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Research Paper

Fear of Negative Evaluation, Students' Anxiety, and Academic Performance among Psychology Students

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the complex association of Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE), Students' Anxiety, and Academic Performance of students in psychology. Adopting a quantitative correlational approach, the research collected data from 180 undergraduate and postgraduate students of psychology using the Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale, Academic Anxiety Scale, and Academic Performance Scale. The findings showed a notable correlation between FNE and Students 'Anxiety, asserting that heightened fear of judgment elevates academic anxiety levels among students. FNE and Students' Anxiety were also found to correlate with Academic Performance, indicating the prevailing adverse influence on cognitive focus, motivation, and engagement. However, no notable differences were found in FNE, anxiety, or Academic Performance when examining gender, educational level, or year of study. Regression analysis showed that, collectively, FNE and Students' Anxiety were notable predictors of Academic Performance, though their predictive power was weaker than anticipated. These outcomes are consistent with concepts such as Social Anxiety Theory, Cognitive Interference Theory, and Self-Determination Theory, emphasizing the psychological constraints that hinder students' academic progress. Although the effect sizes were negligible, the study demonstrates the importance of institutional policies guiding the development of psychological support frameworks, including counseling, stress relief programs, and non-assessment-based pedagogies to improve Academic Performance. Overall, the current study highlights the relationship between students' academic achievement and their mental health concern.

Keywords: *Fear of Negative Evaluation, Students' Anxiety, Academic Performance, Psychology Students, Gender, Educational Level, Year of Study*

A learner who is enrolled and actively participated in academic activities is referred to as a student. Fulfillment of certain academic and behavioral expectations is compulsory. These include class attendance, submission of all academic work within the deadlines, upholding academic honesty, adhering to the school, treating other people with decency, and fostering virtuous principles. Students pursuing psychology form a distinct academic category. Their academic workload consists of self-reflection, deep analysis of intricate human behaviors, critical thought, and a combination of research and

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interpersonal engagement. Though such requirements can be intellectually stimulating, they can also lead to a great deal of stress, anxiety, and an elevated Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE).

Fear of Negative Evaluation

The fear of being evaluated negatively by other individuals. FNE is the fear of being appraised negatively by other individuals. It manifests as anxiety concerning one's image, anguish over criticism, and avoidance of socially evaluative situations (Watson & Friend, 1969). This kind of fear is more common in educational and social contexts, where evaluations of performance and participation are commonplace. This form of fear is often linked to insufficient confidence, social anxiety, and heightened insecurity. Jefferson (2001) defined social anxiety as the unrelenting fear of negative appraisal in social interactions and performance settings, often accompanied by overactive cardiovascular and respiratory symptoms, including increased heart rate, trembling, sweating, and shortness of breath. Iqbal and Ajmal (2019) indicated that the FNE phenomenon is stronger amongst fearful students, leading to avoidance of evaluative situations, thus perpetuating the fear of overperformance and withdrawal. FNE is reinforced through distorted cognitive processing and negative self-evaluations, which escalate anxiety and avoidance behaviors, as proposed in Clark and Wells (1995) Cognitive Behavioral Theory. Beck and Clark (1997) argued similarly that anxiety in evaluative contexts arises due to biased expectations and the mere anticipation of negative outcomes. Self Determination Theory Deci & Ryan formulated in 1985 suggests that autonomy, competence, and connectedness are vital psychological needs for motivating and succeeding academically. For students who experience high levels of FNE, their autonomy is likely to be diminished. This in turn lowers their motivation to participate in learning and academic activities (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Student Anxiety

The emotional strain, discomfort, and apprehension that occurs in relation to academic activities. It is commonly triggered by the stress of meeting certain academic milestones, social interactions, or personal expectations of achieving a certain level of success (Cassady et al., 2019). According to Spielberger and Vagg (1995), anxiety is an emotional 'on-off switch' that varies in intensity and disrupts a person's life in functioning, especially when the level of anxiety becomes too high. Under Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) cognitive appraisal theory, anxiety occurs when students view academic challenges as threats, particularly when they hold some doubts about their ability to manage. Wigfield and Eccles (2000) theorized that students' expectations of the outcome and the value placed on the academic task informs their motivation and level of anxiety. When students place high value on achieving academic milestones while dreading the possibility of failing, anxiety is highly likely to occur. This is also supported by the Yerkes-Dodson Law (1908) which states that while moderate levels of anxiety can enhance performance, excessive anxiety can lead to cognitive overload and diminished academic functioning (Cassady & Johnson, 2002). Through anxiety, the ability to think is disrupted because a person's short-term memory is impaired, attention is drawn to 'threats,' and focus is cast away from learning objectives.

