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Addressing Higher Education Burnout: The Development and Impact of an Animated Educational Intervention at Systems Plus College Foundation

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ABSTRACT

Manual and static educational materials often struggle to capture student engagement when addressing sensitive mental health topics such as academic burnout. Existing digital resources frequently rely on foreign academic settings, leaving a lack of localized psychoeducational content tailored for Filipino university students. This study proposes the development and evaluation of a localized, character-driven animated educational intervention designed to enhance mental health literacy regarding academic burnout at Systems Plus College Foundation (SPCF). Guided by fundamental animation principles and creative digital storytelling, the project involves designing campus-inspired environments and character models to visually portray psychological stress, common burnout triggers, and practical coping mechanisms. The effectiveness of the intervention will be evaluated using pre and post-implementation assessment tools measuring students' burnout awareness, understanding, empathy, and information retention. Expected outcomes include an increase in mental health awareness among SPCF students and the provision of a localized digital asset for institutional wellness campaigns.

Keywords: Academic Burnout, Animated Educational Intervention, Visual Storytelling, Mental Health Literacy, Systems Plus College Foundation

SECTION I — INTRODUCTION (THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING)

1.1 Introduction

Efficient mental health communication is essential for supporting university students navigating rigorous academic environments (Sutiawati et al., 2024). Traditional static media, such as text-heavy pamphlets and clinical posters, often struggle to engage students when delivering sensitive psychoeducational concepts (Haris et al., 2026). Furthermore, while digital mental health resources exist, many rely on foreign academic settings and generalized scenarios that lack relatability for local student populations.

This research explores a central question: How can a localized, narrative-driven animated intervention effectively communicate academic burnout, its signs, and practical coping strategies to higher education students at Systems Plus College Foundation (SPCF)? By integrating short-form digital animation and visual storytelling into mental health education, this study aims to bridge the communication gap. Ultimately, the project seeks to foster student engagement, improve mental health literacy, and provide practical support mechanisms that are culturally and contextually tailored to the Filipino higher education experience (Chanakya, 2024; Putro et al., 2025).

1.2 Background of the Study

Academic stress and burnout are increasingly prevalent issues among college students, negatively impacting their cognitive performance, psychological well-being, and overall academic persistence (Hainrich & Raclaw, 2026; Liu et al., 2023). In higher education environments, students face demanding coursework, tight deadlines, and unexpected academic challenges that heighten stress levels. This reality is particularly evident at Systems Plus College Foundation (SPCF), where tertiary students navigate rigorous academic requirements alongside personal and social responsibilities.

While educational institutions attempt to promote mental health literacy, traditional text-heavy materials such as pamphlets, static posters, and formal lecture presentations frequently fail to sustain student attention or effectively translate complex psychological concepts into actionable insights (Moe-Byrne et al., 2022). Consequently, students often struggle to identify early warning signs of burnout, leading to untreated emotional exhaustion and reduced academic performance.

Animation and visual storytelling offer dynamic, engaging alternatives capable of simplifying complex topics, boosting learner motivation, and promoting empathy (Alzahrani, 2025; Klefodimos, 2024; Prihantoro et al., 2025). By translating abstract psychological experiences into relatable visual narratives, animated media can bridge the gap between theoretical health information and real-world student experiences. However, most existing animated mental health resources are produced in foreign academic settings and tailored to generalized Western populations, making scenarios, cultural nuances, and language less relatable to Filipino college students (Alibudbud, 2025). Furthermore, few digital interventions specifically focus on higher-education burnout in local institutional contexts.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

- **General Objective:** To produce a 2D-animated educational intervention on higher-education burnout and evaluate its effectiveness in increasing burnout awareness, understanding, empathy, and information retention among SPCF students.
- **Specific Objectives:**
 1. Design character models and environmental assets that reflect local college academic settings.
 2. Apply fundamental animation principles to visually convey psychological stress, emotional states, and experiences associated with academic burnout.
 3. Produce a character-driven narrative presenting information about burnout, its common signs and causes, and practical coping strategies.
 4. Evaluate the effectiveness of the animated educational intervention in terms of students' burnout awareness, understanding, empathy, and information retention using appropriate evaluation metrics.

