Education and Exploration in Learning, Behavior and Cognition Open Access

Winter (2025) 1 (1): 1-4

https://doi.org/: 10.30473/elc.2026.77244.1003

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

A Structural Model of the Hidden Curriculum and Academic Interest with the Mediating Roles of Academic Adjustment and Academic Resilience

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Receive Date: 02/Oct/2025
Revise Date: 24/Oct/2025
Accept Date: 27/Nov/2025
Publish Date: 22/Dec/2025

How to cite:
Darabi Emarati, A. Shahmohammadi, A & Faryadras, L. (2025). A Structural Model of the Hidden Curriculum and Academic Interest with the Mediating Roles of Academic Adjustment and Academic Resilience, *Education and Exploration in Learning, Behavior and Cognition*, 1 (1), 1-4. (https://doi.org/: 10.30473/elc.2026.77244.1003)

A B S T R A C T

The purpose of this study was to investigate the fit of the conceptual model of educational interest based on the hidden curriculum, with the mediating role of educational adaptation and educational resilience of students, with the empirical model. The research method was descriptive-correlational structural equation modeling. The statistical population was all female students of the first year of high school in Nahavand, numbering 3157 people. 345 people were selected as samples using multi-stage cluster random sampling. The research tools were Sheikhi's Hidden Curriculum Questionnaire (2009), Rotgans's Academic Interests (2015), Sinha and Singh's Educational Resilience (1993), and Samuels's Educational Resilience (2004). Pearson correlation and structural equations were used to analyze the data using SPSS 26 and SmartPLS 4 software. The findings showed that the hidden curriculum has a direct and positive effect on educational resilience, educational adjustment, and academic interest. Additionally, educational resilience and educational adjustment have direct and positive effects on academic interest. The mediating role of educational resilience and educational adjustment in the relationship between the hidden curriculum and academic interest is significant. Given the model's favorable fit, it can be inferred that explaining academic interest requires a comprehensive view of environmental factors (the hidden curriculum) and individual-adaptive characteristics. These results emphasize the importance of re-examining the informal aspects of education to facilitate academic adjustment and promote students' academic resilience.

K E Y W O R D S

Hidden Curriculum, Academic Interest, Educational Adaptation, Educational Resilience.

Introduction

A significant educational issue for schools and teachers is a lack of academic interest and school dropout (Gholami & Sedrpoushan, 2021). Academic interest is recognized as one of the key factors in the student learning process, which can have a direct impact on their motivation and engagement (Akbarzadeh Fesandooz, 2023). Academic interest refers to an individual's inclination and motivation to learn and acquire knowledge in a specific field, and it plays a significant role in choosing a field of study (Zabanan, 2024). The school's educational environment, with all its features, is entirely focused on instruction. Regardless of the teachers' level of expertise and will, or the advancement of the curriculum, students are, in reality, exposed to something that has never been previously addressed (Wessel-Powell et al. 2019; Hernandez & Flores, 2019). One type of curriculum that influences academic interest is the hidden curriculum, which is designed and implemented by curriculum designers and planners to educate and develop learners. This curriculum is formal and largely approved by educational authorities (Roofe, 2018). In recent years, considerable attention has been paid to the topic of educational resilience, as it falls within the field of positive psychology, which focuses on the study and development of individuals (Sadeghi Shadkam, 2023). School resilience is one of the modern approaches to enhancing the quality of education. Promoting students' resilience means the ability to manage daily stress and to be familiar with coping skills for difficult situations (Bahmani, 2023). Srem-Sai et al (2025) in a study showed that there is a relationship between academic resilience, academic motivation, and academic interest. Behmanesh et al. (2025) in a study showed that there is a significant relationship between the hidden curriculum and academic resilience. Hopkins et al. (2024) showed that the hidden curriculum affects academic adjustment. Afdhalia & Suherman (2024) in their research showed that there is a relationship between academic adjustment and academic interest. Gündüz & Gündogdu (2023) in a study showed that the hidden curriculum can increase students' academic interest. The research by Namazi & Masjoudi (2023) showed that there is a relationship between academic resilience and academic interest.

Based on the theoretical foundations and the background presented, this study seeks to answer the question of whether the conceptual model of academic interest, grounded in the hidden curriculum and mediating the students' academic adjustment and academic resilience, fits the empirical model adequately.

