I have trouble thinking clearly.	0.7	8.8	52.5	34.0	4.0	3.32	0.72	Moderate
I forget and am distracted.	0.7	7.4	35.0	43.8	13.1	3.61	0.83	High
I struggle to concentrate.	0.7	14.5	33.3	40.4	11.1	3.47	0.90	Moderate
I make mistakes because I think about other things.	1.7	25.6	25.9	41.4	5.4	3.23	0.95	Moderate
15 I can't control my emotions.	0.0	22.6	35.0	37.7	4.7	3.25	0.86	Moderate
I don't recognize myself, the way I react emotionally.	1.0	19.5	63.3	12.1	4.0	2.99	0.72	Moderate
I become irritable when things don't go as I think.	1.0	10.8	35.4	31.0	21.9	3.62	0.98	High
I get upset without knowing why.	3.7	24.2	32.7	29.0	10.4	3.18	1.03	Moderate
I overreact unintentionally.	3.0	7.1	30.3	35.4	24.2	3.71	1.01	High

Table 3 displays the results of the descriptive statistics of the items related to burnout among university students. Mean scores over the items were between 2.99 and 3.93, with SDs between 0.53 and 1.03, corresponding to generally moderate to high levels of burnout. For example, students indicated they had a hard time recovering energy at the end of the day ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 0.58$) and having energy in the morning ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 0.68$), both indicating high levels of burnout. Similarly, fatigue and tiredness of mind at the end of the day also earned a relatively high mean ($M = 3.81$, $SD = 0.60$). By contrast, lower scores were found for things like not recognizing yourself in emotional reactions ($M = 2.99$, $SD = 0.72$), which suggests burnout was less strongly endorsed in this dimension. Overall, the results indicate that

burnout is typically moderate to high for students, and especially intense in areas associated with fatigue and energy depletion.

Table 4.
Item Analysis for Self-Leadership of University Students

Statements	SD %	D %	U %	A %	SA %	Mean	SD	Interpretation
I create specific goals for my performance.	0	8.4	39.1	37.7	14.8	3.59	0.84	High
I keep track of how well I am doing at work.	0	7.7	23.2	45.1	23.9	3.85	0.87	High
I work toward specific goals I set for myself.	2.4	14.1	35.4	31.0	17.2	3.43	1.01	Moderate
I visualize myself performing a task successfully before I start it.	2.7	18.9	19.2	45.1	14.1	3.49	1.04	High
I picture a successful performance in my mind before I do it.	2.4	9.1	42.1	32.7	13.8	3.46	0.92	High
When I complete a task, I reward myself with something special.	2.4	14.8	31.3	34.7	16.8	3.49	1.01	High
Sometimes I talk to myself out loud to work through problematic situations.	2.7	10.4	41.8	35.0	10.1	3.39	0.90	Moderate
I try to evaluate the accuracy of my beliefs about the problematic situations.	3.4	13.1	32.0	33.7	17.8	3.42	1.04	Moderate
I evaluate my own beliefs and assumptions when I face a difficult situation.	2.0	14.1	30.0	36.7	17.2	3.53	1.00	High

Table 4 presents item-level descriptive statistics for self-leadership in university students. Mean scores were 3.39 to 3.85 with SD scores between 0.84 and 1.04, which indicated students generally reported moderate to high levels of self-leadership. For example, students reported that they make a point of keeping track of their performance ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 0.87$), which is a relatively higher level of self-regulation. In contrast, lower scores were found for items such as talking to oneself in difficult situations ($M = 3.39$, $SD = 0.90$), that is, more moderate endorsement. Other items, such as setting personal goals ($M = 3.59$, $SD = 0.84$) and assessing personal beliefs in problem situations ($M = 3.49$, $SD = 1.04$), also showed moderate levels of agreement. Overall, these findings indicate that while students exhibit some effective self-leadership strategies, their use is still at a moderately higher level.

Table 5
Pearson Correlation for Self-Leadership, Burnout, and Engagement of University Students

SN	Variables	Engagement	Burnout	Self-Leadership
1	Engagement	1	-.235**	.765**
2	Burnout	-.296**	1	-.312**
3	Self-Leadership	.765**	-.312**	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 5 discusses the Pearson correlations between self-leadership, burnout, and engagement in university students. Engagement was negatively related to burnout, $r(297) = -.24$, $p < .01$, suggesting that students who had more engagement reported less burnout. Self-leadership was found to be highly positively related with engagement, $r(297) = .77$, $p < .01$, indicating that self-leadership and engagement have a positive correlation such that the higher the self-leadership, the higher the perceived engagement.

In addition, self-leadership also has a negative correlation with burnout, $r(297) = -.31, p < .01$, showing that students with higher levels of self-leadership had lower levels of burnout. Overall, these results point to the high level of interrelationships between the three constructs.

Table 6

Regression Coefficients of Self-leadership on Burnout of University Students

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig	R ²
(Constant)	4.536	.234		19.391	.000	.097
Self-Leadership	-.381	.068	-.312	-5.642	.000	

a. Dependent Variable: Burnout

Table 6 presents the regression findings on the influence of self-leadership on the occurrence of burnout among the university students. The results of the analysis showed that there was a significant negative association between self-leadership and burnout, $B = -0.38, SE = 0.07, b = -.31, t(295) = -5.64, p < .001$. This result suggests that the higher the level of self-leadership in students, the lower their level of burnout, with 1 unit increase in the self-leadership of students being associated with a decrease in the level of burnout by 0.38 units. This model explained about 9.7% of the variance in burnout ($R^2 = .097$), which indicates that while self-leadership does play an important role in reducing burnout, there are other factors that contribute to the overall experiences of burnout among students.

Table 7

Regression Coefficients for Effects of Self-Leadership on Engagement of University Students

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig	R ²
(Constant)	.555	.145		3.835	.000	.586
Self-Leadership	.853	.042	.765	20.426	.000	

a. Dependent Variable: Engagement

The results showed that self-leadership was a significant predictor of engagement and was positive, $B = 0.85, SE = 0.04, b = .77, t(295) = 20.43, p < .001$. This suggests that for every one unit increase in self-leadership, engagement has increased 0.85 units, and it would appear there is a significant and direct relationship between these variables. The model accounted for about 58.6% of the variance in engagement ($R^2 = .59$), which shows that self-leadership is a significant determinant of student engagement.

Table 8

Regression Coefficients for Effects of Engagement on Burnout of University Students

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig	R ²
(Constant)	4.130	.219		18.863	.000	.055
Engagement	-.257	.062	-.235	-4.153	.000	

a. Dependent Variable: Burnout

The results suggested that engagement was a significant negative predictor of burnout, $B = -0.26, SE = 0.06, b = -.24, t(295) = -4.15, p < .001$. This finding indicates that higher levels of engagement are associated with lower levels of burnout so that a one-unit increase in engagement was associated with a 0.26-unit reduction in burnout scores. The model accounted for 5.5% of the variance in burnout ($R^2 = .06$) indicating that although engagement is a significant factor in reducing burnout, most of the variance can likely be explained by other variables that were not included in the model.