1.4 Scope and Limitation of the Study

- **Scope:** This study focuses on the production and empirical evaluation of a short-form, character-driven animated video designed to communicate academic burnout, its primary indicators, and actionable coping strategies within a localized college setting. The project encompasses the complete asset pipeline, including the creation of custom 2D character models, visual elements, and environmental backgrounds that explicitly reflect the Systems Plus College Foundation (SPCF) campus environment. To determine the project's impact, the animated intervention will undergo an empirical evaluation among selected SPCF tertiary students, evaluating key performance metrics such as burnout awareness, conceptual comprehension, empathy, and information retention.
- **Delimitations:** This study operates under several deliberate constraints. The proposed intervention strictly serves an educational and preventive function; it does not include clinical diagnostic tools, diagnostic functionality, or personalized psychological therapy for students experiencing severe clinical mental health disorders. Furthermore, the empirical findings and applicability of the research are bounded by the specific demographic profile of tertiary students enrolled at SPCF. Finally, the project excludes interactive software production, such as video games, web applications, or mobile apps, focusing exclusively on the design and production of a linear, narrative-driven animated video intervention.

1.5 Significance of the Study

SPCF Students. Offers a relatable, visually engaging, and culturally grounded medium that helps students recognize early signs of academic burnout. By translating abstract psychological stress into familiar visual narratives, it equips students with practical coping mechanisms to manage academic workload without compromising their mental well-being.

SPCF ACAP Center. Serves as an innovative digital asset for campus wellness programs, orientation sessions, and student guidance campaigns. It provides institutional counselors with a modern, student-centric tool to complement traditional one-on-one therapy and informational drives.

EMC Professors. Demonstrates a practical framework for applying fundamental animation principles, character design, and narrative storytelling to health communications and social impact topics beyond traditional commercial entertainment.

Future Researchers. Expands the limited local literature on narrative-driven animation as a psychoeducational tool within the Philippine higher education context. It establishes baseline empirical data regarding the effectiveness of visual media in improving student mental health literacy, retention, and empathy.

1.6 Definition of Terms

Academic Burnout. A state of emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced personal accomplishment caused by chronic academic stress, operationally defined as the psychological subject depicted in the animated intervention and measured through students' ability to recognize its symptoms, causes, and coping strategies.

Animated Educational Intervention. The structured integration of moving graphics, visual storytelling, character design, and audio elements to communicate complex psychoeducational concepts referring specifically to the short character-driven video designed around Systems Plus College Foundation (SPCF) campus life as the study's primary media tool.

Mental Health Literacy. Knowledge and beliefs about mental health conditions that aid in their recognition, management, or prevention evaluated in this study through student assessment scores measuring burnout awareness, conceptual understanding, empathy, and information retention.

Visual Storytelling. A narrative communication method utilizing dynamic visual media, character animations, and environmental cues to simplify complex psychological themes, evoke emotional resonance, and effectively deliver health and educational content. This is executed through the specific narrative structure, character dynamics, color palette, and scene composition of the animated video.

SECTION II — LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction to the Review

This chapter reviews related literature and studies on academic burnout among college students and the use of animated educational media as a tool for addressing presenting it. It focuses on how digital media can contribute to engagement, simplify complex mental health topics, and support student well-being in a visual presentation. The review also identifies existing gaps in localized and burnout-focused educational interventions, providing a basis for the development of the proposed animated educational intervention.

2.2 Review of Related Literature and Studies

Academic stress is a significant concern among university students due to the multiple academic and personal demands associated with higher education. Common sources of stress include examinations, heavy coursework, assignments, deadlines, academic competition, and the pressure to achieve good grades; these may be further intensified by career uncertainty, financial concerns, and adjusting to university life (Pascoe et al., 2020). Research indicates that academic stress has substantial consequences for students' mental health and overall well-being. When students perceive that academic demands exceed their abilities or available resources, prolonged stress may develop. This chronic stress can lead to anxiety, sleep difficulties, reduced concentration, decreased motivation, and emotional exhaustion, ultimately contributing to academic burnout and negatively affecting both academic engagement and quality of life.

Students' responses to academic stress are influenced by the coping strategies and resources available to them. A foundational study by Lazarus and Folkman 1984 described coping as the cognitive and behavioral efforts used to manage stressful demands, broadly categorizing them into problem-focused and emotion-focused approaches. University students may use adaptive strategies such as time management, planning, problem-solving, physical activity, relaxation, positive thinking, and seeking social support to manage academic demands and maintain psychological balance. Conversely, some students rely on maladaptive coping strategies, such as avoidance and procrastination, which provide temporary relief but ultimately increase stress over time.

Moreover, aside from academic pressures, environmental influences play a crucial role in a student's perception of burnout; these influences range from financial stress and family status to overall lifestyle (McClintock, 2022). Social and institutional support from peers, family members, teachers, counselors, and university staff can provide essential emotional and practical assistance. This underscores the importance of addressing both individual coping behaviors and the broader educational environment.

