

Frequency of Academic Failure and its Associated Factors From the Perspectives of Students of Zabol University of Medical Sciences in 2016

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Abstract

Academic failure among university students is taken into account as the main damage inflicted upon an education system which can also occur in all levels of education. The present study was of descriptive-analytical approach and cross-sectional research type conducted in the first semester of 2016-2017 academic year on 306 students of Zabol University of Medical Sciences selected based on stratified random sampling method with proportional allocation. According to the results of this study, the most important causes of academic failure among university students were associated with educational(4.21), personal(4.17), and familial factors(3.96). There was also a statistically significant relationship between gender, marital status, place of residence, students' levels of education, parental education, as well as household monthly income and personal, familial, and educational factors.

It was concluded that taking educational environment and content into account as well as holding educational workshops on curriculum design and study skills could prevent academic failure among university students as well as waste of time and existing costs in educational centers and consequently lead to improvement and development of education system in Iran.

Keywords: *Academic failure Education, personal factors, educational factors, familial factors*

1. Introduction

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has defined the concept of academic failure as grade repetition, early academic dropout, and reduced academic and educational quality among individuals [1]. Ongoing and continuous assessment of students' academic status during their education is also considered as one of the necessary and inevitable foundations of improved quality in education

system especially within universities which can be performed through comparing average scores acquired by university students at different periods. This issue can thus have a significant effect on developing better educational programs, improving quality in education, and finally correcting and improving the efficiency of relevant authorities. Shedding light on this issue is likewise of utmost importance across the world [2]. Given the results of studies in this respect, about 12% of students enrolled in universities of medical sciences go through academic probation at least for one semester during their academic years which not only can lead to mental problems among these students but also expose them to the risks of expulsion in terms of their academic achievement [3]. Lack of monitoring for academic failure among university students can also result in negligence as well as waste of resources, time, and costs which finally lead to reduced educational productivity. This issue can as well make Iran's education system farther from the predicted goals and discard capitals and opportunities [4]. Furthermore, lots of university students especially those enrolled in universities of medical sciences may be encountered by troubles such as depression, anxiety, chronic environmental stress, changes in lifestyle, work-related problems and also those associated with the field of study which can cause psychological trauma and academic failure [5].

Besides, academic failure contains different aspects including repeated absence from classes, early dropout, grade repetition, or low quality in education [6]. In this regard, academic failure among students enrolled in universities of medical sciences is of utmost importance because if these university students are not well-educated, they will critically demonstrate this problem due to their occupational sensitivity and their roles in public health in a way that such students will have poor academic performance in hospitals and healthcare centers following their academic failure that cannot be sometimes

recompensed [7]. In this respect, the results of a study in Britain suggested that academic failure among students of dentistry had led to reduced quality of dental services [8]. The results of the related studies on the academic status of university students similarly confirmed the impact of factors such as intervening demographic and psychological characteristics on students' academic behaviors which could prevent academic failure and improve quality in education. Moreover, these effective factors could be analytically classified as follows:

The demographics factors included age, gender, academic records, interest in field of study, marital status, as well as socioeconomic status such as occupation, place of residence, parental education, financial ability of an individual, and responsibility in family.

As well, the educational factors were comprised of hours of study by students and their academic status. Since no comprehensive studies had been conducted on the causes of academic failure within Zabol University of Medical Sciences, the purpose of the present study was to determine the factors affecting academic failure among students enrolled in Zabol University of Medical Sciences in Iran.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was of descriptive-analytical approach and cross-sectional research type which was conducted in the first semester of 2016-2017 academic year. The statistical population included 1460 university students (300 students from the School of Public Health, 350 individuals from the School of Paramedics, 200 students from the School of Medicine, 230 individuals from the School of Pharmacology, and 380 students from the School of Nursing and Midwifery) enrolled in Zabol University of Medical Sciences who had spent at least one full academic semester and also enrolled in the given university during the present study. Using Krejcie and Morgan Table, 306 students were selected as the study sample and thus the estimated number of samples from the students of Schools of Medicine, Pharmacology, Nursing and Midwifery, Public Health, and Paramedics through the stratified random sampling method with proportional allocation was equal to 42, 48, 80, 63 and 73 students; respectively. To determine the content and the face validity, the questionnaire was submitted to three faculty members and their revisions were implemented. In the next step, the given questionnaire was randomly distributed among 20 university students and its internal reliability (94%) was confirmed via Cronbach's alpha coefficient. In order to observe the research ethics, participation in the study was voluntary and the personal characteristics of the given students were not included in the questionnaires.

