

## Fear of Failure, Academic Self-Efficacy and Academic Performance among College Students

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### ABSTRACT

The main objective of the study was to find out the relationship between fear of failure, academic self-efficacy and academic performance among the college students. The study was conducted among college students of the age range 18 to 25 who are either pursuing undergraduate course or postgraduate course in Bangalore. The other major aim of the study was to find if there was any interaction between these variables. The study also tried to find differences in fear of failure and academic self-efficacy based on gender and level of education. The two questionnaires used in the study were: the performance failure appraisal inventory and Academic self-efficacy scale. To run the statistical analysis IBM SPSS software was used. The tests used were correlation, linear regression and independent sample t-test. Results revealed that there was a significant correlation between academic self-efficacy and fear of failure. A significant correlation was also found between academic self-efficacy and academic performance. The findings also reveal that academic self-efficacy negatively predicted fear of failure and positively predicted academic performance. Gender differences was noted in fear of failure.

**Keywords:** *Fear of Failure, Academic Self-Efficacy, Academic Performance*

Today we live in a society that emphasizes greatly on achievements and puts down students who fail. Everyone seems to be in a race for being better than other. No student is left out of the competition. Along with the physical health of college student cohort, mental health is of vital importance for good performance in their academics (Eisenberg et al., 2009). India's students encounter numerous difficulties. The prominent ones include low motivation, academic overloads, workloads and inadequate time to study all of which contributes to stress in students (Dimitrov, 2017). A competitive environment shapes the students thinking, feeling, and behavior. (Weissman et al., 2022). Fear of failure could be a potential stressor in a competitive environment.

Along with this the parental expectation of high achievement, and uncertainty about employment and the future can also affect students. Parents push students to get the highest grade possible and leave them in a tough position. Comparison of the students with other students also becomes a factor for stress among college students. During the course of the

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study, parents may demand independence and mastery from students which can also lead to fearing the consequences of failure and expecting failure in their career. The parental expectation of high achievement also affects students' level of competence in their studies and career. Expecting a hostile reaction from their parents and loved ones, students submit to the wishes of parents and go into the loop of fearing shame, fearing embarrassment and further it may affect their academic performance and self-efficacy. Good academic performance is associated with increased self-confidence and is likely to encourage students to take on more responsibility in completing tasks (Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 2005).

Fear of failure is the avoidant motive which is a disposition to avoid the temporary cognitive, and emotional stimuli threats, and feeling anxiety, shame, or humiliation as a result of failure in achievement contexts (Atkinson & Feather, 1966; Atkinson, 1957; Cacciotti, 2015; Conroy et al, 2003). A person can feel anxiety when they are not able to reach their goals set by themselves. Depending on the particular details of the achievement contexts one's level of fear of failure changes.

Academic self-efficacy alludes to the individual's belief to organize, plan, manage, execute actions, and structure their surrounding conducive to attaining the required achievement. (Zimmerman et al., 1992). One's belief about oneself affects the choices one makes and the actions one will take subsequently. Self-efficacy also helps determine the extent to which how much effort people will put into an activity, how long their perseverance will be in the face of obstacles, and how much their resilience will be in the face of adverse situations. A person with high self-efficacy will create a calmer environment, on the other hand, a person with low self-efficacy will foster an anxious and stressful environment. (Schunk & Pajares, 2010).

Academic performance reflects the intellectual capacity of the person. The degree to which a student has attained either short- or long-term educational goals can be measured by their academic performance or achievement. Academic performance is measured either by continuous assessment or cumulative grade point average (CGPA) (Talib & Sansgiry, 2012).

Chemers et al. (2001) studied how students' academic performance and commitment can be affected by academic self-efficacy and optimism in students. The participants were 1st-year students of the university. Optimism and academic self-efficacy were strong predictors of academic performance. Students with a positive outlook and positive expectations are seen to look at the world with more confidence and belief in their capabilities. The demands of college life are taken more as a challenge by students with increased self-efficacy and an optimistic attitude. These students comprehend uncertain situations as less threatening.

In a study conducted by Nelson et al. (2013) tried to see the gender differences in fear of failure among engineering students. The participants were engineering students of a southern university in the USA. A sample of 250 students of 17 to 38 was considered for the study. The findings showed that female engineering students are more likely to feel that other people are aware of their personal failure experience and are more likely to feel humiliated and uncomfortable when others observe their failures.

