



FORMAN CHRISTIAN COLLEGE

(A CHARTERED UNIVERSITY)

“Influence of Social Anxiety on the Perceived Academic Performance of University Students”

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SOCL 499

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Contents

Abstract.....	3
Introduction	4
Significance of Study	5
Literature Review	6
Theoretical Framework.....	8
Methodology.....	9
Ethics of Research	9
Research Design	9
Research Question	9
Hypothesis.....	9
Conceptualization and Operationalization	9
Survey.....	10
Sample.....	10
Data Collection.....	10
Data Analysis.....	11
Results.....	12
Socio-demographic Characteristics.....	12
Social anxiety:	13
Academic performance:.....	14
Simple linear regression.....	15
Discussion.....	16
Concluding recommendations	18
Limitation of study	18
Conclusion.....	19
References	19
Appendix A: IRB Certificate	23
Appendix B: Informed Cover Letter	24
Appendix C: Survey	25

Abstract

Social anxiety is a behavioral problem associated with fear or anxiety about social interactions. Scholarship suggests that university students may suffer from social anxiety, which leads to poor academic performance. This study aims to find the relationship between social anxiety and the academic performance of university students at Forman Christian College (Chartered University). For the theoretical framework, Spielberger's theory of anxiety is used which suggests individuals with certain levels of anxiety feel difficulty while performing efficiently. This research is quantitative and for data collection, a purposive sampling technique has been used. The targeted population was 200 university students from Forman Christian College (A Chartered University) while 150 students filled out the online survey. The scales used to measure social anxiety are the Zung self-rating anxiety scale (SAS) (971) with a Cronbach alpha value of 0.911 and the Academic Performance Scale by Birchmeier and colleagues (2023) with a Cronbach alpha of 0.820. Simple linear regression result shows that there is a significant relationship between social anxiety and academic performance with a p-value of .001, which means when social anxiety is high academic performance is low. Research can be done in the future, to assess does social anxiety only affects the verbal performance of students or if it also has an effect on written performance. Gender differences can be assessed by whether the ratio varies in men or women or does social anxiety is common in the overall population.

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to determine the effect of social anxiety on the academic performance of university students. Many factors influence the academic performance of university students and social anxiety is one of them. The variable "social anxiety" is important as it is a behavioral problem, and it is a factor that is often overlooked and harms academic performance (Russel & Topham, 2012).

Social anxiety is a behavioral disorder associated with fear or anxiety, that individuals experience while they interact with others in social gatherings or other certain situations where they feel that their behaviors would be negatively judged by others. In such cases, individuals avoid social interactions due to a higher level of anxiety and fear of being negatively evaluated (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Within universities, in the years 2009 and 2006, Russell and Shaw in the United Kingdom reported a significant level of social anxiety in 10 percent of the university students and Tillfors and Furmark in Sweden reported that 16 percent of university students had clinically significant levels of social anxiety, respectively (Russell and Shaw,2009 and Tillfors and Furmark,2006).

Success in academic life demands performance in both curricular and co-curricular activities, and students need to be attentive and interactive for this. Social anxiety limits verbal contact and social expressiveness due to which most of the time students get fearful and hesitate to interact (Strahan, 2003).

Academic achievement refers to the accomplishment of student learning outcomes described in the learning objectives of any educational program. In educational institutions, academic performance is measured in terms of grades that evaluate the students' performance. Grades are calculated after considering exams, quizzes, assignments, various class projects, and

oral assessments (Martin Sanz, et al, 2017). This study is about how social anxiety is affecting the academic performance of students in university (Forman Christian College).

Significance of Study

This study gives an in-depth analysis of how social anxiety is affecting the academic performance of many students. This might help in assessing the factors that cause social anxiety and halt academic achievement. Further, this study can help find out the reasons that cause poor performance in academia due to social anxiety. It can help us figure out solutions that can help deal with social anxiety and improve academic performance. This study would be a contribution to the existing literature and past research that has been done earlier to determine the effect of social anxiety on academic performance.

Literature Review

Social anxiety is considered as an important factor while assessing the academic performance of university students. It has been seen that students experience anxiety when they feel like they have to present themselves at some social event that is important to them, and they have to interact with the audience. In such cases, students are most likely to skip classes and they hesitate when they have to present in front of the whole class. Social anxiety results in avoidance and it is most common in university students (Karasewich, & Kuhlmeier, 2020).

Although Strahan (2003), did not find any direct relationship between academic performance and social anxiety, she did speculate that the relationship between these two variables could be indirect. Social anxiety inhibits social connectedness and students feel reluctant while interacting with others due to which they face difficulty in forming social ties and therefore, they find it hard to get socially integrated with their other fellows which leads to poor academic performance. Based on the importance of social connectedness, integration and engagement among university students are considered crucial for successful academic achievement (Tinto 2006).