Biologically, anxiety is also associated with the fight-or-flight response (Cannon, 1915), which initiates physiological reactions when a person perceives threat. LeDoux (1996) highlighted neurobiological structures such as the amygdala and prefrontal cortex's role in the processing of fear and anxiety. Psychodynamic models, for example, those by Freud (1926), consider that anxiety results from unconscious conflict, including fear of being

disapproved of by parents or failing. Erikson's psychosocial theory (1950) accounts for Student Anxiety because of identity development issues that arise in adolescence and young adulthood. Motivational theories also yield information about the origins of academic anxiety. Achievement Goal Theory (Dweck & Leggett, 1988) points to the fact that performance-goal students who fear failure are more susceptible to anxiety. Self-Determination Theory also points out that whenever autonomy is constrained and forces outside of oneself to hold sway, students are more prone to anxiety. These views cumulatively show that Student Anxiety is shaped by a complex interplay of cognitive biases, learned behavior, social pressures, biological reactions, and developmental issues.

Academic Performance

Students' ability to meet education-related goals, measured by outcomes such as their grades, participation in class, and understanding of course material (Birchmeier et al., 2020). There are multiple determinants in relation to academic success, including cognitive abilities, emotional regulation, motivation, and environmental support for achievement. To highlight the importance of students' beliefs about their competence and the reasons to expect to succeed in relation to academic tasks, Eccles and Wigfield (2002) put for the expectancy-value theory. FNE and anxiety disrupt students' expectation to succeed, lessen their motivation to try, although they often lead to avoiding behaviors, such as procrastination, disengagement, and ultimately poor performance (Putwain et al., 2010). Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory also supports the connection between students' beliefs about their academic abilities and their performance and motivation; essentially, when anxiety disrupts student confidence, they are less likely to take on challenging tasks as they are less confident in their abilities, leading to poor performance. However, either a supportive learning environment or teaching students effective coping strategies can increase student's self-efficacy beliefs and lessen the negative impacts of anxiety. As Zeidner (2019) noted, anxiety about grades and evaluations reduces the engagement of the student with the academic material and will directly lessen that overall ability to succeed academically, as well as performance evaluations.

The relevance of this research into the relationship of FNE, Student Anxiety, and Academic Performance lies in its potential contributions to educational practice and psychological research. By examining the relationship of these psychological variables, within a subpopulation of psychology students, it created a deeper understanding of the emotional and cognitive obstacles to academic success. This understanding can help educators, counselors, and institutions implement individualized interventions aimed at reducing academic anxiety, increasing engagement with their studies, and improving their learning. These results could also contribute to educational policy or promote the establishment of appropriate student-centered educational settings that prioritize psychological well-being. In addition, theoretically, this paper contributes to the community of academic anxiety and performance literature,

This study has several assumptions. It has assumed that psychology students´ self-reported experiences appropriately reflect their levels of FNE or anxiety. It has assumed that these psychological factors have an actual effect, directly or indirectly, on Academic Performance. It has assumed that the theoretical frameworks used, such as Cognitive Behavioral Theory and Expectancy-Value Theory, have validity. And it has assumed that institutional climates and policies exert influences on students' mental health and academic experiences. However, there are limitations to be aware of. There may be bias associated with self-reporting, and

the sample consisted only of psychology students, meaning that the findings may not be generalizable. The study does not imply a cause-and-effect relationship, and there are a few unmeasured variables, including personality traits, level of financial and economic security, or their academic history that may also impact the results of this study. The study also cannot assess impact over time because of its brief duration.

Delimitations for the study specifically include the population of the study being psychology students in a university, which allowed the research to examine FNE and anxiety in detail in this capacity. Academic Performance was used to quantify performance through traditional measures like grades and participant engagement rather than measuring experience levels, such as extra-curricular engagement. The research used quantitative methods and focused on only statistical analysis of relationships between variables; thus, qualitative components such as in-depth interviews or participant-reported vignettes were not utilized. The study provided narrow boundaries in hopes of returning specific and applicable findings of psychological challenges psychology students experience and their role on Academic Performance.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

For the study, a total of 180 responses were collected. The participants consisted of undergraduate and postgraduate psychology students with a variety of academic backgrounds. Demographic information such as age, gender, and academic level was gathered. A convenience and purposive sampling method will be adopted to recruit participants who qualify for the inclusion criteria

Data collection

The sampling frame is the list of psychology students enrolled in the institution's undergraduate and postgraduate programs. The unit is the individual students, intuitional databases, online announcements, and social media platforms that will be used for participant recruitment.

