

## Impact of Favoritism/ Nepotism on Emotional Exhaustion and Education Sabotage: The Moderating Role of Gender

**Belal Hamed Taher Shneikat<sup>1</sup>, Abubakar Mohammed Abubakar<sup>2\*</sup>, Mustafa Ilkan<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Eastern Mediterranean University, Department of Business Administration, Famagusta, North Cyprus

<sup>2</sup> Aksaray University, Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, Department of Management Information System, Turkey.

<sup>3</sup> Eastern Mediterranean University, School of Computing and Technology, Famagusta, North Cyprus

### Abstract

Favoritism/nepotism are common practice at most organizations. This study attempts to provide an insight by measuring the impact of favoritism/nepotism on emotional exhaustion and education sabotage. Data was collected from teaching/research assistants at six universities in North Cyprus. The interplay among the study variables was observed via SEMs. Implications and consequences of organizational politics like favoritism/nepotism and work-related strain like emotional exhaustion are discussed.

**Keywords:** favoritism/nepotism, emotional exhaustion, education sabotage.

## Introduction

During the last decades, the education sector has experienced a boom due to a tremendous increase in the number of students from all over the globe (Abubakar et al., 2014). The Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2014) has reported that the number of international students increased sharply during the period 2000 to 2007 to over 2 million students worldwide. In addition, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2014) stated that about 2.5 million students studied abroad in 2009. Most students go abroad to study at universities. Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines university as a school that teaches students and awards them with varieties of degrees such as Bachelor, Masters and PhD, and at the same time conducts scientific research (Merriam-Webster, 2014). For universities to achieve their goals, they have to recruit full professors, associate professors, assistant professors, and teaching and research assistants. According to the regulations, in most countries around the globe, teaching and research assistants should have a Bachelor or Master's degree to work in these positions. Nevertheless, to be eligible for one of these positions the individual must have high grades from his/her previous education. For example Eastern Mediterranean university regulations state that an individual must have above 3.00 out of 4.00 to be a teaching/research assistant (EMU, 2014). However, this policy is sometimes violated by favoritism/ nepotism (Fa/Ne) in small countries like North Cyprus because people know each other and they tend to have strong social or family ties; perhaps they depend on these relationships to get jobs (Arasli & Tumer, 2008). Given this, establishing mechanistic processes and ways of conducting teaching activities based on competency is difficult in small and non-western countries. Thus, the possibility of emerging Fa/Ne is very high. Fa/Ne may destroy professionalism in workplaces like universities. Roy and Roy (2004) describe favoritism as the act of favoring an individual or group over others who have similar rights. Nepotism is referred to as "a dimension of favoritism given to family members for example hiring of nephews, nieces, in-laws and others because of the family ties rather than competency" (Arasli & Tumer, 2008, pg. 2). Individuals working in politically charged atmospheres in which procedures, justice, and rewards are granted based on favoritism are vulnerable to work-related strain like burnout or emotional exhaustion (EE) (Karatepe et al., 2012; Ross, 2005). Maslach and Jackson (1996) have defined burnout as a critical psychological and physical response syndrome, resulting from prolonged stress, attrition and frustration at work.

In the context of university teaching and research assistants, when they experience burnout or EE, they often retaliate against students by obstructing and reducing educational quality. For instance they may take revenge on rude students or deliberately fail them. This action is a way of coping with stress and expressing frustration (Lee & Ok, 2014). Sabotage in the workplace has received the attention of various scholars and practitioners. Because of the lack of literature regarding education sabotage (ES), we aligned service sabotage (SS) to ES. Thus, education is a form of service. Taylor and Walton (1971) refer to SS as workplace aberrant behaviors, "cheating at work" (Mars, 1982) and "residual rule breaking" (Scheff, 1996). Perhaps ES is any kind of deviant behavior that undermines the quality of education and knowledge transfer processes. Ambrosea et al. (2002) identified five motives behind SS, namely injustice, frustration, boredom/fun, facilitation of work, and powerlessness. However, some of the literature considers sabotage in the service sector to be rational conduct that results from an individual's reaction to their atmosphere (Analoui, 1995; Jermier, 1988). This paper aims to examine the impact of Fa/Ne on EE and ES. No empirical study has examined the impact of Fa/Ne on EE and ES. In addition, this study also examines the mediating role of EE between the Fa/Ne and ES relationship as well as gender differences.