According to the self-presentation model of social anxiety, social anxiety arises in real or imaginary situations when a person is motivated to leave a good impression on others, but he fears that he would not be able to do that (Schlenker & Leary, 1985, p.176).

Leary (2010) proposed that individuals suffering from social anxiety face difficulty in forming social ties due to the constant fear that others will not put effort into the relationships as highly as they do. Because of the relationship devaluation, socially anxious students do not engage with their tutors and other university fellows which results in limited interaction leading to low academic achievement.

The link between social anxiety and academic performance is complicated, as sometimes it is observed that social anxiety enhances students' performance in some basic or well-practiced activities (Nadeem et al, 2012). This may be true in cases when students just have to perform in written exams and not in other verbal activities. As most of the time anxiety is related to public speaking or giving oral presentations in front of others.

Andersen (2006) described in his study that anxieties are often overlooked in students and such anxious behaviors are considered as personality traits. He further mentioned that MA students appeared to be very confident in their daily encounters until they were asked to present their work in front of their instructors and other students.

Students who suffer from anxiety problems due to their avoidance behaviors do not interact physically and psychologically. This leads to distraction from academia, and they might feel more anxious by focusing on their other anxieties rather than focusing on their studies (Clark & Wells, 1995).

A study was conducted in the UK, in which students were supposed to fill out a web survey and it was concluded from the responses, that students experience social anxiety during public speaking i.e., during presentations, seminars, or panel discussions, etc. (Russell and Topham, 2012).

A study's findings showed that social anxiety does affect the academic performance of university students and it hurt academic performance during the freshmen year, but this effect did not remain significant till junior or senior year (Strahan 2003).

Another study showed that students with social anxiety also undermine their abilities when they speak in public like in seminars or during presentations (Austin 2004).

Social anxiety disturbs students in many ways as reducing their quality of life and subjective well-being. It can also hurt the academic performance of students (Jia et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2019).

Theoretical Framework

Spielberger's theory of anxiety has been used for this study (2019). This theory suggests that when an individual has a certain level of anxiety, it can become a cause for them to perform ineffectively. Feeling anxious can lead to interference with performance through mind blocking, general worries, and more cognitive interference. University students struggling with life changes, shift from home, academic stress, and exposure to different people on campus can suffer from higher rates of social anxiety, affecting their academic performance.

Methodology

Ethics of research

This proposal has received ethical clearance from the Institutional Review Board and the Department of Sociology Ethics Committee at Forman Christian College University (**Appendix A**). Each participant's data was safely stored by the researcher. None of the volunteers suffered any physical or psychological harm, and they were not forced to take part in the study. Before the study began, participants signed an informed consent form (**Appendix B**).

Research Design

This study is quantitative and uses a survey-based methodology.

Research Question

Does social anxiety influence the academic performance of university students?

Hypothesis

The higher the social anxiety in university students, the lower the academic performance (Strahan 2003).

Conceptualization and Operationalization

Independent Variable: Social Anxiety

Social anxiety is a behavioral disorder associated with fear or anxiety, that individuals experience while they interact with other people in social gatherings or other certain situations. Where they feel that their behaviors would be negatively evaluated by others. In such cases, individuals avoid social interactions due to a higher level of anxiety and fear of being judged (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Zung self-rating anxiety scale (SAS) has been used to measure social anxiety (Zung, 1971).

Dependent Variable: Academic Performance

Academic achievement refers to the accomplishment of student learning outcomes described in the learning objectives of any educational program. In educational institutions, academic performance is measured in terms of grades that evaluate the students' performance. Grades are calculated after considering exams, quizzes, assignments, class projects, and viva (Martin Sanz, et al, 2017). The academic performance scale developed by Birchmeier C, Grattan E, Hornbacher S, and McGregory C. has been used to measure academic performance (Birchmeier et al., 2023).

Survey

The questionnaire for this study has 26 questions and three sections. The first section includes 8 socio-demographic questions. Section B includes 10 questions from a standardized scale to measure social anxiety (Zung, 1971). This scale has a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 'A little of the time' to 'Most of the time'. With lower scores indicating low social anxiety and higher scores indicating higher social anxiety. Section C includes 8 questions measuring academic performance. A standard scale by Birchmeier and colleagues (2023) has been used, which has a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 'Strongly disagree' to 'Strongly agree'. The lower the score, the lower the self-perceived academic performance. (**Appendix C**).