Materials and Methods

This research is applied in terms of its purpose and descriptive-correlational in terms of its methodology and data collection, of the structural equation type. Additionally, it is considered a quantitative study based on the type of data. The statistical population of the study was all female middle school students in the city of Nahavand during the 2022-2023 academic year, totaling 3,157 individuals. Of this number, 1,083 students were in the first grade, 1,101 students were in the second grade, and 973 students were in the third grade. To determine the sample size, 345 individuals were selected as the statistical sample using the multi-stage cluster random sampling method. Of this number, 115 were in the first cycle of high school, 115 in the second cycle, and 115 in the third cycle. Four questionnaires were used to collect data: the hidden curriculum questionnaire by Sheikhi (2009), the academic interest questionnaire by Rotgans (2015), the academic adjustment questionnaire by Sinha and Singh (1993), and the academic resilience questionnaire by Samuels (2004). Structural equation modeling was used to analyze the data, employing SPSS 26 and SmartPLS 4 software.

Results and Discussion

The findings showed that the relationship between the hidden curriculum and academic resilience (0.895) and the relationship between the hidden curriculum and academic interest (0.755) are direct, significant, and at a strong level. The relationship between academic adjustment and academic interest (0.398) is direct, significant, and at a moderate level. The relationship between the hidden curriculum and academic adjustment (0.146) and the relationship between academic

resilience and academic interest (0.157) are direct, significant, and of low magnitude. Also, the relationship between the hidden curriculum and academic interest with the mediating role of academic resilience (0.140) and the indirect relationship between the hidden curriculum and academic interest via the mediating role of academic adjustment (0.058) are non-direct, significant, and weak. The effect size values indicate that the effect size of the hidden curriculum on academic resilience (4.021), the effect size of the hidden curriculum on academic adjustment (0.490) and the effect size of the hidden curriculum on academic interest (1.500) are large, while the effect size of educational resilience on academic interest (0.049) and the effect size of educational adaptability on academic interest (0.070) are small.

The variables of academic interest, educational adjustment, and educational resilience have an adequate and appropriate R^2 for the research model, and these variables explain 92.6%, 32.7%, and 80.0% of the variance related to the research model, respectively. All values of the Stone and Giser Q^2 index are positive and large, indicating the high predictive power of the research model. The model's goodness-of-fit value was obtained as 0.702, which indicates a strong overall fit of the model.

Conclusions

This research was conducted to answer the question of whether the conceptual model of academic interest, based on the hidden curriculum with the mediating roles of students' academic adjustment and academic resilience, has a good fit with the empirical model. The results obtained from the data analysis showed that the hidden curriculum has a direct and significant effect on academic interest. This finding is consistent with the findings of Gündüz & Gündogdu (2023), Free & Križ (2022), Petherick (2018). The importance and quality of the hidden curriculum influence students' interest in learning. When the content and activities are designed to align with students' interests and preferences, it leads to an increased interest and motivation for learning.

Another finding was that academic resilience has a direct and significant effect on academic interest. This finding is consistent with the findings of Namazi & Masjoudi (2023) and Shahbazi et al. (2023). An individual with higher levels of academic resilience understands and applies important abilities necessary for academic success. Academic resilience identifies and enhances an individual's ability to cope with constraints, pressures, learning deficits, and various situations in the academic domain.

The findings showed that educational adjustment has a direct and significant effect on academic interest. This result is consistent with the findings of Afdhalia & Suherman (2024) and Fallahi (2021). Multiple factors influence the relationship between academic adjustment and students' academic interest. For example, teaching and learning methods tailored to individuals' needs and interests contribute to improved academic adjustment. Additionally, considering the types of characteristics and learning styles of students is also crucial and can facilitate improved academic adjustment.

The next finding of the research was that the hidden curriculum has a direct and significant effect on academic resilience. This result is consistent with the findings of Behmanesh et al. (2025) and Free & Križ (2022). To explain these findings, it can be said that one of the main advantages of the hidden curriculum is the strengthening of academic resilience. The hidden curriculum causes students to view mistakes as an opportunity for learning and improvement, based on their own reflection. In this way, students understand and develop important skills such as flexibility, collaboration, creative thinking, and decision-making, which help them face successes and challenges in life.

Another finding of the study was that the hidden curriculum has a direct and significant effect on academic adjustment. This result is consistent with the findings of Hopkins et al (2024) and Tahmasbzadeh (2017). The hidden curriculum helps students actively participate in the learning process, establish a deeper connection with the presented material, and ultimately achieve academic adjustment. The results obtained regarding the mediating variables showed that academic resilience and academic adjustment, as mediating variables, directly and significantly predict the relationship between the hidden curriculum and interest in education.
Based on the findings of this study, it is suggested that curricula be designed to implicitly reinforce factors such as academic interest, educational resilience, and academic adjustment, and to use active teaching methods and engage students actively in order to stimulate academic interest and increase resilience and adjustment.

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