Tukey's post-hoc test and Pearson correlation coefficient were also used for data analysis. The 0.05 significance level was also considered in this study.

3. RESULTS

Out of the total number of 306 questionnaires distributed, all were completed and returned by the university students. Based on the findings, the mean age and the GPA of the study participants were 22.56 ± 1.07 and 16.38 ± 2.49 ; respectively. In addition, 51% of the students were female and 40.2% of them were male. As well, 51% of students were residing in dormitories and most of them were unemployed and enrolled in undergraduate levels. The bulk of the students were spending between one and three hours a day for study. The parental education was also divided based on illiteracy, elementary and junior high school degree, high school degree, and university degree. In this respect, the most frequent level of education among fathers was university degree (34.6%) and the most frequent one among mothers was associated with high school degree (34.3). In terms of household monthly income, 33.7% of families had an income less than one million tomans (about 280 dollars), 50.3% of families received between one and two million tomans (about 280-560 dollars), and the rest had an income higher than two million tomans (about 560 dollars). Considering employment, 31.7% of fathers were employed and 73.9% of mothers were housewives (Table 1). The mean and the standard deviation scores assigned to the items of the causes of academic failure were also illustrated in Table 2. According to the attitudes of students, educational factors with a mean of 4.21 were ranked the first, personal factors assigned with a mean of 4.17 were placed in the second ranking, and familial factors with a mean of 3.96 were ranked the third. Considering the items associated with educational factors, three important causes of academic failure in this respect were low quality in education (4.82), inappropriate educational program (4.75), and unsuitable teaching methods adopted by lecturers (4.73). In terms of personal factors, lack of planning (4.47), inadequate study skills (4.7), and emotional-psychological problems were highlighted (4.58). Moreover; insufficient parent-child relationships (4.62), household's low socioeconomic levels (4.57), as well as conflicts with parents or other family members (4.53) received the highest importance among the items related to familial factors. Given the results of the independent t-test, there was a statistically significant relationship between gender, place of residence, marital status, as well as university students' employment status and personal, familial, and educational factors.

In this respect, the mean scores of personal and educational factors among male students were higher than those among female individuals; however, the female students received higher mean scores in the domain of familial factors. Moreover, university students residing in dormitories and unemployed ones had higher scores concerning educational and familial factors. As well, single individuals had scored higher than the married ones in terms of the personal factors. Nevertheless, there was no statistically significant relationship between mother's occupation and the given factors affecting academic failure (Table 3). According to the results of the one-way ANOVA, a statistically significant relationship was observed between university students' level of education, parental education, as well as household monthly income and personal, familial, and educational factors. Based on Tukey's post-hoc test, the mean score of all the three given factors among undergraduate students having parents with university degrees and a monthly income between one and two million tomans (280-560 dollars) was more than those of other groups. There was also a statistically significant difference between daily amount of study and educational factors. The results of Tukey's post-hoc test also suggested that the mean score of the educational factors among students with more than 3 hours of study per day was higher than those in other groups; however, no relationship was found with personal and familial factors in this respect. No statistically significant difference was similarly observed between father's occupation and the given factors affecting academic failure (Table 3). Furthermore, the findings of Pearson correlation coefficient revealed no significant relationship between age, GPA, and the personal, familial, and educational factors (Table 3).

4. DISCUSSION

In the domain of familial factors; lack of parent-child relationships, low socioeconomic levels, and conflicts with parents were illustrated as the most important factors. Death of one parent or living in a single-parent family, improper expectations by families, imposed thinking, and insufficient experiences by parents or their inattention to their children's education were viewed as low-priority factors affecting academic failure from the attitudes of these university students. In this respect, Amin Far [23] noted disputes and disagreements between parents and students and the manner of relationships between students and their siblings and being inspired by them as factors affecting academic failure that were in line with the findings of the present study. They also argued that the socio-economic status of families, poverty, and lack of adequate and healthy food could have a direct impact on

academic failure. In the study by Dehbozorgi and Mooseli [24], the role of parents was regarded of utmost importance in individuals' academic achievement that was in agreement with the results of the present study. The purpose of this study was to investigate the causes of academic failure among students enrolled in Zabol University of Medical Sciences in Iran. In this regard, the findings of the present study suggested that the most important causes of academic failure highlighted by the given university students were educational, personal, and familial factors; respectively. In the investigation by Jebraeily et al [11], Dehcheshmeh et al [12], as well as Vanhanen and Janhonen [13], the highest score was also related to educational factors.