The experimental research study conducted by Krispenz et al. (2019) tried to understand the influence of a short inquiry-based stress reduction on university students who are having procrastination and test anxiety. Before and after intervention their test anxiety, procrastination, and self-efficacy were noted. 84 students were considered for the study. The

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results revealed that short IBSR intervention has enhanced self-efficacy which in turn reduces procrastination and test anxiety. This indicates how self-efficacy can play a vital role in academics and related aspects.

The level of cognitive demand needed is increased in college unlike in school. Thus students may face the fear of failing in different stages of pursuing their academics. The different tasks, one's own expectations, and parental expectation add to the list of aspects affecting the student. The cohort of college students is studied on their academic self-efficacy and academic performance in many research studies. But very fewer studies have been conducted for looking at the relationship between a negative construct like fear of failure, academic self-efficacy, and academic performance. The study addresses that gap in knowledge.

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### *Research Design*

This is a quantitative study done to measure three variables: fear of failure, academic self-efficacy, and academic performance. A comparative study between undergraduate and postgraduate college students was carried out.

#### *Objectives*

1. To study the relationship between fear of failure, academic self –efficacy and academic performance among young adults.
2. To study the impact of academic self-efficacy on fear of failure and academic performance.
3. To study the difference in fear of failure and academic self-efficacy based on level of education.
4. To study the difference in fear of failure and academic self-efficacy based on gender.

#### *Hypotheses*

- H<sub>01</sub>: There is no significant relationship between fear of failure, academic self-efficacy and academic performance.
- H<sub>02</sub>: There is no significant impact of academic self-efficacy on fear of failure.
- H<sub>03</sub>: There is no significant impact of academic self-efficacy on academic performance.
- H<sub>04</sub>: There is no significant difference in fear of failure between undergraduate and postgraduate students.
- H<sub>05</sub>: There is no significant difference in academic self –efficacy between undergraduate and postgraduate students.
- H<sub>06</sub>: There is no significant differences in fear of failure between males and females.
- H<sub>07</sub>: There is no significant difference in academic self –efficacy between male and female.

#### *Sample*

The sample is undergraduate and postgraduate students enrolled in various courses in India. The sample size chosen was 150 students among which 75 were undergraduate students and 75 were postgraduate students. Non-probability sampling method (convenient sampling) was used in the study as the sampling technique.

**Instruments**

1. Demographic questionnaire included questions such as age, gender, CGPA and the level of education.
2. Performance failure appraisal inventory: The Performance Failure Appraisal Inventory is a 25-item multidimensional questionnaire of cognitive-emotional-relational appraisals related with fear of failure( Conroy et al., 2002).There are five aversive consequences mentioned in the inventory: i)fear of experiencing shame and embarrassment, ii)fear of devaluing one’s self-estimate, iii) fear of having an uncertain future, iv)fear of important others losing interest, and v) fear of upsetting important others. (Conroy, n.d.). PFAI responses are on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “do not believe at all” (-2) to “believe 100% of the time” (+2) (Conroy, n.d.). The tool shows a Cronbach’s Alfa coefficient reliability of 0.798 and an index of reliability of 0.893(Rawat et al., 2019). The reliability values range as follows: fear of experiencing shame and embarrassment 0.80; fear of devaluing one’s self-estimate 0.74; fear of having an uncertain future 0.80; fear of important others losing interest 0.81; and fear of upsetting important others 0.78 (Conroy et al., 2002).
3. Academic Self-Efficacy Scale is prepared to assess the academic self-efficacy of secondary school students based on the Self-Efficacy theory of Albert Bandura (1977) who placed it within the structure of Social Cognitive theory. The scale is built around the notion that students' performance in each area of academic work will have an impact on their total academic self-efficacy. Learning process, Reading, Comprehension, Memory, Curricular Activities, Time Management, Teacher Student Relationship, Peer Relationship, and Utilization of resources, Goal Orientation, Adjustment, and Examination are the areas of academic work chosen. There are 40 statements all together in which 20 are negative statements and 20 are positive statements. The test-retest coefficient of correlation is 0.85; the Split half reliability of the scale is 0.90 and Concurrent validity against the ‘General Self-efficacy scale’ (Jerusalem & Schwarzer, 1979) is found to be  $r=.68$  (Gafoor & Ashraf, 2007).

**Procedure**

The data of the research study was collected using google forms. The google forms were created and circulated among college students. Both undergraduate and postgraduate students filled the forms. The form contained the basic demographic details along with two questionnaires- Performance failure appraisal Inventory and Academic Self-efficacy Scale. The academic performance score was taken as CGPA score of the previous semester. This form took around 10 to 15 minutes to be filled. IBM SPSS software was used to analyze the data gathered.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The data was analyzed using Pearson correlation, Liner regression and Independent sample t-test.

