



# What Is the Status of Academic Cynicism and Its Relationship with Academic Variables Among Kermanshah University of Medical Sciences Students?

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## Abstract

**Background:** Academic cynicism means feeling tired because of demands and being pessimistic and unwilling about the texts and assignments.

**Objectives:** The present study aimed to determine the correlation among academic cynicism and academic variables among Kermanshah University of Medical Sciences (KUMS) students.

**Methods:** This cross-sectional study was conducted among 288 KUMS students in 2018, who were collected using simple random sampling method proportional to the selected sample size. The data were collected by a self-administered questionnaire and analyzed by nonparametric methods using SPSS Version 16.

**Results:** The mean score of academic cynicism was as much as  $11.48 \pm 3.50$ , indicating that the participants obtained 57.4% of the maximum score of academic cynicism. According to results, there was a significant and inverse correlation among academic cynicism and academic achievement ( $r = -0.195$ ). The mean rank of academic cynicism was significantly higher among MD students ( $P = 0.001$ ) and dentistry ( $P = 0.008$ ).

**Conclusions:** Students received more than half of the possible score for academic cynicism, which was significant and inversely affected academic achievement. Therefore, developing, implementing, and evaluating interventions are essential to prevent and reduce academic cynicism among students.

**Keywords:** Academic Cynicism, Academic Achievement, University Student, Kermanshah

## 1. Background

Students face many challenges in educational environments, which can negatively affect their motivation and academic performance (1). Academic cynicism is one of these challenges, which means feeling tired because of demands and being pessimistic feeling with no interest in the texts and assignments (2-4). In other words, Academic cynicism is a chronic stress response in students who are preoccupied with the requirements of the course, resulting from the difference between students' ability and what they expect of others in terms of academic achievement (2). In these situations, students are usually disinterested in the curriculum, reluctant to attend class regularly and participate in classroom activities. Therefore, they have frequent absences and experience feelings of inadequacy in

learning the curriculum (5). Academic cynicism is considered an important issue that affects all educational levels and wastes human resource and costs (6). There are also other long-term consequences in addition to the reduction of study time. For example, the student who develops these conditions when studying is less likely to be able to perform job tasks in the future (7). As Neumann points out, academic cynicism has various effects on students, including affecting students' relationship with the university, influencing their interest in pursuing their education, and being an essential tool to understand students' behaviors, such as academic performance during their studies (8). On the other hand, the growth of any society depends on its educational system, which can be efficient by focusing on the academic performance of learners in this regard. Fur-

thermore, identifying factors affecting academic achievement and performance of students creates a suitable approach for planning, development, and evolution of educational programs (9,10).

## 2. Objectives

Considering the importance of the subject and the lack of sufficient information at KUMS, this study aimed to determine the correlation among academic cynicism and academic variables among KUMS students.

## 3. Methods

This cross-sectional study was conducted among KUMS students in 2018. First, different faculties were divided into classes, and participants were selected randomly according to a simple random sampling method proportional to the size of each class. In this study, the data were collected by means of a self-administered questionnaire.

In the present study, the sample size was calculated using the following formula:

$$n = \frac{\sigma^2 \times Z_{1-\frac{\alpha}{2}}^2}{d^2} \quad (1)$$

The sample size required for this study was estimated at 346 based on the standard deviation of the dependent variable (academic cynicism), which is equal to 2.95 according to the pilot study findings and considering the significance level of 5% and the error rate of 0.15. There were 288 complete questionnaires (response rate of 83%) after removing incomplete forms.

Students were asked to complete a questionnaire consisting of three parts as a self-report instrument in this study. The first part was demographic and academic variables, including ten items of age, gender, marital status, level of study, living in a dormitory, being a native of Kermanshah province, school, semester of study, and occupation of parents.

The second part was related to the academic cynicism questionnaire. The Academic Burnout Questionnaire was introduced by Bresó et al. in 1997 (11). This section was a sub-scale of the academic burnout questionnaire consisting of 4 items, including: a. I have become less interested in my studies since my enrolment at the university; b. I have become less enthusiastic about my studies; c. I have become more cynical about using my studies; and d. I doubt the significance of my studies. This 4-item academic cynicism is scored based on a 5-point Likert scale from completely disagree to completely agree. The scores ranged from 4 to 20 so that the lower score indicated less academic cynicism.