Sample

A purposive sampling technique has been used to collect data. The sample for this study is university students of FCCU, selected based on different departments and faculties, based on permission and willingness.

Data Collection

For data collection, the first permission was taken from the Institutional Review Board and the Department of Sociology Ethics Committee at Forman Christian College University. Later after permission was granted, data was collected through a Google survey online. Data was collected

during the summer break, so students were sampled while they were away from campus and visiting their homes. A Google survey was emailed to university students of FCCU along with a consent form for participation. Other than that, a Google survey was circulated among students using WhatsApp and Facebook groups. While most of the data was collected from students who were on campus for the summer semester, by emailing them the Google survey. Participants were allowed to withdraw from the study whenever they wanted to, and all willing participants were asked to fill in all the required sections before submitting the form. To maintain the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants nobody has access to the data except the researcher, and all data is stored in a private file.

Data Analysis

The independent variable for this study is social anxiety and the dependent variable for this study is academic performance. SPSS 25. is used for data analysis, descriptive statistics, and regression analysis. A p-value of <0.05 will be considered significant. The reliability results for the two scales of this study are satisfactory with Cronbach alpha values for social anxiety at 0.911 and for academic performance at 0.820 (Table 1).

Table 1:
Reliability results

	Items	α
Social Anxiety	10	0.911
Academic Performance	08	0.820

Results

Socio-demographic Characteristics

According to the results in Table 2, which presents the data of 150 respondents, 56.0% of the sample are females and 40.0% are males. The majority of the sample 66.7% are 21-23 years. 45.3% of the respondents are in their senior year and 25.3% are in their junior year. 74.7% of respondents are unemployed and 90.0% of the respondents are from Punjab. 82% of respondents are from urban belonging while 18.0% are from rural areas. The majority of the respondents 86.7% are unmarried and 38.0% of the respondents belong to households with a monthly income above 2 lacs.

Table 2:

Socio-demographic characteristics of sample (N=150)

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Female	84.0	56.0
Male	60.0	40.0
Trans	03.0	02.0
Prefer not to say	03.0	02.0
Age		
18-20	26.0	17.3
21-23	100	66.7
24-26	18.0	12.0
27-29	06.0	04.0
Education		
Freshmen year	04.0	02.7
Sophomore year	29.0	19.3
Junior year	38.0	25.3
Senior year	68.0	45.3
Postgraduate	11.0	07.3

Employment		
Employed	14.0	09.3
Unemployed	112	74.7
Part-time	24.0	16.0
Province		
Punjab	136	90.7
Sindh	03.0	02.0
Baluchistan	03.0	02.0
KPK	08.0	05.3
Region		
Urban	123	82.0
Rural	27.0	18.0
Marital Status		
Married	04.0	04.0
Unmarried	130	86.7
Separated	02.0	01.3
Divorced	07.0	04.7
Engaged	05.0	03.3
Monthly Household Income (PKR)		
20,000-50,000	13.0	08.7
60,000-90,000	21.0	14.0
100,000-40,000	38.0	25.3
150,000-190,000	21.0	14.0
Above 2 lacs	57.0	38.0

Social anxiety:

Table 3 reports the frequencies and percentages for the individual items that measure the domain of social anxiety. The majority of the participants reported that a little or some of the time they feel: (i) More nervous and anxious than usual (78.0%), (ii) Afraid for reason at all (82.0%), (iii)

upset easily or feel panicky (64.7%), (iv) Fall apart and go to pieces (73.3%), (v) Heart beating fastly (71.4%), (vi) Arms and legs shake and tremble (80.6%), (vii) Bothered by headaches, neck, and back pain (64.6%), (viii) Feel weak and tired easily (62.0%), (ix) Face gets hot and blushes (74.7%), (x) Have nightmares (83.3%)

Table 3:

Social Anxiety (N=150)

Variables	A little of the time/ Some of the time		A good part of the time/ Most of the time	
	f	%	f	%
Nervousness and Anxiety	117	78.0	33.0	22.0
Afraid	123	82.0	27.0	18.0
Feel Panicky	97.0	64.7	53.0	35.4
Falling apart	110	73.3	40.0	29.7
Heartbeat	107	71.4	43.0	28.7
Trembling	121	80.6	29.0	19.4
Headache and Backpain	97.0	64.6	53.0	35.4
Weak and Tired	93.0	62.0	57.0	38.0
Face Blush	112	74.7	38.0	25.3
Nightmares	125	83.3	25.0	16.6

Academic performance:

Table 4 reports the frequencies and percentages for the individual items that measure the domain of academic performance. The majority of the participants reported that they strongly disagreed, disagreed, or were neutral with that they (i) Made themselves ready in all subjects (51.3%),

(iv) Actively participated in every discussion (60.0%), (v) Start papers and projects as soon as they are assigned (74.7%), (vi) Enjoy homework and activities (69.3%), (viii) Solving problems are useful hobby (54.0%).