Table 9

Indirect Effects of Engagement on the Relationship Between Self-Leadership and Burnout Calculated Through Process Macro Bootstrapping Method

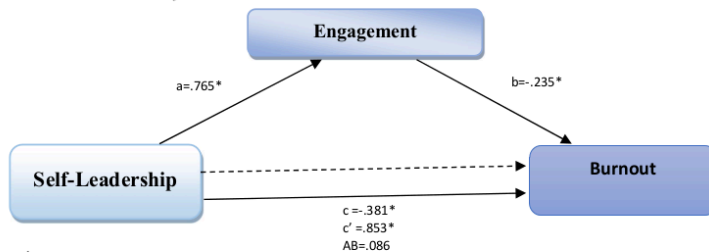
Paths	Effects	SE	t	95%CI L.L., U.L.	P
Direct Effects (c')					
Sflead → Burt	-.389	.11	-3.707	[-.5963, -.1827]	.003
Sflead → Engt	.853	.042	20.43	[.7705, .9348]	.000
Indirect Effects (ab)					
Sflead → Engt → Burt	.086	.08		[-.1563, .1684]	NS
Total Effects (c)					
Sflead → Burt + Sflead → Engt → Burt	-.381	.067	-5.64	[-.5138, -.2480]	.000

Note: Sflead= Self-Leadership; Burt= Burnout; Engt=Engagement.

Table 9 presents the mediation analysis testing the indirect effect of engagement on the relationship between self-leadership and burnout, using the PROCESS macro with bootstrapping. The direct effect of self-leadership on burnout was significant, $B = -0.39$, $SE = 0.11$, $t(295) = -3.71$, 95% CI [-0.62, -0.18], $p = .003$, indicating that higher self-leadership predicted lower burnout. Self-leadership also significantly predicted engagement, $B = 0.85$, $SE = 0.04$, $t(295) = 20.43$, 95% CI [0.77, 0.93], $p < .001$. However, the indirect effect of self-leadership on burnout through engagement was not significant, $B = 0.09$, $SE = 0.08$, 95% CI [-0.16, 0.17], $n.s.$ The total effect of self-leadership on burnout remained significant, $B = -0.38$, $SE = 0.07$, $t(295) = -5.64$, 95% CI [-0.51, -0.25], $p < .001$. These results suggest that while self-leadership directly reduces burnout, engagement does not mediate this relationship.

Figure 2

Direct and Indirect Paths of Mediation Model



Discussion

The results of the descriptive statistics show that the students in university have a moderate to high degree of engagement, burnout, and self-leadership, with results of the mean around or over the midpoint of the scale. The engagement scores indicate that students overall feel somewhat energized in their work. At the same time, some level of stress or exhaustion is also indicated by moderately high burnout levels. These results coincide with previous studies, which found moderate levels of these variables in university students and highlight the role of self-leadership in engagement and burnout. Moderate to high scores on the burnout measure indicate high but not critical burnout, consistent with recent surveys (Goh et al., 2024). These results are in line with recent trends around the world, where it was reported that there has been a growing prevalence of academic burnout stemming from academic pressures in addition to financial stress. These results suggest that mental fatigue and fast exhaustion were

not negligible issues, as would be consistent with the dimension of burnout (emotional exhaustion, cynicism, depleted efficacy) according to Maslach & Leiter (2016). Parker et al. (2023) conducted a study in more than 73 countries worldwide and concluded that more than 60% of university students experienced moderate to high levels of burnout, and exhaustion was the most common symptom of burnout. Perfectionism and fear of failure were the connections between academic burnout and Garcia et al. (2024), who found that academic burnout was associated with perfectionism and fear of failure, especially in competitive programs (medicine, engineering).

It was found that university students demonstrate moderate to high levels on the self-leadership scale, especially in cognitive strategies, such as belief evaluation and self-talk. These results are consistent with the emerging literature in self-regulation in academic environments but also indicate gaps in the proactive self-management of students. These results indicate that students use basic strategies of self-leadership but are inconsistent or advanced in their use, supporting the findings of Neck et al. (2023), that self-leadership skills are underdeveloped at early adulthood. Wunsch et al., (2023) found that positive self talk is beneficial to academic resilience but only 38% of students use it regularly when faced with stress. Hwan et al. (2025) showed that students who have a habit of questioning assumptions have a higher GPA. A recent study by Marques-Quinteiro et al. (2022) found that only 29% of students regularly set weekly academic goals, which denotes weak adoption of action-oriented strategies.

The results show a significant negative relationship between engagement and burnout, implying that the higher the engagement, the lower the burnout in university students. The negative correlation between engagement and burnout is consistent with current work in occupational health psychology. Engaged employees defined by absorption, dedication, and vigor (Schaufeli, 2021) experience less burnout due to their positive work effect and resilience. In a meta-analysis by Lesener et al in 2023, engagement was confirmed as a shield against burnout, especially in high-stress professions. Findings of a meta-analysis of 62 studies exposed that engagement always decreases the risk of burnout, at least in the academic setting with a high level of stress (Lesener et al., 2023). Goh et al. (2024) found that there was 34% less emotional exhaustion experienced by students who are engaged because of greater focus on their tasks and resilience.

A strong positive correlation between Self-Leadership and Engagement was found, which means that people with greater self-leadership (eg, self-regulation, goal-setting and proactive behaviour) are more likely to be engaged. This underlies the importance of self-directed strategies for motivation and commitment to work tasks. The strong positive relationship indicates that people who use the self-leadership strategies are more engaged. Marques-Quinteiro et al. (2022), self-leadership contributes to work engagement through the promotion of proactive behavior and psychological empowerment. The result showed that self-leadership was significantly negatively correlated to burnout, demonstrating that higher self-leadership is correlated with lower burnout, implying that self-leadership may operate as a buffer against burnout. This finding suggests that self-leadership helps individuals manage stress and prevent burnout. Van den Heuvel et al. (2024) found that people with strong self-leadership skill experienced lower levels of burnout as a result of better coping strategies (e.g. cognitive reframing, time management). Garcia et al. (2024) attributed self-leadership to the decrease of emotional exhaustion in the workplace, this is because it contributes to feeling control over the demands of work.

Self-leadership has a significant predictive relationship with lower levels of burnout in university students. This result coincides with the emerging literature on self-regulation and student well-being and identifies further areas for research. Self-leadership decreases moderately with the effect around the same level as in meta-analytic averages (Van den Heuvel et al., 2024). Garcia, A., Gunderson, L., Lin, X., Turner, L., Garvey, G., Chan, M., Forster, J. Gest. Change BI 13 (2) 1582-1604 DOI: 10.1159/ Page 1582 2024 Self-leadership moderates' emotional exhaustion among science, technology, engineering, and mathematics college learners: a mediational role of proactive coping. A strong, statistically significant effect of self-leadership on engagement of university students, with self-leadership explaining 58% of the

variance in engagement. This finding is consonant with and an extension of recent literature regarding self-regulation and academic motivation.