### **Theoretical Background, Hypotheses and Research Model**

#### **Favoritism and Nepotism and Education Sabotage**

Favoritism is seen as unfair practice of treating some people better than others. Arasli and Tumer (2008) show favoritism as an act of giving special employment and job related preferences to socially related people. The existence of favoritism is prevalent in most cultures but more popular in small states (Ozler et al., 2011; Sadozai et al., 2012), which have strong social or family ties. When a manager employs or gives promotion based on blood relationships instead of competency (Sadozai et al., 2012) this action is called nepotism. These practices (Fa/Ne) spoil effective selection and recruitment procedures in organizations because selection is not based on merit. The tendency to recruit unqualified individuals would be high; subsequently these individuals may sabotage the service. Disharmony begins to appear between present employees and new employees who have family or social ties with a person in the top management (Arasli & Tumer, 2008). This disharmony may lead to job burnout (Dylaga et al., 2013) or emotional exhaustion. Moreover, Witt et al. (2000) emphasized that organizational politics like Fa/Ne have a tendency to manipulate formal operating standards, informal norms and procedures with the sole aim to advance self-interests. Similarly, Karatepe et al. (2012) and Ross (2005) have noted that subordinates working in a politically charged atmosphere in which Fa/Ne and injustice exist are vulnerable to work-related strain. Based on the literature, injustices like Fa/Ne have the likelihood to provoke retaliatory actions and deviant work place behaviors like emotional exhaustion and sabotage. Thus, the following hypotheses were proposed:

- H1: Favoritism, nepotism is positively related to emotional exhaustion
- H2: Favoritism, nepotism is positively related to education sabotage

#### **Emotional Exhaustion (EE) and Education Sabotage (ES)**

Burnout is a lengthy response to chronic interpersonal and emotional stressors at work (Maslach et al., 2001, p. 397). It has three dimensions: emotional exhaustion (EE), depersonalization and personal accomplishment. However, to serve the aim of this study we are going to shed light just on EE which is considered as the most important dimension of burnout (Shirom, 1989). EE refers to stress reaction of being depleted and overextended (Evans & Fischer, 1993; Schutte et al., 2000). Depletion could be physiological or/and psychological (Bakker et al., 2003). Maslach (1982) stated that EE exhibits in subordinates as a loss of feeling, attention, spirit, interest and trust. Leiter and Maslach (2005) further explain emotional exhaustion as one of the major work-place issues in modern organizational settings. As a work-related strain, burnout (in the form of EE) leads to unwanted workplace behaviors like deviant work-place behaviors, intention to quit, job dissatisfaction, and less amount of time dedicated to work related activities (Low et al., 2001; Karatepe et al., 2012). EE causes frustration which may lead to workplace misbehavior (Fox & Spector, 1999) and SS is the reaction to that frustration (Jang & Johnson, 2003). SS is the deliberate misbehavior by subordinates against customers, in order to negatively disrupt operational activities of the organization (Harris & Ogbonna, 2009). SS has many aspects in the organization like disrupting the speed of services, revenge toward rude customers, mishandling customers, displaying hostile behaviors, and frustration. Ambrosea et al. (2002) added that an emotional state of frustration can lead to SS and the source of the frustration, like powerlessness or unfairness, may stimulate sabotaging intentions. Giacalone et al. (1997) asserted that SS can be aimed at an individual,

department, or the organization as a whole. Harris and Ogbonna (2009) further distinguish between subordinates' mistakes and SS, because the difference is clear between simple mistakes that can happen anytime or anywhere without intention, as opposed to the intention to sabotage the service. Thus, SS badly influences customer satisfaction and quality perception (Gremier & Gwinner, 2000). As we have mentioned above we integrate SS literature with ES, since education is a kind of service (Angell et al, 2008; Khan, & Matlay, 2009). Given the literature, the following hypothesis was proposed:

- H3: Emotional exhaustion is positively related to education sabotage

### Moderating Role of Gender

Prior studies have asserted that gender is a predictor of EE. These studies stated that there are gender differences in subordinate EE; they proposed that females suffer a greater magnitude of strain than males (i.e. upper concern or anxiety, job- related stress, job load) (Arnten et al., 2008; Doyle & Hind, 1998). Furthermore, positive and negative emotions are more likely to be suffered among females than among males (Grossman & Wood, 1993). As long as females cannot effectively express negative emotions, they suffer a larger magnitude of strain compared to males and because EE is conceived as a form or type of strain (i.e. negative response to workplace stressor), the overall findings propose that females feel a larger magnitude of EE than males (Rubino et al., 2013). Some studies have stated that the relationship between gender and EE is inconsistent (Bakker et al., 2002; Bekker et al., 2005; Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998; Van Horn et al., 1997a, b). The relationship between gender and EE differs (Greenglass et al., 1998), because some studies report larger magnitudes of EE for females (Bakker et al., 2002; Rupert & Morgan, 2005; Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998), while other studies show larger scores for males (Bekker et al., 2005; Van Horn et al., 1997a, b). However, Rubino et al. (2013) propose the potential presence of an external factor, which influences the relationship between gender and EE, and they emphasize the need to investigate the potential mediators and moderators of this relationship. Given the literature, the following hypothesis was proposed:

- H4: Gender moderates the relationship between favoritism/nepotism, emotional exhaustion and education sabotage.

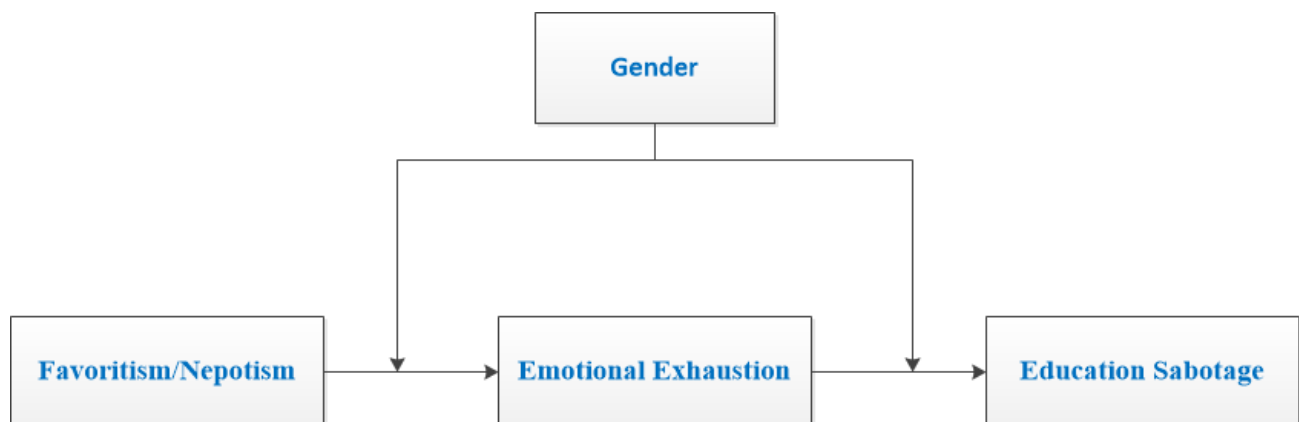


Figure 1: The conceptual model of the research

## **Methodology**

### **Sample and Procedures**

This research employed a purposive sampling technique. Data were gathered with the aid of self-administered questionnaires from teaching/research assistants in six universities in North Cyprus. A pilot survey was conducted with ten teaching/research assistants, and necessary adjustments were made to make sure that respondents understood the questions. Four hundred (400) questionnaires were distributed; each questionnaire had a cover letter to guarantee confidentiality and anonymity of the respondent. Only 310 questionnaires were usable due to missing data and some of the respondents did not return their questionnaires.