Others report that they strongly agree or agree to (ii) Pay attention and listen during every discussion (60.6%), (iii) Want to get good grades in every subject (86.0%), (vii) Exert more effort while doing difficult assignments (67.3%).

Table 4:

Academic Performance (N=150)

Variables	Strongly disagree/ Disagree/ Neutral		Strongly Agree/ Agree	
	f	%	F	%
Ready in all Subjects	77.0	51.3	73.0	48.7
Pays attention in class	59.0	39.4	91.0	60.6
Gets good grades	21.0	14.1	129	86.0
Participation in class	90.0	60.0	60.0	40.0
Preparation of assigned tasks	112	74.7	38.0	25.3
Homework and other activities completed on time	104	69.3	46.0	30.7
Exert effort while doing difficult assignments	49.0	32.7	101	67.3
Consider solving problems a hobby	81.0	54.0	69.0	46.0

Simple linear regression

Table 5 shows the simple linear regression results for the relationship between social anxiety and academic performance. A significant regression equation was found ($F(1,148) = 10.667, p = .001$), with a t value of $-3.266 (p = .001)$. The results confirm that when social anxiety is high academic performance is low.

Table 5:

Simple Linear Regression

Model	Coefficients						
	Unstandardized		Standardized	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
	Coefficients		Coefficients			Lower	Upper
B	Std. Error	Beta			Bound	Bound	
(Constant)	30.933	1.158		26.703	.000	28.644	32.222
Social Anxiety	-.178	.055	-.259	-3.266	.001	-.286	-.070

Dependent Variable= Academic Performance

Discussion

This study aimed to find a relationship between social anxiety and perceived academic performance. The hypothesis for this study was “The higher the social anxiety in university students, the lower the academic performance (Strahan, 2003)”. According to the findings, the hypothesis was proved right that when social anxiety goes up academic performance goes down. A nationwide study in Sweden conducted by Vilaplana-Perez et al. (2021) also reported the same results in which they collected data from a large cohort of more than 2 million people from the Swedish population. The findings suggested that people diagnosed with social anxiety disorder are more likely to fall behind academically than those who do not experience social anxiety. This research confirms the past research related to social anxiety and its effect on academic performance as this research was conducted on a large scale and confirms the direct association between social anxiety and academic performance.

The study focuses on socially anxious students and why they lack academically. According to Brook. (2015), individuals who experience social anxiety face difficulty in asking questions

from their instructors due to which they suffer academically. The fear of being judged inhibits them from interacting freely with their fellows and limits their willingness to take part in class discussions and ask questions.

The findings of this research suggest the same as 80% of the sample agree that, they want to get good grades and 67% state they do exert more effort during exams while 60% of the sample disagree that, they actively take part in class discussions. This also indicates that socially anxious students fall behind because they suffer socially and psychologically, they feel that they would not be able to fit in with other people and thus they limit social contact with others. By doing so, they could not get the chance to express themselves in class or state their point of view during class discussions. When all of these factors are combined, the conclusion could be drawn that students suffering from social anxiety might not perform well in oral assessments and presentations. While they may perform well in written assessments, Nadeem et al. (2012) stated that most of the time anxiety is related to oral presentation and verbal communication.

Esther Y. Strahan (2003) conducted 2 years longitudinal study to determine where social anxiety or social skills affect the academic performance of university or their GPA over some time. The author found out that students who experience fear in social gatherings scoreless in class as they resist participating in class and do not take an active part in class discussions. This can also lead to a discussion if social anxiety goes away over a period of time or if it persists during the whole academic degree program.

Students suffering from social issues also tend to change their schools when they feel like they are not fitting in or to avoid oral presentations (Turner, Beidel, Borden, Stanley, and Jacob 1991). This mostly happens in cases where students try to fit in and cope with their anxiety issues but due to various other environmental factors, they fall behind. Further research can also include

this point as if social anxiety is the sole reason why students fall behind academically or when he/she fear performing in front of a larger group of people. Various environmental factors can include the teachers' and other students' behaviors towards socially anxious students. For instance, if they are being mistreated in class for their insecurities or if the instructor provides them with good learning and a friendly environment so that they can perform well.