Findings indicate that engagement is not a significant mediator for self-leadership and burnout among university students. This finding raises some theoretical assumptions and is concordant with emerging studies on alternative pathways between self-leadership and burnout. While the JD-R model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2023) views engagement as a mediator between self-leadership and burnout, this study indicates that self-leadership may operate through other mechanisms. Van den Heuvel et al. (2024) have found self-leadership to reduce burnout, especially through stress reappraisal, in a sample of 10 universities. Garcia et al (2024) also found a non-significant engagement mediation on STEM students, with self-efficacy as a better mediator.

Conclusion

It was concluded that students generally reported moderate to high levels of self-leadership, engagement, and burnout, and that higher levels of self-leadership were strongly correlated with higher engagement and lower burnout. Further, the more engaged, the less likely you are to burn out. Regression analyses exhibited that self-leadership was a significant predictor for both burnout and engagement, and increased self-leadership was associated with reduced burnout and increased engagement. Engagement itself was also a significant predictor of burnout, as higher engagement correlated with lower burnout. However, the results of mediation analysis suggested that while self-leadership decreased burnout and increased engagement, engagement did not mediate significantly between self-leadership and burnout. The non-significant mediation role of engagement indicated that self-leadership reduced burnout independently of engagement in this study. Researchers should consider other psychological mechanisms and boundary conditions (e.g., stress levels, cultural factors) to refine theory and practice. Overall, the current study emphasizes the value of creating self-leadership among students, which can directly reduce burnout and increase engagement, although the mediating effect of engagement in this interplay seems limited in the current sample.

Implications for Practitioners

The findings of this study offer explicit direction for those working within the world of higher education, such as faculty, academic directors, student support officers, and university administrators. Student affairs and counseling units can create and administer training programs that teach students effective self-leadership skills, such as self-monitoring, goal setting, time management, and positive self-talk. These are skills that directly reduce burnout and increase engagement and can be incorporated into orientation programs. The faculty members could incorporate self-leadership concepts into coursework, especially when they are dealing with project-based learning, internships, or even capstone projects, where they can make independent decisions and are responsible for themselves.

Practitioners in student support can proactively address the prevention of burnout by teaching self-leadership skills before periods of high stress, such as examinations. Group coaching and peer-support programs can assist students in maintaining motivational drive and dealing with stress in a more effective manner. Through proactive development of self-leadership among students, practitioners can overcome burnout as a perceived and real mental health issue, as well as a preventive one. This approach is consistent with the study's finding that self-leadership directly reduces burnout and increases engagement, making it an area with a high impact for intervention.

Recommendations

Modules on self-leadership, self-regulation, and goal setting may be incorporated into first year general courses in order to assist students in developing independent learning and coping strategies early in their academic endeavors. Workshops, seminars, and counseling services may be set up in order to focus on stress management, time management, and self-motivation to reduce academic burnout.

Interactive, problem-based, and collaborative learning approaches may be incorporated in order to keep students interested, dedicated, and absorbed in coursework. Researchers may conduct research over long time periods to monitor changes in self-leadership, engagement and burnout over academic years. This would help in the determination of causal relationships and long-term trends.

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From Self-Leadership to Well-Being: Understanding Student Engagement and Burnout in Universities

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Abstract

The problem of burnout in university students has become a matter of concern because academic stress and psychosocial problems often affect their health and success in studies. This paper aims to explore the link between self-leadership, burnout, and student engagement, where student engagement mediates the aforementioned connections. It also evaluates the impact of self-leadership and engagement on burnout reduction and examines the mediating effect of engagement on the association between self-leadership and burnout. The data collected was in the form of a cross-sectional survey design that sampled 300 students in three faculties of the University of Sargodha. Data collection was done using the Revised Self-Leadership Questionnaire, Utrecht Work Engagement Scale-student version, and Maslach Burnout Inventory-Student Survey. SPSS was used to conduct data analysis using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and regression analysis, and mediation analysis using Process Macro. The findings showed that students had reported moderate self-leadership, engagement, and burnout levels. The results showed that the increased self-leadership had a strong connection with the increased engagement and reduced burnout. Besides, heightened interaction is associated with decreased burnout. Regression models showed that self-leadership was a strong predictor of burnout and engagement. The predicting factor of burnout was also engagement itself, where the greater the engagement, the lower the burnout levels. Nonetheless, mediation analysis reveals that whereas self-leadership has a direct negative impact on burnout and consequential positive impact on engagement, engagement has no significant mediation effect between self-leadership and burnout. The results can be used by higher education institutions to implement interventions that can promote self-leadership among students and enhance engagement as protective measures in burnout reduction.

Keywords: self-leadership, burnout, student engagement, higher education

Introduction

Students attending colleges are normally subjected to academic, social, and personal related problems, and these problems add to the stress and burnout. The psychological syndrome that is described as burnout, post-academic stress after a prolonged duration, is classified into three major dimensions that comprise emotional exhaustion, lessened academic effectiveness, and cynicism (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Emotional exhaustion is the sense of being tired because of academic pressure that influences coping capability. Cynicism is manifested in the form of not working in an academic field, which in most cases comes with frustration, a sense of meaninglessness, or demotivation. Poor academic efficacy entails the absence of self-confidence and achievement in academics.

Over the past several years, burnout among students at the university has resulted in a colorful topic in the sphere of higher learning that influences academic performance, mental condition, and health. The reasons for student burnout are usually caused by long-term academic stress and heavy workloads, the ineffective coping mechanisms (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Although a lot of literature has been devoted to external causes of burnout, greater attention has been paid to internal, self-regulatory processes that could reduce the effects of burnout. One of such capacities is self-leadership (SL), and it is the process

that entails people affecting and controlling their actions, thoughts, and feelings to bring out the desired results (Manz, 1986; Houghton and Neck, 2002).

Burnout is an extreme problem, particularly for university students. One of the possible mechanisms that can be employed against burnout is self-leadership, and this is a self-regulatory process in which individuals assume control over themselves and shape them to meet some goals (Neck and Houghton, 2006). SL entails not only behavioral strategies, such as the setting of goals and self-observation, but also cognitive strategies, such as developing positive thinking styles, which cumulatively increase students' capacity to overcome academic stresses and minimize stress. The construct is then referred to as a way that the individuals influence and motivate themselves in a positive manner towards realizing personal and professional aspirations and other aspects that include ownership of cognitions, behavior, and outcomes. The advantages of being an active self-leader include such qualities as improved emotion regulation, a rise in motivation levels, and burnout resistance in students.

Empirical support also indicates that self-leadership equips students with the instruments (setting goals, positive self-talk, and self-rewards) that make them sail through the academic pressures more effectively. Self-leadership also makes a person resistant to burnout and more engaged. The concept of engagement is multidimensional and involves: vigor, dedication, and good interest in learning activities (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2003). Engagement is a familiar preventive aspect of burnout and is a constructive mental condition, which involves the students with active energy and concentration in significant academic tasks.

Another predictor of burnout is student engagement, and this refers to cognitive, affective, and behavioral interactions in academics (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2003). Engagement involves practicing a physical involvement in the curricular, social, and extracurricular spheres and is strongly known to be an integral part and parcel of academic achievement and individual growth, depending on the amount of attention, interest, optimism, and passion manifested during the learning process. Engaged students care, have interests, and dedication to their work, and therefore defend themselves against the degrading effects of academic stress. The high rates of engagement are always associated with high academic performance, high well-being, and decreased burnout rate.