### **Measures**

Fa/Ne was measured via fifteen (15) items adopted from (Arasli & Tumer, 2008; Abdalla et al., 1998; Sadozai et al., 2012) and modified to fit the research context. Some of the items include 'Teaching assistants at the university always feel that they need a relative in a high-level position' and 'Teaching assistants at the university always feel that they need someone they know or a friend in a high-level position'. ES was measured using nine (9) items adopted from Harris and Ogbonna's (2006) service sabotage study. The items were adjusted to fit the education context. A sample of items includes 'It is common practice here to "get back" at students' and 'Teaching assistants ignore the university regulations to make things easier for themselves'. Five point scales were used to measure the items, ranging from (1=strongly disagree) and (5=strongly agree). Emotional exhaustion was measured via nine items from the validated burnout inventory that Maslach and Jackson have used in prior studies (Maslach et al., 1996; Walters & Raybould, 2007; Kima et al., 2007). A sample of items includes 'I feel emotionally drained by my work' and 'I feel frustrated by my work'. The items were measured on a five point scale ranging from (1=Never) and (5=Daily). Demographic variables used include age, gender, education, marital status and tenure.

### **Data Analysis**

SPSS and AMOS version 22 were used to investigate the causal relationships and goodness-of-fit of the three model item, which yielded ( $X^2 = 1225.6$ ,  $df = 413$ ,  $p < .001$ ). In estimating the fitness of the measurement and structural model, Goodness-of-Fit Indices (GFI), Normed Fit Index (NFI), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), Root Mean Square (RMR) and  $X^2$  re-estimate test (CMIN/DF) were used (GFI = .81, 1 = maximum fit; NFI = .92, 1 = maximum fit; CFI = .95, 1 = maximum fit; RMSEA = .08, values  $\leq .08$  indicating good fit; and CMIN/DF = 2.96, values  $>1$  and  $<4$  are accepted). The results in Table 1 show that the model fits are reasonable and acceptable as suggested (Wheaton et al., 1977; Bentler & Bonett, 1980; Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1984; Tanaka & Huba, 1985; Bollen, 1989a; Bollen, 1989b). Cronbach's alphas were between .87 and .90 above the cutoff point of .60 (Hair et al., 1998) and composite reliability (CR) ranged from .88 to .90, while Average Variance Extract (AVE) ranged from .55 to .75 above the cutoff level of .50 (Hair et al., 1998). In addition the standardized loadings were also above the thresholds of .50, as suggested by Hair et al. (1998) (see Table 2). The results verify evidence of internal consistency and also suggest evidence of convergent and discriminant validity.

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## Results Demographics

The demographic breakdown of the sample shows that most of the respondents were males (59%) and the rest were females. The overwhelming majority (71%) was aged between 22 and 30 years and the rest were between the ages of 31 and 39 years. Sixty one percent (61%) had a Master's degree and the rest had a Bachelor's degree. In terms of marital status, 65% were single, 32% were married and the rest were divorced. About 57% of the respondents had worked for their universities between 1 and 3 years, 26 % between 4 and 6 years, and the rest less than a year. Apart from exceptional cases, teaching/research assistants cannot work for more than 5 years in North Cyprus universities (EMU, 2014).

## Measurements

Scale items	Factor loadings	Mean	S.D
<b><i>Favoritism and Nepotism (<math>\alpha = .97</math>; <math>CR=.97</math>; <math>AVE=.66</math>)</i></b>			
At the university always feel that they need a relative in a high-level position	.80	3.50	1.22
Teaching assistants at the university always feel that they need someone they know or a friend in a high-level position.	.79	3.74	1.12
Chairpersons at the university are uncomfortable with the presence of those Teaching assistants with close personal ties to high-level executives	.87	3.81	1.06
Teaching assistants who were appointed only because of family ties have negative influence at the university.	.76	3.51	1.13
Teaching assistants who were appointed only because of friends or connections have negative influence at the university.	.82	3.52	1.09
I am always careful when speaking to my colleagues about university's top Managers.	.84	3.68	1.12
I am always careful when speaking to friends or acquaintances of university's top managers	.74	3.37	1.24
Top managers' relatives are frustrated by never really knowing whether they were appointed because of their talent or family ties	.80	3.57	1.14
Friends and acquaintances of university's top managers are frustrated by the fact that they never really know if they were appointed based on merit or personal reasons.	.81	3.75	1.04
If a relative of top managers at the university becomes Teaching assistants, he/she can never live up to the expectations of the other Teaching assistants.	.83	3.61	1.14
A friend or acquaintance of top managers at the university can never meet the expectation of other Teaching assistants if he/she appointed at the university.	_*		
University permitting employment of top managers' relatives have a hard time attracting and retaining quality Teaching assistants who are not relatives	.90	3.71	1.07
University permitting employment of top managers' and board trustees' acquaintances have a hard time employing and retaining high quality Teaching assistants who are not acquaintances.	.81	3.75	1.07
University permitting employment of top managers' relatives have a difficult time firing or demoting them if they prove inadequate	.86	3.37	1.18
Top managers at the university have a hard time demoting or firing friends and acquaintances	.77	3.60	1.14
<b><i>Emotional Exhaustion (<math>\alpha =.96</math>; <math>CR=.96</math>; <math>AVE=.77</math>)</i></b>			
I feel emotionally drained by my work.	.99	3.24	1.27
Working with students all day requires a great deal of effort.	.66	3.04	1.31
I feel like my work is breaking me down.	.97	3.02	1.31
I feel frustrated by my work.	.96	3.01	1.35
I feel I work too hard at my job.	.65	3.01	1.30
It stresses me too much to work in direct contact with students.	.98	2.97	1.29
I feel like I'm at the end of my rope.	.95	2.99	1.34
I feel I look after certain students impersonally, as if they are objects.	.67	3.03	1.31
I feel tired when I get up in the morning and have to face another day of work.	_*		