Instruments

1. Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale (Leary, 1983)

Leary introduced a short, 12-question tool in 1983, the Brief Fear of Negative Assessment Scale (BFNE) to get at people's worries about being judged harshly. It's a trimmed-down version of the older 30-item Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale (FNE; Watson & Friend, 1969). A five-point rating system is used to assess how characteristic each item of the Brief FNE is of the respondent. Reverse scoring applies to items 2, 4, 7, and 10. Total scores, which vary from 12 to 60, represent the sum of the item responses.

- **Reliability:** The Brief FNE shows strong internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of .90 and good test-retest reliability over four weeks (r = .75).
- **Validity:** The Brief FNE correlates highly with the full-length version (r = .96) and shows criterion-related validity through its associations with anxiety, avoidance, self-presentation concerns, and sensitivity to negative evaluation.

2. Academic Anxiety Scale

The Academic Anxiety instrument, created by Cassady, Pierson, and Starling in 2019 (Cassady et al., 2019), is the instrument utilized to quantify academic anxiety in this study. 11. Likert-type items that were intended to represent concerns and worries in academic

contexts and situations make up the survey tool used in this study. The CTAR's response possibilities are the same. ("1 = Not at all typical of me," "2 = Somewhat typical of me," "3 = Quite typical of me," and "4 = Very typical of me").

- **Reliability** A split-half Guttman dependability of 0.91 and a CA of 0.90 indicate that the scale has a high estimated reliability (Cassady et al., 2019).
- **Validity** The scale demonstrates a high level of construct validity, showing a strong correlation with measures of test anxiety, academic stress, and performance-related worries.

3. Academic Performance Scale

Carson Birchmeier, Emily Grattan, Sarah Hornbacher, and Christopher McGregor created the Academic Achievement Scale (APS), a self-report questionnaire used to evaluate students' academic achievement. "Strongly agree" receives a score of five, "agree" receives a score of four, "neutral" receives a score of three, "disagree" receives a score of two, and "strongly disagree" receives a score of one.

- **Reliability:** The APS demonstrates strong internal consistency (α = .89) and good test-retest reliability over two weeks (r = .85).
- **Validity:** The scale shows good concurrent validity, correlating well with established measures of academic achievement

RESULTS

Table 1 Shows the Demographic Details of the Participants

Gender	**Male**	**32**
	Female	148
	Total	180
Educational qualification	Undergraduate	90
	Postgraduate	90
	Total	180
Year of study	First Year	58
	Second Year	92
	Third Year	30
	Total	180

Table 2 Showing Mean and Standard Deviation for the variables under study (N = 180)

Variable	N	Mean	SD
Fear of Negative Evaluation	180	33.8	7.48
Academic Anxiety	180	20.3	6.42
Academic Performance	180	27.6	5.05

The descriptive statistics for the variables under investigation are shown in Table 2. Fear of Negative Evaluation had a mean of 33.8 and a standard deviation of 7.48 for this research sample (N=180). Academic anxiety has a mean of 20.3 and a standard deviation of 6.42. Lastly, the mean score for Academic Performance is 27.6, with a standard deviation of 5.05.

Table 3 Showing Normality of Distribution (N=180)

Variable	Shapiro-Wilk Sig.
Fear of Negative Evaluation	.003
Academic Anxiety	.000
Academic Performance	.054

Table 3 presents the results of the Shapiro-Wilk results for normality. Academic Anxiety and Fear of Negative Evaluation had significance values below .05, indicating non-normality. Academic Performance had a value of .054, suggesting approximate normality. Hence, non-parametric tests were used where necessary.