Therefore, relevant university authorities are recommended to provide the necessary facilities, revise the educational program, and distribute study subject units appropriately in different semesters. Moreover, the most influential factors in the domain of educational factors were poor quality in education, inadequate educational program, and inappropriate teaching methods adopted by lecturers. In this respect, factors such as unfriendly classroom environment, students' regional language and culture, and poor relationships with classmates were considered among the least important factors affecting academic failure. These findings were consistent with the results of studies by Dehcheshmeh et al.

[12] conducted at Shahrekord University of Medical Sciences as well as those in the investigation by Vanhanen and Janhonen [13] examining the causes of academic failure among nursing students. Besides, the results obtained [14-15] in which teaching methods adopted by lecturers had been regarded as the major factors affecting the understanding of curriculum content confirmed the findings of the present study. Anderson [16] also assumed the inappropriateness of goals and educational contents as well as professional characteristics of lecturers as the significant causes of academic failure and concluded that any modifications and improvements in the quality of education was directly correlated with the quality of teaching by these lecturers. Moreover, Afrooz [17] noted concise educational programs and lack of textbooks as the educational factors influencing academic failure which was in line with the results of the present study. In terms of the items associated with personal factors and according to students' attitudes; lack of planning, inadequate study skills, and emotional-psychological problems were assigned with the highest scores concerning academic failure and the lowest scores were related to factors such as relationships with opposite sex, marriage, perfectionism, and inattention to realities. Moniri et al. [18] as well considered study methods and planning for learning as well as attention among the factors affecting academic

achievement which were in agreement with the findings of the present study. Najimi et al [19] as well as Walberge and Uguroglu [20] also referred to lack of self-confidence and no interest in the field of study and Damashek [21] and Tovar and Simon [22] highlighted lack of interest in education among the personal factors affecting academic failure. These results were not consistent with the findings of the present study. Aghamirzayi and Salehi Omran [25] also shed light on parents' socioeconomic status (occupation, level of education) as a factor affecting academic success or failure which was consistent with the findings of the present study [26-30]. Academic failure in American talented university students in terms of personal, social, psychological factors as well as familial and educational ones and argued that the greatest impact in terms of social and personal factors was related to emotional problems or immaturity and the least effective factor was associated with inability in general or special learning. Considering educational factors, lack of study skills was reported as the factor affecting academic failure that was consistent with the results of the present study. However, lack of interest in the field of study and relationships with the opposite sex received the lowest scores in the study by Kaskaloglu which was not consistent with the findings of the present study in terms of lack of interest in the field of study. Given the relationships with the opposite sex, the results were in line with those obtained in the present study. Furthermore, Najimi et al [19] stated that educational factors, teaching factors, learning environment, family conditions, and socioeconomic status were respectively conceived as the most important factors affecting academic failure. Besides, Cornilous [32] showed that the economic status was correlated with academic failure and students living in families with a good economic status were endowed with higher academic motivation which was in line with the findings of the present study. In the present study, the relationship between demographic and familial characteristics and the causes of academic failure among the university students was examined. In this respect, there was a statistically significant relationship between personal, familial, and educational factors and the university students' gender which was consistent with the results of investigations [15, 19, 33-41]. In most of the studies, academic failure among male students was reported higher than that in females and it was concluded that female individuals had made more efforts in terms of education and academic achievement and male individuals were more interested in entertainment and sports [42-43] that was in accordance with the results of the present study but in contrast with the findings in the investigations [17-18,35,44-48] also found a statistically significant relationship between place of residence and causes of