**Table 1 Descriptive statistics and Correlation between fear of failure, academic self-efficacy and academic performance among college students**

Variables	N	M	SD	1	2	3
Fear of Failure	150	-0.45	0.74	-	-0.254**	-0.047
Academic Self-efficacy		140.37	19.8	-0.254**	-	0.257**
Academic Performance		7.74	1.06	-0.047	0.257**	-

\*\*  $p < 0.01$  level (2-tailed)

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Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics and correlation between fear of failure, academic self-efficacy and academic performance among college students. The correlation coefficient results shows that there is a significant negative relationship between Fear of Failure and Academic Self-efficacy ( $r = -0.254$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) which indicates that as academic self-efficacy increases fear of failure decreases. This result is consistent with the study conducted by Chuang et al. (2022), the relationship between motivation, fear of failure, career adaptability, and meaning in life. The participants they considered were vocational school students in Taiwan. Among the vocational school students, they found that self-efficacy has a negative influence on fear of failure. When a student is able to deal with situations that are demanding due to their self-efficacy beliefs, their fear of failure is reduced.

Table 1 also reveals that there is a significant positive relationship between academic self-efficacy and academic performance ( $r = 0.257$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) which indicates that as academic self-efficacy increases, academic performance increases. This result is similar to study conducted by Fakhrou and Habib (2021) where results highlighted how due to the student's abilities to use the skills learnt from educational materials, their academic performance increased. Research has revealed that students who showed increased belief in their abilities performed better in learning and thinking.

The above table also reveals that there is no significant relationship between fear of failure and academic performance in contrast to the previous researches which showed that there is a correlation between fear of failure and academic performance (Alkhazaleh & Mahasneh, 2016; Stuart, 2013). A possible explanation for this finding could be due to other possible factors that can influence the relationship between fear of failure and academic performance. These factors may include self-efficacy, motivation and coping strategies.

**Table 2 Regression Coefficients of Academic Self-efficacy on Fear of Failure**

Variable	B	$\beta$	SE
Constant	0.883**		0.425
Academic Self-Efficacy	-0.010**	-0.254	0.003
R <sup>2</sup>	0.064		

Note N=150

\*\*  $p < 0.05$

Table 2 shows the impact of Academic self-efficacy on Fear of failure. The R<sup>2</sup> value of 0.064 revealed that the predictor variable explained 6% of variance in the outcome variable with  $F(1, 148) = 10.19$ ,  $p < 0.05$ . This means that 6% of academic self-efficacy predicted fear of Failure. The findings revealed that academic self-efficacy negatively predicted fear of failure ( $\beta = -0.25$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). This result is consistent with the study conducted by Chuang et al. (2022) which highlighted that self-efficacy is seen to be significantly and negatively influencing fear of failure.

**Table 3 Regression Coefficients of Academic Self-Efficacy on Academic Performance**

Variable	B	$\beta$	SE
Constant	5.810**		0.605
Academic Self-Efficacy	0.014**	0.257	0.004
R <sup>2</sup>	0.066		

Note N=150

\*\*  $p < 0.05$

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Table 3 shows the impact of Academic self-efficacy on academic performance. The R<sup>2</sup> value of 0.066 revealed that the predictor variable explained 6% of variance in the outcome variable with  $F(1, 148) = 10.45, p < 0.05$ . The findings revealed that academic self-efficacy positively predicted Academic performance ( $\beta = 0.257, p < 0.05$ ). This result is in line with previous researches where findings suggest that academic self-efficacy to be a strong predictor or indicator of academic performance. Students who are confident that they can succeed academically when they first enroll in college outperform the students with less confidence (Ardura & Galan, 2019; Chemers et al., 2001).

**Table 4 Independent Sample t-test for Fear of Failure based on Level of Education**

Variable	Level of education	N	Mean	SD	SE	t	p
Fear of Failure	Undergraduate	75	-0.449	0.75	0.87	0.168	0.867
	Postgraduate	75	-0.47	0.74	0.85		

<sup>NS</sup> Not significant

Table 4 shows the independent sample t-test conducted to compare the differences in fear of failure based on the level of education. The results shows that there is no significant difference in the scores of fear of failure based on the level of education as the t value = 0.168 and  $p > 0.05$  indicates. In contrast to the previous researches that have conducted studies only on undergraduate students and school students for their fear of failure (Alkhazaleh & Mahasneh, 2016; Caraway et al., 2003), the current study is the first to look into the differences between undergraduate and postgraduate students to our best of knowledge.

