

Student profiles on engagement and exhaustion

Associations with study behaviour, well-being and academic achievement

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Methods

Quantitative:

- Data from the first Inholland Student Well-being Monitor (SWM) cohort in 2021 on fulltime enrolled students (N= 1460)
- Ultra-short Utrecht Work Engagement Scale - Student Form is used to measure engagement. Mean score of 4 or higher defined as highly engaged
- Subscale of Utrecht Burn-Out Scale is included to measure emotional exhaustion. Mean score of 3.21 or higher defined as high emotional exhaustion
- Correlations between profiles based on engagement-exhaustion cut-off scores and various well-being, student behaviour, and academic achievement variables

Qualitative:

- Semi-structured interviews on profile recognisability, engagement, and emotional exhaustion experiences in the higher education institute and risks and protective factors for each profile
- In-depth interviews with three students and three teachers so far

Introduction

Student well-being requires lots of attention in higher education institutes given the high prevalence of psychosocial problems among students, which was highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic. Engagement and emotional exhaustion are important predictors of academic achievement and other well-being related factors such as depressive symptoms and stress. But although engagement and exhaustion have been conceptualised as a continuum, we argue that internal energy sources and stressors can co-exist or even be both absent (Fig. 1). A person-oriented approach might help students and teachers gain awareness of the diversity and needs of students, and improve well-being and student success.

Aim

Using mixed-methods to investigate different engagement-exhaustion profiles among higher education students, how these profiles relate to study behaviour, well-being and academic achievement, and to explore risks and protective factors for each profile.

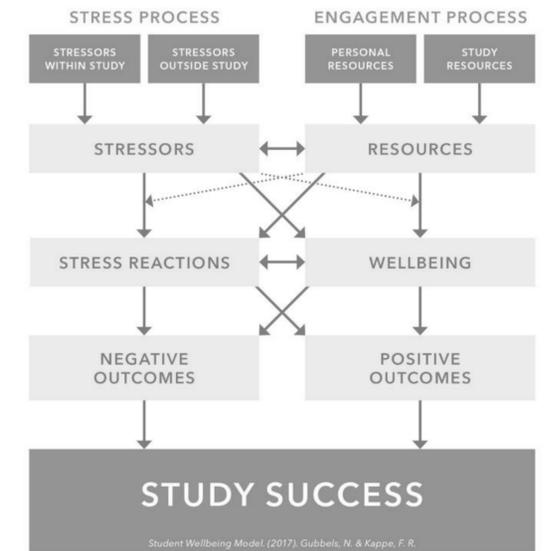


Fig. 1: Student well-being balance model

Energised-Engaged students



- In earlier phase of their studies, over-represented in health/social study domains
- Low levels of depressive symptoms & stress
- High levels of academic participation & bonding
- Most motivated & least study delay

"Everything works out for them. They are in a flow. But they might get annoyed by students who are not working on their level" - Teacher

"You see that these students get feel happiness from their study." - Student

Energised-Disengaged students



- Overrepresented in finance study domains
- Low levels of performance pressure
- Low levels of formal social bonding
- Little study delay

"They are less active in class. The way of asking questions is not about the learning process, but about the results." - Teacher

"I was hardly present in the tutor groups. It's not mandatory. If I want to work I can do that instead." - Student



Exhausted-Engaged students

- In earlier phase of their studies, overrepresented in creative study domains
- High levels of performance pressure
- High levels of extracurricular participation and formal social bonding
- Highly motivated and little study delay

"They need the right information to better understand the assignments. Perhaps extra guidance to put everything in order." - Teacher

"I want everything. I want to go out, go on holiday but still get excellent grades. I exhaust myself to get an 8 instead of a 7." - Student



Exhausted-Disengaged students

- Older students, later phase of their studies, overrepresented in technical study domains
- High levels of depressive symptoms & stress
- Low levels of participation and bonding
- Least motivated & most study delay

"It is difficult to identify them because they often vanish from our sight" - Teacher

"I was drained by the exam week, but you instantly start with new lectures. I was like: I don't care anymore." - Student