The present paper determines the mediation of student engagement in the relationship between self-leadership and burnout. To sum up, the hypothesis is as follows: the high level of self-leadership correlates with the high level of academic activity that, in its turn, changes the burnout level. The more precise approximation, like the mediation effect, will help elucidate why universities can inculcate self-leadership and engagement behaviors that contribute to the well-being and academic success of students. In theory, self-leadership may be used to enhance participation by ensuring proactive learning behaviors, thereby shielding against emotional exhaustion and disengagement. The empirical validation of this mediation process, therefore, gives viable information on what can be done by the institutions to come up with interventions that would facilitate the self-management capacity and resilience of the students.

The present study, in its turn, addresses the impact of self-leadership on burnout among university students, and the mediating variable, which is the current focus of the given study, is student engagement. The literature review gathered in the given study synthesizes the research on burnout, which is why it becomes theoretically and practically informative in relation to the guarantee of the well-being and academic performance of the students. The main concern of the study is to examine the relationship between self-leadership, student engagement, and burnout among university students. Particularly, the paper will assess the effect of self-leadership on burnout, discuss how student engagement can mitigate burnout, and find out whether student engagement can mediate the relationship.

Statement of the Problem

University students bring with them multiple academic, psychological, and social problems that put them at a high risk of burnout. Apart from its effect on students' academic performance, burnout also harms their general well-being. At the same time, the concept of self-leadership has become a major personal resource, empowering students with skills of self-regulation and positive thinking patterns to deal with stress and to keep them engaged. Similarly, student engagement is identified as an important buffer of burnout. However, although previous studies have individually investigated the relationships between these three variables, there is currently insufficient empirical evidence for the interaction between self-leadership, engagement, and burnout among university students.

Understanding the direct and indirect effects of self-leadership on burnout and engagement is important for the development of interventions to increase resilience and academic motivation and reduce burnout among university students. Specifically, quantifying whether student engagement mediates the association between self-leadership and burnout can give more insight into the mechanisms of how self-leadership helps against academic stress. This research addresses this gap by empirically examining the interplay of these constructs by providing both practical implications and theoretical contributions to the development of students.

Objectives

1. To measure the relationship among self-leadership, engagement, and burnout among university students.
2. To assess the effect of student engagement in reducing burnout in university students.
3. To measure the effect of self-leadership on burnout in university students.
4. To investigate the mediation effect of student engagement in the relationship between self-leadership and burnout of university students.

Hypotheses

H₀₁: There is no significant correlation among self-leadership, burnout, and engagement of university students.

H₀₂: Self-leadership has no significant effect on student engagement.

H₀₃: Self-leadership has no significant effect on burnout among university students.

H₀₄: Student engagement has no significant effect on burnout among university students.

H₀₅: Student engagement does not mediate the relationship between self-leadership and burnout.

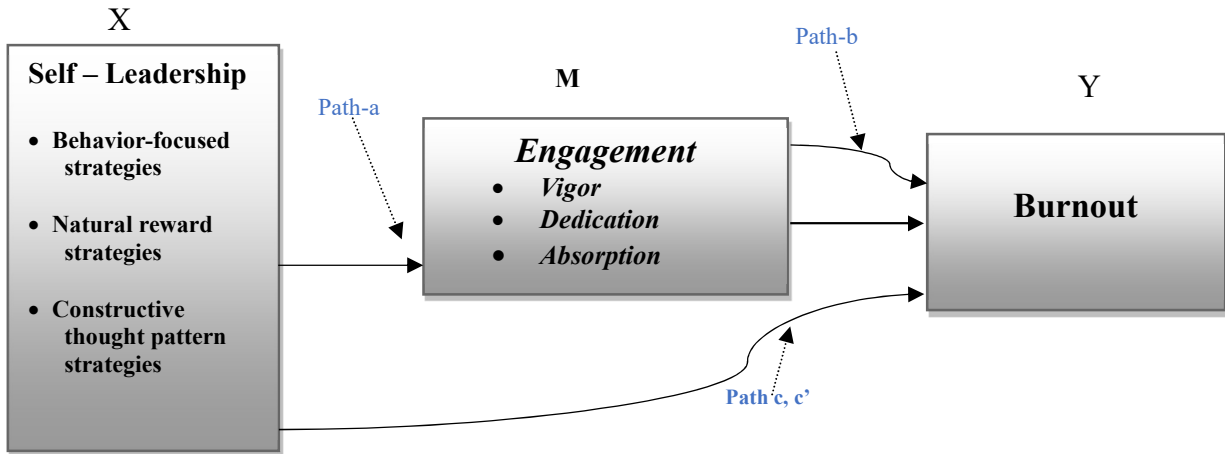
Conceptual Framework

Based on self-leadership theory, self-regulation frameworks, engagement, and burnout literature, the plausible causal chain is as follows:

Self-Leadership -Student Engagement (vigor, dedication, absorption) - Lower levels of burnout (tiredness, cynicism, lowered efficacy).

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework of the Study



Total Effect of X on Y Path $c = c' + ab$
Direct effect (unmediated) Path $c' = c - ab$
Indirect effect (mediated) Path $ab = c - c'$

Design

This study was of quantitative cross-sectional survey design. The quantitative approach is the possibility of statistical examination of the hypothesized relationships between variables, that is, self-leadership, student engagement, and burnout.

Population and Sample

The target population includes the undergraduate and graduate students from different departments of the University of Sargodha. This population was chosen because students are susceptible to academic burnout and stress, and could be the appropriate population to investigate the effects that self-leadership and engagement have on academic burnout. In the present study, stratified random sampling was carried out to ensure representation from the different academic units, namely the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, the Faculty of Science, and the Faculty of Social Sciences. The number of participants identified was 300, which is sufficient for making reliable statistical inferences.

Research Instrument

A structured questionnaire with standardized and validated scales was used for the data collection. This research has been carried out using the Revised Self-Leadership Questionnaire (RSLQ) (Houghton & Neck, 2002), which is used to ascertain the construct of self-leadership. Utrecht Work Engagement Scale-student version (Schaufeli et al., 2002) was used to assess the level of students' engagement. The tool is based on three dimensions, i.e., vigor, dedication, and absorption. The study has also utilized the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Student Survey (MBI-SS) to organize cynicism, emotional exhaustion, and lowered academic efficacy in a group of university students (Maslach & Jackson, 1981).

Validation of Research Instrument

Questionnaires were administered to 40 undergraduate and graduate-level students for a pilot study. The purposes of pilot testing were to establish face and content validity of instruments as well as reliability of scales using the Cronbach alpha coefficient (α). The results showed the internal consistency of the three questionnaires was highly acceptable (see Table 1). To ensure the appropriateness, accuracy, and relevance of the research tools, content validity was achieved through expert opinion. A panel of four professors in the Institute of Education was used to test the questionnaire for the evaluation of each item using a 4-point scale (where 1 = Not relevant, 4 = Highly relevant). Based on their ratings, the tools were simplified to cover the complicated wording of some items. The Ethical Review Board (ERB) of University of Sargodha gave ethical approval of the study.