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### **Education Sabotage ( $\alpha = .94$ ; $CR = .95$ ; $AVE = .68$ )**

Teaching assistants here take revenge on rude students.	.82	2.90	1.36
Teaching assistants here hurry students when they want to.	.99	3.16	1.20
It is common practice here to "get back" at students.	.61	3.31	1.16
Teaching assistants ignore the university regulations to make things easier for themselves.	.69	2.77	1.36
Sometimes, Teaching assistants here "get at students" to make the rest of us laugh.	.57	2.79	1.29
Teaching assistants here never show off in front of student. (R)	.99	3.16	1.21
Sometimes, Teaching assistants deliberately fail students.	.97	3.16	1.22
In this university students are never deliberately mistreated. (R)	.98	3.17	1.21
Teaching assistants here slow down curriculum when they want to.	.61	3.02	1.26

**Note:** R; reverse-scored items. KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy = .91; Bartlett's Test of Sphericity = 17095.9,  $df = 666$ ,  $p < .001$ . The total variance explained by all factors is 75%. \* Dropped as a result of CFA.  $\alpha$  denotes alpha coefficient.

Table 1 Scale Items, Reliability and Exploratory Factor Analysis Results

Variables	Mean	Standard deviation	1	2	3
1. Favoritism/Nepotism	3.60	.93	-		
2. Emotional Exhaustion	3.04	1.17	-.049	-	
3. Education Sabotage	3.05	1.05	-.059	.55**	-

**Note:** Composite scores for each variable were computed by averaging respective item scores. \*\* Correlations are significant at the .01 level.

Table 2 Means, Standard Deviations, and Variables' Correlations

Table 2 presents standard deviations, means, and a correlations analysis of the research model. The relationship between EE and ES was positive and significant ( $r = .55$ ,  $p < .001$ ), providing preliminary support to hypothesis (H3).

Exogenous variables	Endogenous variables	Estimates	Standard error	t-statistics	p
Favoritism/Nepotism	Emotional Exhaustion	-.061	.071	-.855	.393
Favoritism/Nepotism	Education Sabotage	-.037	.054	-.682	.495
Emotional Exhaustion	Education Sabotage	.490	.043	11.42	***

**Notes:** \*\*\* significant at the  $p < 0.01$  level (two-tailed)

Table 3 Maximum likelihood estimates for the research model (n=310)

Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to test the causal relationships between the study variables. Table 3 shows that the relationship between Fa/Ne and EE was negative and insignificant ( $\beta = -.061$ ,  $p = .393$ ). Similarly, the relationship between Fa/Ne and ES was negative and insignificant ( $\beta = -.037$ ,  $p = .495$ ). Finally, the relationship between EE and ES was positive and significant ( $\beta = .490$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Based on the above outcomes, H1 and H2 were rejected, and H3 gained empirical support.