**Table 5 Independent Sample t-test for Academic Self-Efficacy based on Level of Education**

Variable	Level of Education	N	Mean	SD	SE	t	p
Academic Self-Efficacy	Undergraduate	75	137.67	19.85	2.29	-1.67	0.096
	Postgraduate	75	143.08	19.67	2.27		

<sup>NS</sup> Not significant

Table 5 shows the independent sample t-test conducted to compare the differences in academic self-efficacy based on the level of education. The results shows that there is no significant difference in the scores of academic self-efficacy based on the level of education as the t value = 1.67 and  $p > 0.05$  indicates. In contrast to the previous researches that have conducted studies only on undergraduate students and school students for their fear of failure (Alkhazaleh & Mahasneh, 2016; Caraway et al., 2003), the current study is the first to look into the differences between undergraduate and postgraduate students to our best of knowledge.

**Table 6 Independent Sample t-test for Fear of Failure based on Gender**

Variable	Gender	N	Mean	SD	SE	t	p
Fear of Failure	Male	39	-0.66	0.66	0.106	-2.013	** 0.046
	Female	111	-0.38	0.76	0.072		

\*\*  $p < 0.05$

Table 6 shows the independent sample t-test conducted to compare the differences fear of failure based on gender. The results shows that there is a significant difference in the scores

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of fears of failure based on gender as the  $t$  value= 2.013 and  $p < 0.05$  indicates. While comparing the means, it appears that males ( $M=0.66$ ,  $SD=0.66$ ) have higher level of fear of failure than females ( $M=0.38$ ,  $SD=0.76$ ). This contradicts the already existing research results (Alkhezaleh & Mahasneh, 2016; Alabduljabbar et al., 2022; Nelson et al., 2013) which shows that females have higher fear of failure than males. This does not mean that males do not show high fear of failure at all times, research shows that males show higher fear of important others losing interest (Alabduljabbar et al., 2022). Also, the number of males were limited when compared to the females.

**Table 7 Independent Sample t-test for Academic self-efficacy based on gender**

Variable	Gender	N	Mean	SD	SE	t	p
Academic Self-Efficacy	Male	39	137.69	20.48	3.28	-0.97	0.329
	Female	111	141.32	19.67	1.86		

<sup>NS</sup> Not significant

Table 7 shows the independent sample t-test conducted to compare the differences in academic self-efficacy based on gender. The results shows that there is no significant difference in the scores of academic self-efficacy based on gender as the  $t$  value= 0.97 and  $p > 0.05$  indicates. This result is in accordance with the study conducted by Caraway et al. (2003) where researchers examined whether self-efficacy, goal orientation, and fear of failure influence engagement in school. No gender differences were found among students on the variable academic self-efficacy.

## CONCLUSION

Conclusion derived from the present study are:

1. There is negative relationship between fear of failure and academic self-efficacy.
2. It was also observed that there is a positive relationship between academic self-efficacy and academic performance.
3. The findings also reveal that academic self-efficacy predicts fear of failure as well as academic performance.
4. There is no difference in fear of failure and academic self-efficacy based on the level of education.
5. There is a difference in fear of failure based on the gender.
6. There is no difference in academic self-efficacy.

## Implications

The main aim of the study was to look into the relationship between variables fear of failure, academic self-efficacy and academic performance. Accordingly, we found that fear of failure and academic self-efficacy are negatively correlated and academic self-efficacy predicts fear of failure in students as well. Along with this we also found that academic self-efficacy and academic performance are positively correlated and academic self-efficacy predicts academic performance. This result becomes important as it gives us the idea that enhancing the academic self-efficacy can lead us to decrease the fear of failure and increase the academic performance. Researchers who are interested in these variables can come up with interventions to enhance academic self-efficacy. This study also allows future researchers to look into other factors such as academic self-control and academic procrastination and their influence on academic self-efficacy and academic performance of the students.

### ***Limitations and Suggestions***

The study was conducted specifically in the city of Bangalore. We have used measures of self-report questionnaire for collecting data which can be a potential limitation. Another limitation could be large differences in numbers of male and female. The study only includes college students pursuing arts and science. Thus, the study cannot be generalized to students pursuing other courses. The small sample size may reduce the power of the study and increase the margin of error. There was no measure taken to control social desirability. We have used a convenient sampling size which could be another potential limitation. Future studies can use quantitative and qualitative methods for data collection. Researchers can use equal number of male and female to get a better idea of gender difference. Participants can be included from other courses and other cities as well.

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***Conflict of Interest***

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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