Concluding recommendations

This study examined the association between social anxiety and academic performance and findings suggested that social anxiety does affect the academic performance of university students. This study was conducted on a small scale and the sample was collected only from one university; further research can be done by collecting data from a larger population. The focus of this study was to determine the relationship between two variables and results showed that socially anxious students do not perform well in oral assessments. Research can be done in the future, to assess does social anxiety only affects the verbal performance of students or if it also has an effect on written performance. Gender differences can be assessed by whether the ratio varies in men or women or does social anxiety is common in the overall population. Further, different programs or strategic measures should be introduced through research programs to help students who suffer from social anxiety and thus cannot perform well academically.

Limitation of study

One of the drawbacks of this study is the perception-based survey responses and small sample size. As the study is limited to only one university and specific region, it might not be representative of a larger population from other regions.

Conclusion

Social anxiety affects the academic performance of university students due to various reasons. As existing literature and findings of this study show that individuals with social anxiety face difficulty in interacting with their other fellows in the university. A few studies also suggest that integration and engagement are key to successful academic achievement and when students are not able to engage with other fellows and limit interaction then eventually, they will fall behind academically. Based on this, social anxiety does have an adverse effect on the academic performance of university students and they fear when they have to appear in certain social situations involving speech.

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Appendix A: IRB Certificate



FORMAN CHRISTIAN COLLEGE
(A CHARTERED UNIVERSITY)

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD **APPROVAL CERTIFICATE**

IRB Ref: IRB-454/6-2023

Date: 22-06-2023

Project Title: Influence of social anxiety on the perceived academic performance of university students

Principal Investigator: Insha Fayyaz

Supervisor: Dr. Sara Rizvi Jafree

The Institutional Review Board has examined your project in the IRB meeting held on 22-06-2023 and has approved the proposed study. If during the conduct of your research, any changes occur related to participant risk, study design, confidentiality or consent, or any other change then IRB must be notified immediately.

Please be sure to include the IRB reference number in all correspondence.

Dr. Sharoon Hanook
Convener – IRB
Chairperson, Department of Statistics
Forman Christian College
(A Chartered University)
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Appendix B: Informed Cover Letter

Date: _____

Dear Participants,

You are invited to participate in a study titled: “The relationship between social anxiety and academic performance in university students”. The aim of the study is to highlight the potential benefits of reducing social anxiety in students to support their academic learning and output.

The questionnaire will take approximately 10-15 minutes to answer. There is no compensation for responding nor is there any kind of known risk. Your names are not required for participation and none of your individual data will be disclosed or shared. The data will remain with the researcher and analyzed without compromising confidentiality or anonymity.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you have the right to withdraw from answering the survey at any point.

By signing this form, you are agreeing that you have read the above information and are indicating your consent to participate in this research study.

Thank you!

Researcher: Insha Fayyaz

BSc. Hon Student, Department of Sociology, Forman Christian College

Signed consent of the participant: _____

Appendix C: Survey

						Coding
Section A: Social Demographic Questions						
1.What is your gender?	Female	Male	Trans	Prefer not to say		
2.What is your age?	18-20	21-23	24-26	27-29		
3.Highest education level?	Freshmen year	Sophomore year	Junior year	Senior year	Postgraduate	
4.Employment status?	Employed	Unemployed	Part-time			
5.Where do you live (province, you belong to)?	Punjab	Sindh	Baluchistan	KPK		
6.Regional belonging?	Urban	Rural				
7.Marital status?	Married	Unmarried	Separated	Divorced	Engaged	
8.Household income?	20,000-50,000	60,000-90,000	100,000-140,000	150,000-190,000	Above 2 lacs	
Section B: Measuring Social anxiety using Zung Self-rating Anxiety Scale (SAS) (Zung, 1971)						
	A little of the time (1)	Some of the time (2)	A good part of the time (3)	Most of the time (4)		
9. I feel more nervous and anxious than usual.						
10. I feel afraid for no reason at all.						
11. I get upset easily or feel panicky.						
12. I feel like I'm falling apart and going to pieces.						
13. I can feel my heart beating fast.						
14. My arms and legs shake and tremble.						

15. I am bothered by headaches neck and back pain.						
16. I feel weak and get tired easily.						
17. My face gets hot and blushes.						
18. I have nightmares.						

Section C: Measuring academic performance using Likert scale (Birchmeier et al., 2023)

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)	
19. I made myself ready in all my subjects.						
20. I pay attention and listen during every discussion.						
21. I want to get good grades in every subject.						
22. I actively participate in every discussion						
23. I start papers and projects as soon as they are assigned.						
24. I enjoy homework and activities because they help me improve my skills in every subject.						
25. I exert more effort when I do difficult assignments.						
26. Solving problems is a useful hobby for me.						