Exogenous variables	Endogenous variables	Total Effect	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect
Favoritism/Nepotism	Emotional Exhaustion	-.061	-.061	0.00
Favoritism/Nepotism	Education Sabotage	-.067	-.037	-.030

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Emotional Exhaustion	Education Sabotage	.490	.490	0.00
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Table 4 Break down of total effect of the research model (n=310)

Multi-group moderation analysis was conducted; at the model level the groups were not different. However, at the path level the groups were different. As predicted, gender did moderate the relationships in the model. The results in Table 5 show that the relationship between Fa/Ne and ES was negatively significant for men but not significant for women. The result posits that men were less likely to experience EE in organizations with higher levels of injustice, such as favoritism/nepotism. Secondly, the relationship between EE and ES was significant for both genders but higher for men. This suggests that men who experienced EE had a high tendency to turn to education sabotage. This provides confirmatory support for H4.

Exogenous variables	Endogenous variables	Male (n=183) β (t)	Female (n=127) β(t)	Decision
Favoritism/Nepotism →	Emotional Exhaustion	-.176(-1.793)	.060(.585)	Rejected
Favoritism/Nepotism →	Education Sabotage	-.155(-2.115*)	.083(1.056)	Accepted
Emotional Exhaustion →	Education Sabotage	.466(8.437**)	.498(7.317**)	Accepted

Notes: \*Significant at the  $p < 0.05$  level (two-tailed); \*\*significant at the  $p < 0.01$  level (two-tailed)

Table 5 Moderating effect of gender (n=310)

### Discussion and Conclusion

This study provides additional insight into the perception that employees who experience injustice in their organization will engage in sabotage and may experience EE. As predicted, the findings of this study reveal that EE is positively associated with ES. Contrary to our expectation Fa/Ne did not result in EE and ES. This phenomenon explicitly explains the relationship and strength of strong ties. Nevertheless, emotional exhausted teaching/research assistants have the tendency to mistreat students, which may lead to frustration. Frustrated teaching/research assistants have a higher propensity to engage in ES, in line with Fox and Spector's (1999) and Lee and Ok's (2014) findings. In addition, injustice that may result from Fa/Ne may not always manifest as EE and ES. The current findings indicate that organizational practices like Fa/Ne do not always lead to unwanted outcomes, specifically in small countries such as North Cyprus where the majority of the population have blood and/or social ties.

Theoretically EE refers to the stress reaction of being depleted and overextended, and to loss of feeling and attention, spirit, interest and trust (Bakker et al., 2003; Schutte et al., 2000). Employees who were employed due to social or blood ties may not experience EE, due to existing trust, fair treatment and flexible work processes assigned. Fa/Ne may not result in ES because such employees often do their best to protect and preserve the image and reputation of their mentor(s). In addition, they also want to keep their dignity within the society. Herzberg's (1959) two-factor theory exhibits another description for the relationship between EE and ES. The theory posits that motivators like responsibility, recognition, and achievement are the main triggers of subordinates' (teaching/research assistants) satisfaction. However, teaching/research assistants who experience EE may become disengaged from their duties. Thus, with regards to ES, we argue that this is a result of



other work factors rather than injustice or Fa/Ne. Male employees in organizations with high Fa/Ne are less likely to resort to ES.

HRM practitioners in small countries or cities can leverage Fa/Ne to diminish sabotage in the workplace. Some might argue that organizational politics in the form of Fa/Ne will reduce service or product quality. However, the reverse is the case for small countries. Abubakar et al. (2014) have reported that North Cyprus has emerged as an educational tourism destination, with international students from various countries. In addition, one of the factors that have lured students to study in North Cyprus is the presence of qualified and friendly academic staff (Abubakar et al., 2014).

### **Limitations and Future Study Directions**

This study has several contributions but is not without limitations. Cross-sectional design and self-report measures were some of its shortcomings. Future research should adopt a longitudinal research design. Secondly, the study did not look at the effect of leadership style and other cultural factors. Future studies should examine other factors that have a tendency to result in education sabotage. Thirdly, the generalizability of our findings is questionable because of the small sample size and the fact that the sample was drawn only from North Cyprus. Lastly, the study employed a purposive sampling technique; future studies should use a probability sampling method to strengthen the current findings. Also, future research should be conducted with a larger sample size and in countries with different cultural settings.

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