Despite the growing literature on academic stress and coping, significant research gaps remain regarding specific cultural contexts, diverse student populations, and unique institutional factors. Furthermore, existing studies frequently utilize cross-sectional designs, which limits the understanding of the long-term relationship between academic stress and coping mechanisms. These gaps highlight the need for further research that considers both individual coping strategies and the institutional support available to students (Subedi & Pokharel, 2026).

These findings support the concerns raised in Chapter 1 regarding the urgent need to address educational burnout among college students. Because recognizing and understanding academic stress helps students manage its effects, accessible and engaging educational resources are vital. For the present study, an animated educational intervention offers an engaging and comprehensible medium to present information about stress, coping, and burnout while reflecting situations highly relevant to Filipino college students at Systems Plus College Foundation (SPCF).

Within the local context, a recent study among high school students revealed significant insights into the relationship between academic burnout and coping mechanisms. It highlighted that academic burnout is primarily driven by exhaustion and disengagement, reflecting feelings of profound fatigue, emotional drain, and disinterest in academic tasks (Robles et al., 2024). To manage this stress, students employ various strategies, including problem-focused, emotion-focused, and avoidant coping mechanisms. Robles et al. (2024) observed that while students exhibit moderate engagement in problem-focused and emotion-focused coping, they also utilize avoidant behaviors, albeit to a lesser extent. Their correlation analysis revealed significant relationships between academic burnout and these coping mechanisms—particularly linking exhaustion to problem-focused, emotion-focused, and avoidant coping. This suggests a critical need for interventions that actively promote adaptive coping strategies while discouraging avoidant behaviors.

Numerous studies conclude that stress negatively affects academic outcomes. Consequently, researchers advocate for targeted interventions that promote constructive coping skills, improve time management, and support psychological well-being to enhance the overall quality of life among college students (Shobana, 2026). In relation to the current study, digital storytelling (DST) serves as an audiovisual technological instrument that utilizes personal images and animations through a creative process (Lanszki, 2021). This medium provides a significant advantage in portraying students' life stories, unique situations, and perspectives on adapting to stress in a modern, digital format. Previous research has explored various materials to help students navigate academic burnout, including the DST method. DST is a narrative approach that has successfully helped students experiencing burnout syndrome create audiovisual texts to process their past, present, and future experiences (Lanszki, 2021).

Overall, the reviewed literature emphasizes the significant impact of academic stress, coping strategies, and environmental factors on students' well-being and their susceptibility to academic burnout. The findings consistently highlight the necessity for accessible and engaging approaches to help students understand and manage these challenges. Ultimately, these studies provide a robust foundation for the present research and strongly support the development of a localized, animated educational intervention to address higher educational burnout among students at Systems Plus College Foundation.

2.3 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study proposes that a localized 2D animated video intervention addressing academic burnout should be developed through a structured approach grounded in multimedia learning theory and targeted at undergraduate students.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework

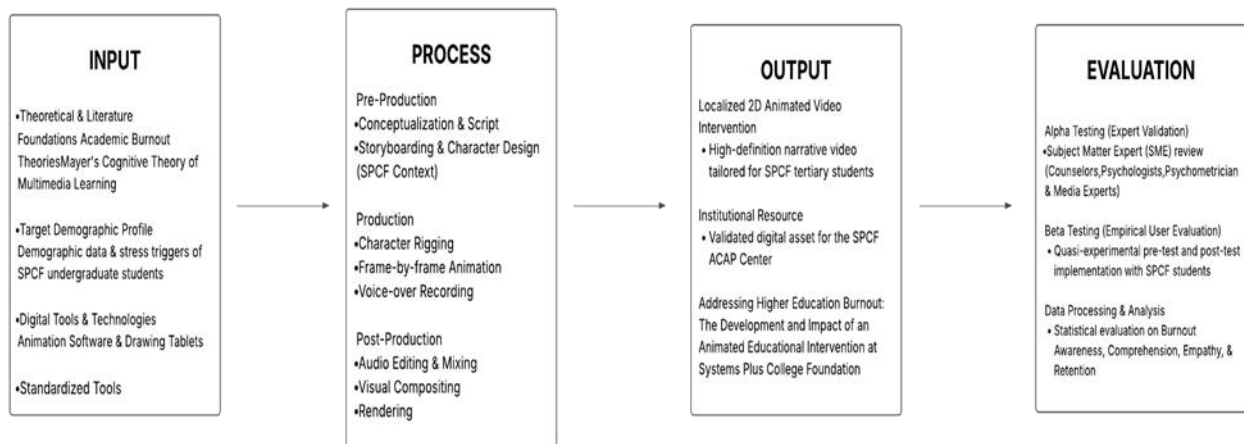


Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework highlighting the input, process, output, and evaluation phases of the proposed study. The input consists of the foundational components required to design the video, including theoretical and literature foundations concerning academic burnout and Mayer's Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning. These inputs also encompass the target demographic profile, focusing on demographic data and stress triggers of SPCF undergraduate students, as well as the necessary digital tools and technologies like animation software and drawing tablets, alongside standardized tools.

The process follows a three-phase animation pipeline consisting of pre-production, production, and post-production. Pre-production involves conceptualization and scriptwriting, along with storyboarding and character design tailored to the SPCF context. The production phase covers character rigging, frame-by-frame animation, and voice-over recording. Post-production completes the pipeline with audio editing and mixing, visual compositing, and rendering.

The direct output of this process is a localized 2D animated video intervention, featuring a high-definition narrative video tailored for SPCF tertiary students. This output also serves as a validated institutional resource for the SPCF ACAP Center. To ensure its effectiveness, a comprehensive evaluation phase is conducted. This includes alpha testing for expert validation by subject matter experts such as counselors, psychologists, psychometricians, and media experts. This is complemented by beta testing through a quasi-experimental pre-test and post-test empirical user evaluation with SPCF students. Finally, data processing and statistical analysis are utilized to evaluate the intervention's impact on burnout awareness, comprehension, empathy, and retention.

2.4 Synthesis

The reviewed literature and studies show that academic stress, coping strategies, and environmental factors are closely related to academic burnout. Heavy academic demands can lead to emotional exhaustion, reduced motivation, and decreased academic engagement, while adaptive coping strategies

and social support can help students manage stress more effectively (Pascoc et al., 2020; McClintock, 2022). Local studies also emphasize the importance of healthier coping behaviors among students (Robles et al., 2024).

These findings are supported by the insights of Sir Froilan Sibayan, a licensed psychometrician, who identified academic demands, poor time management, family problems, and responsibilities at home as common contributors to student burnout. He explained that burnout can result in exhaustion and decreased motivation, with signs such as absenteeism, declining academic performance, late submissions, and persistent tiredness even after adequate rest.

The literature also suggests that digital and audiovisual media can make complex topics such as stress and burnout more engaging and understandable. Similarly, Sir Froilan Sibayan emphasized that animated educational videos can effectively communicate mental health information because they are visually appealing, engaging, and accessible to different types of learners. He recommended grounding the intervention in reliable research and realistic student experiences while using appropriate humor to maintain engagement.

Sir Froilan Sibayan also highlighted the importance of time management, task prioritization, self-care, social support, and professional help in managing burnout. He recommended conducting surveys among SPCF students to identify their actual experiences and concerns, ensuring that the intervention reflects the needs of the local student population.

Overall, the literature and expert interview emphasize the need for an evidence-based and accessible approach to addressing student burnout. However, gaps remain in localized and burnout-focused interventions for Filipino college students. Therefore, the present study proposes an animated educational intervention that presents burnout and coping strategies in an engaging, research-based, and contextually relevant format for students at System Plus College Foundation.

SECTION III — RESEARCH DESIGN

Digital animation is now widely used for education, communication, and storytelling, serving as an effective medium to communicate complex psychoeducational concepts (Noetel et al., 2021). While traditional static materials often fail to sustain student attention on sensitive mental health topics, visual storytelling provides a dynamic and creative approach to help students process academic stress and burnout (Lanszki & Kunos, 2021; Haris et al., 2026). Therefore, this study explores how to design, produce, and evaluate an original, localized 2D narrative animation to support mental health literacy and adaptive coping mechanisms among tertiary students at Systems Plus College Foundation (SPCF).

To achieve this, the study will utilize a combination of a developmental research design and a quantitative quasi-experimental design. The developmental phase will strictly follow a three-stage animation pipeline comprising pre-production, production, and post-production to ensure the visual assets and character-driven narrative authentically reflect the localized SPCF campus environment. Subsequently, the evaluation phase will employ a quasi-experimental pre-test and post-test design during Beta Testing. Following an initial expert validation phase (Alpha Testing), this empirical user evaluation will quantitatively measure the intervention's effectiveness in improving SPCF students' burnout awareness, conceptual comprehension, empathy, and information retention.

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