academic failure. It was also noted that residence in dormitories was one of the stressors encountered by some university students during their education and any changes in the living conditions could generally increase stress and psychological pressure. Moreover, living away from family and incompatibility with other people in that environment could occupy some parts of the thinking power of students which could lead to reduced educational efforts. These results were consistent with the findings of the present study but such factors had not been confirmed in the results of studies [33, 45, 47-50]. According to the study by Tavakoli et al. [51], there was a relationship between household income, mother's level of education, and causes of academic failure that were in agreement with the findings of the present study. No relationship was also found between factors such as age, mother's occupation, marital status, as well as parental education and academic failure which was in line with the results of the present study in terms of age and mother's occupation, but contradicted the findings concerning marital status and parental education. In their studies indicated no statistical differences between age and causes of academic failure which was not consistent with the findings of the present study [38, 46-48, 52-53]. However, the results were in line with the findings of the present study in which age was not considered by itself as the factor affecting academic failure rather associated issues in this regard were taken into account that could reinforce the effect of this factor [33, 54-55]. In a systematic investigation by Azari et al [56] the role of demographic factors such as gender, status of residence, and marital status were illustrated as effective factors which also confirmed the findings of the present study. Nazari and Sharifinia [57] likewise conducted a research study on nursing students and suggested being married, living in a dormitory, and low levels of parental education as the insignificant factors affecting academic failure which were not in agreement with the results of the present study. In the study by Dastranj et al [47] conducted on students enrolled in Payam Noor University in Iran, parental education and occupation were considered as insignificant factors which were inconsistent with the findings of the present study. However, household income was correlated with causes of academic failure that was in line with the results of this research study. Since father's occupation could have a direct effect on the economic status of families and indirectly on the development of children's education, thus parental occupation could be correlated with the causes of academic failure which was in line with the results of investigations [37].

Stevenson [58] and in contrast with the findings of studies by Pordanjani et al [44] and Alikhani et al [46]. Parental education was similarly taken into account as an important factor affecting the development of children’s education. parents with higher levels of education could be a more Successful model for their children’s performance which was consistent with the findings also suggested the effect of level of education on academic failure which was in line with the results of the present study [36-37, 46, 59]. Furthermore, Habibzadeh et al [50] reported a statistical correlation between the daily amount of study and causes of academic failure which was consistent with the findings of the study by Izadi Sabet et al [59]. A study plan for at least two hours a day is taken into account among the study

skills; therefore, there is a need to hold educational workshops on study skills for university students especially those who are experiencing academic failure. It should be noted that university students need to learn the right study methods and memory-enhancing techniques in order to achieve better results. Furthermore, the role of the counselors can be also of utmost importance in terms of identifying and dealing with problems and also providing appropriate teaching methods. Finally, Hazvaye et al [15] focused on demographic factors as the significant causes of academic failure based on the attitudes of students enrolled in Hamedan University of Medical Sciences in Iran which somewhat corresponded with results of the present study.

5. Tables

Table 1

Demographic variables	frequency (percentage)	demographic variables	frequency (percentage)
gender		father’s education	
female	183 (59.8)	illiterate	81 (26.5)
male	123 (40.2)	primary school and junior high school degree	51 (16.7)
level of education		high school degree	68 (22.2)
associate’s degree	38 (12.4)	university degree	106 (34.6)
bachelor’s degree	178 (58.2)	mother’s education	
master’s degree and PhD degree	90 (29.4)	illiterate	58 (19)
place of residence		primary school and junior high school degree	70 (22.9)
dormitory	156 (51)	high school degree	105 (34.3)
non-dormitory	150 (49)	university degree	73 (23.8)
marital status		university student’s occupation	
single	202 (65)	employed	45 (14.7)
married	104 (35)	unemployed	261 (85.3)
household monthly income		father’s occupation	
less than one million tomans (about 280 dollars)	103 (33.7)	employee	97 (31.7)
between one and two million tomans (about 280-560 dollars)	154 (50.3)	worker	86 (28.1)
more than two million tomans (about 560 dollars)	49 (15)	self-employed	53 (17.3)
daily amount of study		unemployed	70 (22.9)
less than one hour	30 (9.8)	mother’s occupation	
between one and three hours	197 (64.4)	housewife	226 (73.9)
more than three hours	79 (25,8)	employed	80 (26.1)
mean (standard deviation)			
age	22.56 (1.07)		
grade point average (GPA)	16.38 (2.49)		