Results

Data analysis was performed with the help of SPSS. Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, regression analysis, and mediation analysis with Process Macro were the techniques for analysis.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables

Variables	N	Mean	SD	α	Skewness	Kurtosis
Engagement	297	3.46	0.71	.772	-.858	-.006
Burnout	297	3.24	0.78	.851	-.681	-.615
Self-Leadership	297	3.41	0.64	.777	-.938	.550

In Table 1, the descriptive statistics of engagement, burnout, and self-leadership are presented. The mean engagement score for the 297 students was 3.46 (SD = 0.71). Distribution was slightly skewed to the left (skewness = -0.858) and roughly normal (kurtosis = -0.006). Burnout had a mean of 3.24 (SD = 0.78) with a slight positive skew (skewness = 0.609) and a flatter than normal distribution (kurtosis = -0.615). Self-leadership was found to have a mean = 3.41 (SD = 0.64) with a small positive skew (skewness = 0.409) and moderate kurtosis (0.550). Overall, the descriptive statistics are a summary of the central tendencies and the distributional characteristics of the study variables.

Table 2

Item Analysis for University Students' Engagement

Statements	SD %	D %	U%	A %	SA %	Mean	SD	Interpretation
I feel bursting with energy while doing my work as a student.	3.0	13.8	27.9	38.4	16.8	3.52	1.02	High
I feel capable and energetic when I study or go to class.	2.0	15.8	25.6	41.8	14.8	3.52	0.99	High
I am passionate about my studies.	2.7	16.5	26.6	33.3	20.9	3.53	1.08	High
My studies inspire me a lot.	2.0	14.8	23.2	39.4	20.5	3.62	1.03	High
I feel like going to class when I start my day.	2.7	18.2	39.7	28.6	10.8	3.27	0.97	Moderate
I feel happy when I am learning deeply.	2.7	19.5	19.9	40.4	17.5	3.42	1.08	Moderate
I feel proud of my studies.	3.0	11.8	22.9	39.4	22.9	3.67	1.05	High
I am deeply involved in my studies.	1.3	12.5	41.8	34.0	10.4	3.40	0.88	Moderate
I get carried away when I am involved in studying.	3.7	9.8	33.3	38.7	14.5	3.51	0.98	High

Note: 1.00 to 1.80 (very low level); 1.80 to 2.61 (low level); 2.61 to 3.42 (moderate level); 3.43 to 4.23 (high level); and 4.23 to 5.00 (very high level) (Alkharusi, 2022).

Item-level descriptive statistics of student engagement are shown in Table 2. Mean scores were 3.27 to 3.67 with an SD of 0.88 to 1.08, indicating overall moderate engagement. For example, students were proud of their studies ($M = 3.67, SD = 1.05$) and inspired by their academic work ($M = 3.62, SD = 1.03$), which is, moderately high engagement. In contrast, lower mean scores were found for items such as motivation to come to class in the morning ($M = 3.27, SD = 0.97$). Overall, these results suggest students experience moderate to high levels of energy, enthusiasm, and involvement in their studies (but with variation among specific items when it comes to engagement).

Table 3

Item Analysis for Burnout of University Students

Statements	SD %	D %	U%	A %	SA %	Mean	SD	Interpretation
I feel mentally exhausted.	0.0	1.3	64.6	27.9	6.1	3.39	0.62	Moderate
Everything I do needs a great deal of effort.	0.0	1.0	46.1	52.2	0.7	3.53	0.53	High
At the end of the day, I find it hard to recover my energy.	0.0	1.7	26.9	65.3	6.1	3.76	0.58	High
I lack the energy to start a new day in the morning.	0.0	2.4	19.5	60.9	17.2	3.93	0.68	High
I want to be active; however, I am unable to manage.	0.0	3.7	38.7	50.8	6.7	3.61	0.67	High
I quickly feel tired when I exert myself.	0.0	1.3	49.8	45.1	3.7	3.51	0.59	High
I feel mentally exhausted and drained at the end of my day.	0.0	1.3	25.6	64.0	9.1	3.81	0.60	High
I struggle to find any interest in my research work.	0.0	0.7	14.8	25.6	49.8	3.52	0.88	High
I feel hatred towards my task.	1.3	13.8	44.1	36.7	4.0	3.28	0.80	Moderate
I feel indifferent about my assignments.	0.0	16.8	36.7	38.7	7.7	3.37	0.85	Moderate
I'm pessimistic about what my work means to others.	0.0	8.4	41.4	42.4	7.7	3.49	0.76	High
I have trouble remaining focused.	2.0	17.2	26.6	40.4	13.8	3.43	1.00	Moderate
I have trouble thinking clearly.	0.7	8.8	52.5	34.0	4.0	3.32	0.72	Moderate
I forget and am distracted.	0.7	7.4	35.0	43.8	13.1	3.61	0.83	High
I struggle to concentrate.	0.7	14.5	33.3	40.4	11.1	3.47	0.90	Moderate
I make mistakes because I think about other things.	1.7	25.6	25.9	41.4	5.4	3.23	0.95	Moderate
I can't control my emotions.	0.0	22.6	35.0	37.7	4.7	3.25	0.86	Moderate
I don't recognize myself, the way I react emotionally.	1.0	19.5	63.3	12.1	4.0	2.99	0.72	Moderate
I become irritable when things don't go as I think.	1.0	10.8	35.4	31.0	21.9	3.62	0.98	High
I get upset without knowing why.	3.7	24.2	32.7	29.0	10.4	3.18	1.03	Moderate
I overreact unintentionally.	3.0	7.1	30.3	35.4	24.2	3.71	1.01	High

Table 3 displays the results of the descriptive statistics of the items related to burnout among university students. Mean scores over the items were between 2.99 and 3.93, with SDs between 0.53 and 1.03, corresponding to generally moderate to high levels of burnout. For example, students indicated they had a hard time recovering energy at the end of the day ($M = 3.76, SD = 0.58$) and having energy in the morning ($M = 3.93, SD = 0.68$), both indicating high levels of burnout. Similarly, fatigue and tiredness of mind at the end of the day also earned a relatively high mean ($M = 3.81, SD = 0.60$). By contrast, lower scores were found for things like not recognizing yourself in emotional reactions ($M = 2.99, SD = 0.72$), which suggests burnout was less strongly endorsed in this dimension. Overall, the results indicate that

burnout is typically moderate to high for students, and especially intense in areas associated with fatigue and energy depletion.

Table 4.