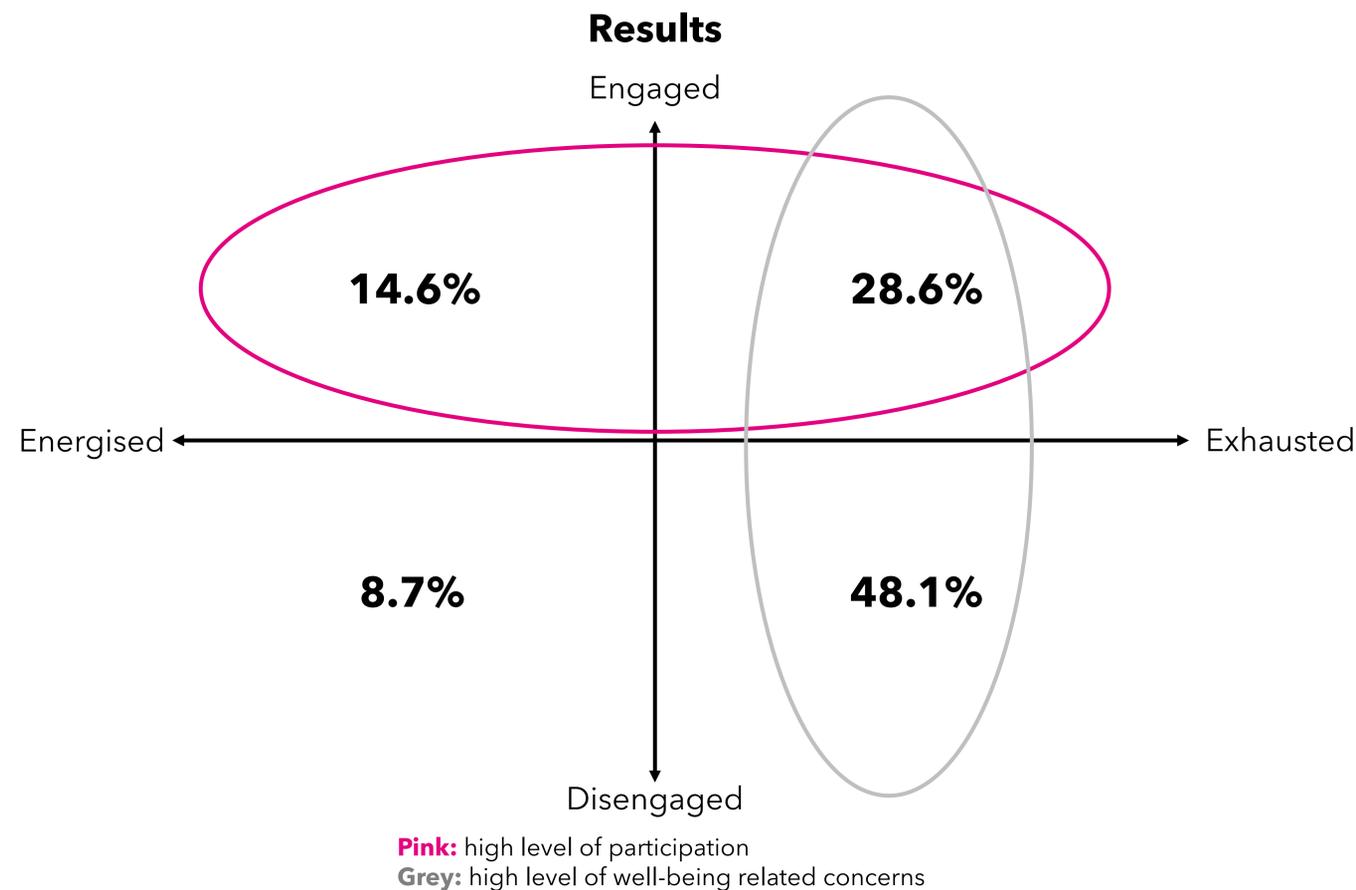


Fig. 2: Quadrant analysis of engagement-exhaustion student profiles

Conclusions

There seem to be various synergies between engagement and exhaustion, rather than purely a negative correlation. The interviewed students and teachers recognised the student profiles. Most students fall in the exhausted-disengaged category, which is worrying but also in line with other results regarding student well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic. Since lifting the restrictions, higher education institutes should re-establish the relations with their students to improve engagement and adequately support them when emotional exhaustion sets in.