Table 2

Components	items	completely agree	agree	neutral	disagree	completely disagree	mean	standard deviation
personal factors	socio-behavioral problems	192	84	30	0	0	4.53	0.67
	emotional-psychological problems	188	110	5	3	0	4.58	0.57
	inadequate study skills	239	52	7	8	0	4.7	0.64
	lack of self-confidence	156	150	0	0	0	4.5	0.5
	no interest in the field of study	149	155	2	0	0	4.48	0.51
	no planning	239	57	8	2	0	4.47	0.58
	non-educational activities (research-based, cultural, sport-related, ...)	170	95	39	2	0	4.41	0.52
	inability in general and special learning	166	140	0	0	0	4.54	0.5
	slow progress	139	85	0	36	46	3.77	1
	high dependency on family	175	120	0	11	0	4.5	0.58
	perfectionism and inattention to existing realities	121	61	0	77	47	3.43	1.06
	relationship with opposite sex	97	65	0	85	59	3.18	1.19
	employment and its associated problems	128	67	0	54	57	3.51	1.1
	marriage	114	51	3	75	63	3.25	0.99
educational fatigue	176	100	30	0	0	4.47	0.67	
total							4.17	0.78
familial factors	dysfunctional family and conflicts with parents	132	153	0	20	1	4.29	0.9
	death of one parent or having a single-parent family	98	43	0	86	79	2.98	1.01
	parents' low level of education	143	155	0	5	3	4.4	0.72
	low socio-economic level of family	176	130	0	0	0	4.57	0.48
	parents' inadequate experiences or their inattention to their children's education	100	45	0	91	70	3.04	0.99
	insufficient parent-child relationships	140	129	7	15	15	4.19	0.97
	insufficient family-university relationships	189	117	0	0	0	4.62	0.5
	conflicts with parents or other family members	165	140	1	0	0	4.53	0.56
	improper expectations and imposed thinking	72	69	20	78	67	3	1
total							3.96	0.79
educational factors	lack of motivation among talented university students	167	68	10	50	11	4.08	0.91
	low quality of education	250	56	0	0	0	4.82	0.41
	inadequate support and provision of educational, research, and welfare facilities	148	139	0	12	7	4.34	0.67
	no accommodation of educational needs	155	151	0	0	0	4.51	0.73
	poor student-lecturer	147	162	3	0	0	4.55	0.8

	relationships							
	poor relationships with classmates	90	106	2	32	76	3.33	1.6
	no healthy and competitive environment	149	107	0	1	49	4	0.93
	unfriendly classroom environment	89	77	15	61	64	3.21	1.2
	wrong assessment of student performance	160	103	0	25	18	4.18	0.88
	inappropriate teaching methods by lecturers	224	81	1	0	0	4.73	0.41
	inappropriate educational program	229	77	0	0	0	4.75	0.37
	inappropriate physical environment of university	198	85	5	13	10	4.51	0.74
	no relationship between study subjects and students' values and abilities	215	78	3	10	0	4.63	0.69
	no relationship between study subject units in the field of study and future employment	179	120	1	2	4	4.53	0.77
	unattractive educational contents	183	101	0	10	12	4.41	0.89
	issue of regional language and culture among students	100	89	0	23	94	3.25	1
	poor concentration in classroom	140	95	0	18	53	3.82	0.89
	poor general attitudes towards course lecturers	189	52	0	20	45	4.04	0.97
	no development of standard questions by lecturers	152	139	1	7	7	4.38	0.81
	total						4.21	0.63

Table 3

variables	educational factors	familial factors	personal factors
gender	P=0.018	P<0.001	P=0.038
level of education	P=0.03	P<0.001	P=0.005
place of residence	P=0.025	P=0.045	P=0.024
marital status	P=0.011	P<0.001	P<0.001
father's education	P=0.014	P=0.03	P=0.026
mother's education	P=0.019	P<0.001	P=0.01
household monthly income	P=0.027	P=0.044	P<0.001
father's occupation	P=0.062	P=0.057	P=0.125
mother's occupation	P=0.045	P=0.881	P=0.194
daily amount of study	P=0.625	P=0.56	P=0.041
age	P=0.234	P=0.129	P=0.296
grade point average (GPA)	P=0.65	P=0.518	P=0.41

4. Conclusions

As a whole; gender, marital status, place of residence, parental education, household income, daily amount of study, and father's occupation were taken into account as the significant factors affecting academic failure among university students. Thus, the relevant university authorities in the department of education were suggested to reconsider educational programs, employ experienced educational counselors in terms of academic counseling in order to deal with the existing problems, remove the obstacles, and also provide university students with services of good quality. Given the high rate of academic failure among university students, there is a need to identify the individuals at risk and provide them with effective solutions from the very beginning in order to have more skilled human resources in society.

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