In this study, the reliability coefficients for academic cynicism were calculated as 0.75. The face validity of the questionnaire was measured qualitatively. Therefore, individual face-to-face interviews were conducted with 12 experts, their comments were analyzed, and the necessary modification was performed.

The third part focused on measuring academic achievement among student. Hence, grade point average (GPA) was considered a criterion with a score between 0 and 20.

The data were analyzed in SPSS statistical software Version 16. The mean and standard deviation were used for descriptive statistics. The data normality was evaluated using the Shapiro-Wilk and Kruskal-Wallis tests, and non-parametric tests were utilized to analyze the data due to abnormal distribution. The Mann-Whitney U test was used to evaluate the correlation among academic cynicism and gender, occupation of father, being a native in Kermanshah Province, and living in a dormitory. The correlation among academic cynicism and school of study, level of education, and occupation of mother was investigated using the Kruskal-Wallis H test. Spearman's rank correlation coefficient was used to measure the correlation among academic cynicism and academic achievement. In addition, the correlation coefficient Kendall was utilized to determine the correlation among semester and academic achievement.

## 4. Results

The mean age of participants was as much as 22.73 years old (SD: 2.15), who ranged from 18 to 29 years old. Table 1 shows the status of backgrounds and academic variables among students.

The correlation, mean, and standard deviation for age, GPA, semester, and academic cynicism are shown in Table 2. According to this table, academic cynicism inversely affected academic achievement ( $r = -0.195$ ). Furthermore, academic achievement was inversely affected by semester ( $r = -0.101$ ).

Table 3 indicates the relationship among academic cynicism and gender, occupation of father, being a native of Kermanshah province, and living in a dormitory. According to the findings, academic cynicism has no significant correlation with the mentioned variables (Table 3).

The results revealed that the mean rank of academic cynicism was significantly relationship to the school of study and level of study. The academic cynicism average rank was significantly higher among students in dental school and professional doctoral students (Table 4).

**Table 1.** The Backgrounds and Academic Variables Among Students

Variables	No. (%)
<b>Gender</b>	
Female	159 (55.2)
Male	129 (55.8)
<b>School of study</b>	
Medicine	65 (22.6)
Dentistry	24 (8.3)
Pharmacy	20 (6.9)
Nursing and midwifery	67 (23.3)
Health and Nutrition	59 (20.5)
Allied medical sciences	53 (18.4)
<b>Level of study</b>	
Bachelor	169 (58.7)
Master	10 (3.5)
Professional doctorate	106 (36.8)
Un-answered	3 (1)
<b>Father job</b>	
Governmental	149 (51.7)
Self-job	137 (47.6)
Un-answered	2 (0.7)
<b>Mother job</b>	
Governmental	69 (24)
Self-job	47 (16.3)
Housewife	172 (59.7)
<b>Native of Kermanshah province</b>	
Yes	232 (80.6)
No	56 (19.4)
<b>Living in dormitory</b>	
Yes	99 (34.4)
No	189 (65.6)

## 5. Discussion

Based on the study findings, the mean score of academic cynicism was as much as  $11.48 \pm 3.50$ , indicating the participants obtained 57.4% of the maximum score of academic cynicism. Ghadampour et al. reported that the mean of academic cynicism was as much as 10.86 (12), which is consistent with the results of the present study. However, Zaregar et al. reported that the mean score of academic cynicism among students of Mahshid University of Medical Sciences was as much as 15.31, which is slightly higher than the findings of this study (13). Sadoughi and Markoubi, in Kashan University of Medical Sciences (14),

Ahookhosh and Alibeigi in Razi University students (15), Mohammadi et al. in Shiraz University of Medical Science (16), and Nemat-Tavousi and Ghahri Saremi in Islamic Azad University from South Tehran Branch (17) found findings relatively like the present study. These studies revealed that Iranian students achieved almost more than 50% of the possible score for academic cynicism. Educational planners should take these findings seriously, and identifying the factors affecting students' academic cynicism should be a priority for educational administrators in Iranian universities.