Item Analysis for Self-Leadership of University Students

Statements	SD %	D %	U %	A %	SA %	Mean	SD	Interpretation
I create specific goals for my performance.	0	8.4	39.1	37.7	14.8	3.59	0.84	High
I keep track of how well I am doing at work.	0	7.7	23.2	45.1	23.9	3.85	0.87	High
I work toward specific goals I set for myself.	2.4	14.1	35.4	31.0	17.2	3.43	1.01	Moderate
I visualize myself performing a task successfully before I start it.	2.7	18.9	19.2	45.1	14.1	3.49	1.04	High
I picture a successful performance in my mind before I do it.	2.4	9.1	42.1	32.7	13.8	3.46	0.92	High
When I complete a task, I reward myself with something special.	2.4	14.8	31.3	34.7	16.8	3.49	1.01	High
Sometimes I talk to myself out loud to work through problematic situations.	2.7	10.4	41.8	35.0	10.1	3.39	0.90	Moderate
I try to evaluate the accuracy of my beliefs about the problematic situations.	3.4	13.1	32.0	33.7	17.8	3.42	1.04	Moderate
I evaluate my own beliefs and assumptions when I face a difficult situation.	2.0	14.1	30.0	36.7	17.2	3.53	1.00	High

Table 4 presents item-level descriptive statistics for self-leadership in university students. Mean scores were 3.39 to 3.85 with SD scores between 0.84 and 1.04, which indicated students generally reported moderate to high levels of self-leadership. For example, students reported that they make a point of keeping track of their performance (M = 3.85, SD = 0.87), which is a relatively higher level of self-regulation. In contrast, lower scores were found for items such as talking to oneself in difficult situations (M = 3.39, SD = 0.90), that is, more moderate endorsement. Other items, such as setting personal goals (M = 3.59, SD = 0.84) and assessing personal beliefs in problem situations (M = 3.49, SD = 1.04), also showed moderate levels of agreement. Overall, these findings indicate that while students exhibit some effective self-leadership strategies, their use is still at a moderately higher level.

Table 5

Pearson Correlation for Self-Leadership, Burnout, and Engagement of University Students

SN	Variables	Engagement	Burnout	Self-Leadership
1	Engagement	1	-.235**	.765**
2	Burnout	-.235**	1	-.312**
3	Self-Leadership	.765**	-.312**	1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 5 discusses the Pearson correlations between self-leadership, burnout, and engagement in university students. Engagement was negatively related to burnout, $r(297) = -.24, p < .01$, suggesting that students who had more engagement reported less burnout. Self-leadership was found to be highly positively related with engagement, $r(297) = .77, p < .01$, indicating that self-leadership and engagement have a positive correlation such that the higher the self-leadership, the higher the perceived engagement.

In addition, self-leadership also has a negative correlation with burnout, $r(297) = -.31, p < .01$, showing that students with higher levels of self-leadership had lower levels of burnout. Overall, these results point to the high level of interrelationships between the three constructs.

Table 6

Regression Coefficients of Self-leadership on Burnout of University Students

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig	R ²
(Constant)	4.536	.234		19.391	.000	.097
Self-Leadership	-.381	.068	-.312	-5.642	.000	

a. Dependent Variable: Burnout

Table 6 presents the regression findings on the influence of self-leadership on the occurrence of burnout among the university students. The results of the analysis showed that there was a significant negative association between self-leadership and burnout, $B = -0.38, SE = 0.07, b = -.31, t(295) = -5.64, p < .001$. This result suggests that the higher the level of self-leadership in students, the lower their level of burnout, with 1 unit increase in the self-leadership of students being associated with a decrease in the level of burnout by 0.38 units. This model explained about 9.7% of the variance in burnout ($R^2 = .097$), which indicates that while self-leadership does play an important role in reducing burnout, there are other factors that contribute to the overall experiences of burnout among students.

Table 7

Regression Coefficients for Effects of Self-Leadership on Engagement of University Students

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig	R ²
(Constant)	.555	.145		3.835	.000	.586
Self-Leadership	.853	.042	.765	20.426	.000	

a. Dependent Variable: Engagement

The results showed that self-leadership was a significant predictor of engagement and was positive, $B = 0.85, SE = 0.04, b = .77, t(295) = 20.43, p < .001$. This suggests that for every one unit increase in self-leadership, engagement has increased by 0.85 units, and it would appear there is a significant and direct relationship between these variables. The model accounted for about 58.6% of the variance in engagement ($R^2 = .59$), which shows that self-leadership is a significant determinant of student engagement.

Table 8

Regression Coefficients for Effects of Engagement on Burnout of University Students

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig	R ²
(Constant)	4.130	.219		18.863	.000	.055
Engagement	-.257	.062	-.235	-4.153	.000	

a. Dependent Variable: Burnout

The results suggested that engagement was a significant negative predictor of burnout, $B = -0.26, SE = 0.06, b = -.24, t(295) = -4.15, p < .001$. This finding indicates that higher levels of engagement are associated with lower levels of burnout, so that a one-unit increase in engagement was associated with a 0.26-unit reduction in burnout scores. The model accounted for 5.5% of the variance in burnout ($R^2 = .06$) indicating that although engagement is a significant factor in reducing burnout, most of the variance can likely be explained by other variables that were not included in the model.

Table 9

Indirect Effects of Engagement on the Relationship Between Self-Leadership and Burnout Calculated Through Process Macro Bootstrapping Method

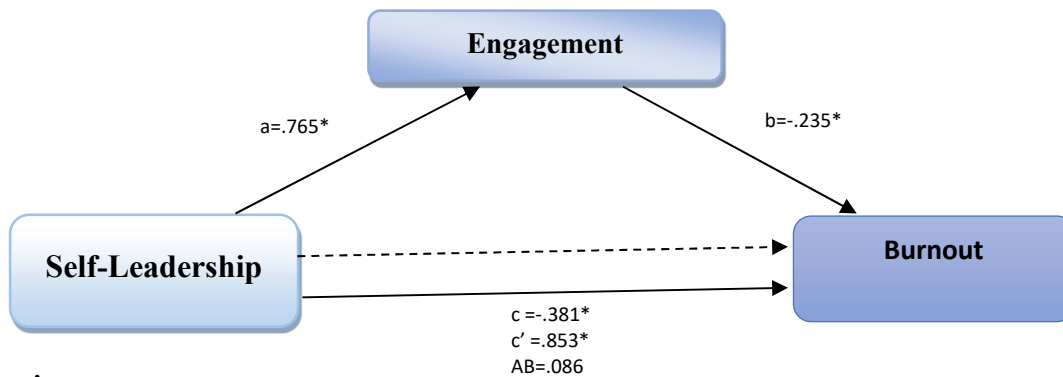
Paths	Effects	SE	t	95%CI		P
				L.L.	U.L.	
Direct Effects (c')						
Sflead → Burt	-.389	.11	-3.707	[-.5963, -.1827]		.003
Sflead → Engt	.853	.042	20.43	[.7705, .9348]		.000
Indirect Effects (ab)						
Sflead → Engt → Burt	.086	.08		[-.1563, .1684]		NS
Total Effects (c)						
Sflead → Burt + Sflead → Engt → Burt	-.381	.067	-5.64	[-.5138, -.2480]		.000

Note: Sflead= *Self-Leadership*; Burt= *Burnout*; Engt=*Engagement*.

Table 9 presents the mediation analysis testing the indirect effect of engagement on the relationship between self-leadership and burnout, using the PROCESS macro with bootstrapping. The direct effect of self-leadership on burnout was significant, $B = -0.39$, $SE = 0.11$, $t(295) = -3.71$, 95% $CI [-0.60, -0.18]$, $p = .003$, indicating that higher self-leadership predicted lower burnout. Self-leadership also significantly predicted engagement, $B = 0.85$, $SE = 0.04$, $t(295) = 20.43$, 95% $CI [0.77, 0.93]$, $p < .001$. However, the indirect effect of self-leadership on burnout through engagement was not significant, $B = 0.09$, $SE = 0.08$, 95% $CI [-0.16, 0.17]$, ns. The total effect of self-leadership on burnout remained significant, $B = -0.38$, $SE = 0.07$, $t(295) = -5.64$, 95% $CI [-0.51, -0.25]$, $p < .001$. These results suggest that while self-leadership directly reduces burnout, engagement does not mediate this relationship.

Figure 2

Direct and Indirect Paths of Mediation Model



Discussion

The results of the descriptive statistics show that the students in university have a moderate to high degree of engagement, burnout, and self-leadership, with results of the mean around or over the midpoint of the scale. The engagement scores indicate that students overall feel somewhat energized in their work. At the same time, some level of stress or exhaustion is also indicated by moderately high burnout levels. These results coincide with previous studies, which found moderate levels of these variables in university students and highlight the role of self-leadership in engagement and burnout. Moderate to high scores on the burnout measure indicate high but not critical burnout, consistent with recent surveys (Goh et al., 2024). These results are in line with recent trends around the world, where it was reported that there has been a growing prevalence of academic burnout stemming from academic pressures in addition to financial stress. These results suggest that mental fatigue and fast exhaustion were

not negligible issues, as would be consistent with the dimension of burnout (emotional exhaustion, cynicism, depleted efficacy) according to Maslach & Leiter (2016). Parker et al. (2023) conducted a study in more than 90 countries worldwide and concluded that more than 60% of university students experienced moderate to high levels of burnout, and exhaustion was the most common symptom of burnout. Perfectionism and fear of failure were the connections between academic burnout and Garcia et al. (2024), who found that academic burnout was associated with perfectionism and fear of failure, especially in competitive programs (medicine, engineering).

It was found that university students demonstrate moderate to high levels on the self-leadership scale, especially in cognitive strategies, such as belief evaluation and self-talk. These results are consistent with the emerging literature in self-regulation in academic environments but also indicate gaps in the proactive self-management of students. These results indicate that students use basic strategies of self-leadership but are inconsistent or advanced in their use, supporting the findings of Neck et al. (2023), that self-leadership skills are underdeveloped at early adulthood. Wunsch et al., (2023) found that positive self talk is beneficial to academic resilience but only 38% of students use it regularly when faced with stress. Hwang et al. (2025) showed that students who have a habit of questioning assumptions have a higher GPA. A recent study by Marques-Quinteiro et al. (2022) found that only 29% of students regularly set weekly academic goals, which denotes weak adoption of action-oriented strategies.

The results show a significant negative relationship between engagement and burnout, implying that the higher the engagement, the lower the burnout in university students. The negative correlation between engagement and burnout is consistent with current work in occupational health psychology. Engaged employees defined by absorption, dedication, and vigor (Schaufeli, 2021) experience less burnout due to their positive work effect and resilience. In a meta-analysis by Lesener et al in 2023, engagement was confirmed as a shield against burnout, especially in high-stress professions. Findings of a meta-analysis of 62 studies exposed that engagement always decreases the risk of burnout, at least in the academic setting with a high level of stress (Lesener et al., 2023). Goh et al. (2024) found that there was 34% less emotional exhaustion experienced by students who are engaged because of greater focus on their tasks and resilience.

A strong positive correlation between Self-Leadership and Engagement was found, which means that people with greater self-leadership (eg, self-regulation, goal-setting and proactive behaviour) are more likely to be engaged. This underlies the importance of self-directed strategies for motivation and commitment to work tasks. The strong positive relationship indicates that people who use the self-leadership strategies are more engaged. Marques-Quinteiro et al. (2022), self-leadership contributes to work engagement through the promotion of proactive behavior and psychological empowerment. The result showed that self-leadership was significantly negatively correlated to burnout, demonstrating that higher self-leadership is correlated with lower burnout, implying that self-leadership may operate as a buffer against burnout. This finding suggests that self-leadership helps individuals manage stress and prevent burnout. Van den Heuvel et al. (2024) found that people with strong self-leadership skill experienced lower levels of burnout as a result of better coping strategies (e.g. cognitive reframing, time management). Garcia et al. (2024) attributed self-leadership to the decrease of emotional exhaustion in the workplace, this is because it contributes to feeling control over the demands of work.

Self-leadership has a significant predictive relationship with lower levels of burnout in university students. This result coincides with the emerging literature on self-regulation and student well-being and identifies further areas for research. Self-leadership decreases moderately with the effect around the same level as in meta-analytic averages (Van den Heuvel et al., 2024). Garcia, A., Gunderson, L., Lin, X., Turner, L., Garvey, G., Chan, M., Forster, J. *Gest. Change BI* 13 (2) 1582-1604 DOI: 10.1159/ Page 1582 2024 Self-leadership moderates' emotional exhaustion among science, technology, engineering, and mathematics college learners: a mediating role of proactive coping. A strong, statistically significant effect of self-leadership on engagement of university students, with self-leadership explaining 58% of the

variance in engagement. This finding is consonant with and an extension of recent literature regarding self-regulation and academic motivation.

Findings indicate that engagement is not a significant mediator for self-leadership and burnout among university students. This finding raises some theoretical assumptions and is concordant with emerging studies on alternative pathways between self-leadership and burnout. While the JD-R model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2023) views engagement as a mediator between self-leadership and burnout, this study indicates that self-leadership may operate through other mechanisms. Van den Heuvel et al. (2024) have found self-leadership to reduce burnout, especially through stress reappraisal, in a sample of 10 universities. Garcia et al (2024) also found a non-significant engagement mediation on STEM students, with self-efficacy as a better mediator.

Conclusion

It was concluded that students generally reported moderate to high levels of self-leadership, engagement, and burnout, and that higher levels of self-leadership were strongly correlated with higher engagement and lower burnout. Further, the more engaged, the less likely you are to burn out. Regression analyses exhibited that self-leadership was a significant predictor for both burnout and engagement, and increased self-leadership was associated with reduced burnout and increased engagement. Engagement itself was also a significant predictor of burnout, as higher engagement correlated with lower burnout. However, the results of mediation analysis suggested that while self-leadership decreased burnout and increased engagement, engagement did not mediate significantly between self-leadership and burnout. The non-significant mediation role of engagement indicated that self-leadership reduced burnout independently of engagement in this study. Researchers should consider other psychological mechanisms and boundary conditions (e.g., stress levels, cultural factors) to refine theory and practice. Overall, the current study emphasizes the value of creating self-leadership among students, which can directly reduce burnout and increase engagement, although the mediating effect of engagement in this interplay seems limited in the current sample.

Implications for Practitioners

The findings of this study offer explicit direction for those working within the world of higher education, such as faculty, academic directors, student support officers, and university administrators. Student affairs and counseling units can create and administer training programs that teach students effective self-leadership skills, such as self-monitoring, goal setting, time management, and positive self-talk. These are skills that directly reduce burnout and increase engagement and can be incorporated into orientation programs. The faculty members could incorporate self-leadership concepts into coursework, especially when they are dealing with project-based learning, internships, or even capstone projects, where they can make independent decisions and are responsible for themselves.