Academic cynicism was inversely correlated to academic achievement, and the results of similar studies confirmed these findings (12, 15). Ghadampour et al. found that controlling students' academic burnout can improve their academic motivation and performance, which is in line with the results of the present study (12). In addition, Ahookhosh and Alibeigi reported that students with higher GPAs have lower levels of academic cynicism (15). The lack of interest and motivation of unmotivated students lead to a reduction in their academic performance (17). Counseling teachers in universities play a unique role in identifying and assisting students who show disinterest in their education and field to provide appropriate interventions.

Sadoughi and Markoubi reported a significant relationship between academic cynicism and gender (14), which is not consistent with the present study. Thus, both genders should be considered in developing, implementing, and evaluating interventions correlated to the educational advancement of students.

Our results indicated that the mean rank of academic cynicism was significantly higher among doctorate students of dentistry. Long chapters of some academic disciplines with a large volume of material and long periods of university study can contribute to academic cynicism in students. Our findings also showed no statistically significant correlation among academic cynicism and variables such as a semester, occupation of parents, being a native of Kermanshah province, and living in a dormitory. These findings are consistent with those of Ahookhosh and Alibeigi (15).

One of the study limitations was being susceptible to biases such as nonresponse and recall bias because of the cross-sectional method used in this study. The other limitation was self-reporting data collection, which was usually prone to recall bias. However, these exaggerations were prevented as much as possible by stating the importance of the issue and encouraging the participants to provide detailed and honest answers.

**Table 2.** The Correlation, Mean, and Standard Deviation for Age, GPA, Semester, and Academic Cynicism

Variables	1	2	3	Mean $\pm$ SD	Range
Age	1			22.73 $\pm$ 2.15	18 - 29
GPA	0.080	1		15.08 $\pm$ 1.29	11 - 20
Semester	0.039	-0.101 <sup>a</sup>	1	4.75 $\pm$ 1.36	1 - 10
Academic cynicism	0.001	-0.195 <sup>b</sup>	0.021	11.48 $\pm$ 3.50	4 - 20

<sup>a</sup>  $P < 0.05$ <sup>b</sup>  $P < 0.01$ **Table 3.** The Relationship Among Academic Cynicism and Gender, Father's Job, Being a Native of Kermanshah Province, and Living in a Dormitory

Variables	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Mann-Whitney U	Wilcoxon W	Z	P
<b>Gender</b>			10125.00	18510.000	-0.187	0.852
Female	145.32	23106.00				
Male	143.49	18510.00				
<b>Father job</b>			10087.500	21262.500	-0.171	0.864
Governmental	142.70	21262.50				
Self-job	144.37	19778.50				
<b>Native of Kermanshah</b>			6149.00	7745.000	-0.623	0.533
Yes	146.00	23871.00				
No	138.30	7745.00				
<b>Living in dormitory</b>			27163.00	27163.500	-0.220	0.826
Yes	145.98	14452.50				
No	143.72	27163.50				

**Table 4.** The Relationship Among Academic Cynicism and School of Study, Level of Study and Mothers Job

Variables	Mean Rank	Chi-Square	df	P
<b>School of study</b>		15.752	5	0.008
Medicine	144.40			
Dentistry	179.08			
Pharmacy	170.55			
Nursing and midwifery	119.84			
Health and nutrition	133.28			
Allied medical sciences	162.80			
<b>Level of study</b>		13.073	2	0.001
Bachelor	140.20			
Master	59.10			
Professional doctorate	155.37			
<b>Mothers job</b>		3.088	2	0.214
Governmental	146.91			
Self-job	125.15			
Housewife	148.82			

### 5.1. Conclusions

Students received more than half of the possible score for academic cynicism, which was inversely related to academic achievement. Developing, implementing, and evaluating interventions are essential to prevent and reduce academic cynicism among students.

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### Footnotes

**Authors' Contribution:** MMA, CJ, and FJ designed the research and wrote the manuscript. SHF collected data and wrote the manuscript. FJ analyzed the data and edited the manuscript. NMA and FB were contribution in drafting of the manuscript. All authors read and approved the edited manuscript.

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