Practitioners in student support can proactively address the prevention of burnout by teaching self-leadership skills before periods of high stress, such as examinations. Group coaching and peer-support programs can assist students in maintaining motivational drive and dealing with stress in a more effective manner. Through proactive development of self-leadership among students, practitioners can overcome burnout as a perceived and real mental health issue, as well as a preventive one. This approach is consistent with the study's finding that self-leadership directly reduces burnout and increases engagement, making it an area with a high impact for intervention.

Recommendations

Modules on self-leadership, self-regulation, and goal setting may be incorporated into first year general courses in order to assist students in developing independent learning and coping strategies early in their academic endeavors. Workshops, seminars, and counseling services may be set up in order to focus on stress management, time management, and self-motivation to reduce academic burnout.

Interactive, problem-based, and collaborative learning approaches may be incorporated in order to keep students interested, dedicated, and absorbed in coursework. Researchers may conduct research over long time periods to monitor changes in self-leadership, engagement and burnout over academic years. This would help in the determination of causal relationships and long-term trends.

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Manuscript Review Form

Title: “From Self-Leadership to Well-Being: Understanding Student Engagement and Burnout in Universities”

Evaluation Criteria	Yes	No	Comments
Title of the manuscript appropriate?		No	The title claims to examine “well-being,” yet the variables central to mediation (self-leadership → engagement→ burnout) do not explicitly include any well-being construct.
Does abstract accurately reflect the content?	Yes		
Is theoretical and practical content of the study clearly identified?	Yes		The manuscript should include a clear theoretical framework to explain the basis of examining the relationships between self-leadership, students’ engagement, burnout, and well-being.
Is the literature cited correctly and up-to-date?	Mostly Yes		Ensure APA 7 formatting throughout.
Is the Method clearly stated and appropriate?	Yes		Methodology is clearly described, sample size is adequate, and variables are well operationalized. However, correlational research design should be added as the study’s methodology.
Is the procedure Clearly and appropriately stated	Yes		
Are the ethical guidelines followed?	yes		Add the ethical approval document/approval number from the Ethical Review Board (ERB) of University of Sargodha for completeness and transparency.
Are the results appropriately described?	yes		
Are the appropriate statistical procedures used?			Correlation analysis and mediation analysis is sufficient for this study.
Are the tables and Figures as per APA Guidelines?		No	Several tables do not follow APA 7 formatting (table titles, spacing, decimal alignment).

Are the findings concluded in appropriate manner?	Yes		
Are the findings appropriately interpreted in discussion section?	yes		Revise table title to ‘Descriptive Statistics for Burnout Among University Students’ as it shows descriptive data, not item analysis. Table 2, 3 and 4
Is the overall writing, Clear and unambiguous?			Writing flow is generally good. However, there are some grammatical issues like “student engagement affects the well-being of student” should be “students’ engagement affects the well-being of students.”
Is the manuscript written according to APA?		No	Some APA elements need revision (in-text citations, table format)

Final Comments and Recommendations:

The manuscript shows inconsistent use of verb tenses, shifting between present and past forms. It should be revised to use past tense consistently, especially when describing methods, data collection, and results.

The study is essentially correlational; therefore, the research design should be labeled as a correlational design, and hypotheses should also reflect correlations rather than effects.

Correlation analysis and mediation analysis is sufficient for this study.

Throughout the manuscript, the term “student engagement” should be revised to “students’ engagement” to ensure correct possessive form and maintain grammatical accuracy.

In the abstract, avoid using the word “explore”; use alternatives like “investigate,” “examine,” or “find out” to clearly convey the study’s purpose.

Add an introductory line before the objectives and hypotheses. Also, separate the hypotheses for each variable instead of combining them.



Dr. Anam Noshaba
Assistant Professor
Lahore College for Women University

Manuscript Review Form

Article (193)

Article: From Self-Leadership to Well-Being: Understanding Student Engagement and Burnout in Universities

Evaluation Criteria	Status	Comments
Title of the manuscript appropriate?	Yes	The title is precise, research-oriented, and clearly reflects the study's core variables: self-leadership, engagement, and burnout.
Does abstract accurately reflect the content?	Yes	The abstract clearly summarises objectives, methodology (cross-sectional survey of 300 students), instruments used (RSLQ, UWES-S, MBI-SS), statistical procedures, and major findings that self-leadership predicts engagement and reduces burnout.
Is theoretical and practical content clearly identified?	Yes	The introduction explains burnout, self-leadership theory (Manz, 1986; Neck & Houghton, 2006), and the role of engagement as a mediator. Practical relevance for higher education institutions is clearly stated.

Is the literature cited correctly and up-to-date?	Yes	The article cites recent studies (2022–2025), including Lesener et al., 2023; Goh et al., 2024; Hwang et al., 2025, demonstrating up-to-date scholarship.
Is the Method clearly stated and appropriate?	Yes	A quantitative cross-sectional design with validated tools is appropriate for assessing relationships among self-leadership, engagement, and burnout. Sampling, instruments, and ethics approval are clearly described.
Is the procedure clearly and appropriately stated?	Yes	Pilot testing, expert validation, reliability assessment, and use of SPSS for correlation, regression, and PROCESS mediation are well-described.
Are the ethical guidelines followed?	Yes	The article states that Ethical Review Board approval was obtained from the University of Sargodha.
Are the results appropriately described?	Yes	Tables present descriptive statistics, item-level analyses, correlations, regression models, and mediation analysis. Interpretation aligns with the statistics.

Are the appropriate statistical procedures used?	Yes	Pearson correlation, multiple regression, and mediation via PROCESS Macro bootstrapping are suitable for the hypotheses.
Are the tables and figures as per APA Guidelines?	Yes	Tables are properly labeled (Table 1–9), use APA-style formatting, and include variable descriptions and statistical values. Figures clearly represent mediation pathways.
Are the findings concluded in an appropriate manner?	Yes	Conclusions match the results: self-leadership increases engagement and decreases burnout; engagement predicts burnout; but engagement does not mediate the relationship.
Are the findings appropriately interpreted in discussion section?	Yes	Discussion compares findings to global literature, offers explanations, and discusses theoretical implications such as JD-R theory considerations.
Is the overall writing clear and unambiguous?	Yes	The writing is academically sound, coherent, and clearly structured. Minor typographical edits could enhance readability.
Is the manuscript written	Yes	APA in-text citations and

according to APA?

reference list are
consistent and current,
with proper citation
formatting.

Final Comments and Recommendations

The article titled "*From Self-Leadership to Well-Being: Understanding Student Engagement and Burnout in Universities*" is well-written, theoretically grounded, and statistically sound. The integration of self-leadership frameworks with burnout and engagement constructs makes a strong contribution to higher education literature. The methodology is robust, with validated tools and appropriate analyses including mediation modelling. Results are consistent, logically presented, and well-supported by contemporary literature. The study offers clear practical implications for universities, such as integrating self-leadership training and engagement-enhancing interventions to reduce burnout. Overall, the article is suitable for publication and recommended for the publication.



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