Table 4 Showing correlation between Fear of Negative Evaluation, Academic Anxiety and Academic Performance

Variables		Fear of Negative Evaluation	Academic Anxiety	Academic Performance
Fear of Negative Evaluation	p (rho)	1.000	.497**	-.173*
Academic Anxiety	p (rho)	.497**	1.000	-.240***
Academic Performance	p (rho)	-.173*	-.240**	1.000

***** Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)
****** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

In a sample of 180 participants, Spearman's rho correlation revealed significant relationships between Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE), Academic Anxiety (AA), and Academic Performance (AP). Non-parametric tests were used due to non-normal distribution of FNE and AA. FNE was positively correlated with AA ($\rho = .497$, $p < .01$), while both FNE and AA were negatively correlated with AP ($\rho = -.173$, $p < .05$; $\rho = -.240$, $p < .01$). These findings suggest that higher anxiety and fear are linked to lower Academic Performance. Therefore, H_{01} is rejected. FNE, anxiety, and Academic Performance are significantly related.

Table 5 Multiple Linear Regression Analysis Predicting Academic Performance from Fear of Negative Evaluation and Academic Anxiety

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig.F Change
1	.200	.040	.029	4.973	.040	3.700	2	177	.027

Fear of Negative Evaluation and Academic Anxiety together significantly predict Academic Performance, $F(2, 177) = 3.70$, $p = .027$. However, they explain only 4% of the variance ($R^2 = .040$; adjusted $R^2 = .029$), indicating a minimal contribution. The standard error of 4.973 reflects the average deviation of observed scores from predicted values.

Major Findings

Fear of Negative Evaluation and Anxiety

Overall, the research suggested a significant positive relationship linking academic anxiety and Fear of Negative Evaluation. Students who are more alert to peer input and reject may feel more anxiety in academic contexts. This supports Leary's (1983) assertion that social-evaluative concerns exacerbate anxiety, particularly in performance contexts. Even with only minor students' peer assessments, the fear would heighten and obstruct focus, which is what we have seen in the previous research.

Psychological Factors and Academic Performance

Academic anxiety and fear of inadequate evaluation both had a negative correlation to Academic Performance. These findings are relevant to the Cognitive Interference Theory (Eysenck et al., 2007) as they suggest that anxiety, which is linked to working memory, is interfered with by intrusive thoughts that is associated with lower academic achievement. Previous research (Cassady & Johnson, 2002; Zeidner, 2019) emphasized how anxiety can lead to performance impairments, which can occur even in high performers. Overall, these findings provide further evidence that psychological well-being plays an important role in supporting academic achievement, particularly when the stakes are high in subject disciplines like psychology.

Educational Level and Year of Study

No discernable difference in anxiety, fear of evaluation, or performance was found among undergraduates and postgrads, or amongst studying students across years. This might be a consequence of the same levels of academic pressure and resources at every academic level. This indicates that personal attributes may impact anxiety levels more than educational status (Misra & McKean, 2000).

Gender Differences

Despite slight anxiety, fear, and performance differences, there were no statistically significant differences for female students. Academic Performance differences were nearly statistically significant ($p = .080$), which could be influenced by traits associated with gender, such as conscientiousness and study habits (Duckworth & Seligman, 2006).

Predictive Power of Psychological Factors

Through regression analysis, we found that Fear of Negative Evaluation and academic anxiety together predict significant variance in Academic Performance, with a small effect size ($R^2 = .040$). This finding is consistent with Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017), which suggests that psychological well-being matters for motivation and performance; even small predictive relationships can matter in educational contexts because there are multiple influences on performance.

This research investigated the connections between Academic Performance, Academic Anxiety, and Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE) in students in psychology. Using important theories such as Social-Evaluative Threat, Cognitive Interference, and Self-Determination, secondary data from 180 university students were used with standardized scales of measurement and statistical analysis.

The participants in this study demonstrated a strong positive relationship between anxiety and FNE, while both Academic Performances had negative relationships with academic

anxiety and FNE. This finding supports earlier research that found anxiety can disrupt a student's focus and motivation, leading to ineffective Academic Performance. Demographic factors including gender, level of study, and year of study, were considered and had no significant effect on the primary variables.

The outcome of regression analysis showed that both FNE and anxiety have acceptable explanations as predictors of Academic Performance although to a minor extent ($R^2 = .040$) and that Academic Performance can be predicted in some other respect. Even considering the above limitation, the current study highlighted that the level of psychological distress can have a substantial impact on academic achievement and that psychological distress needs action.

CONCLUSION

The study found that psychological factors primarily anxiety and Fear of Negative Evaluation could hinder Academic Performance. These issues are not unique to specified groups, which indicates that all students need mental health support. Although there are limitations to the current study's findings, such as the survey's cross-sectional design and self-report measures, they add to a growing body of evidence that academic achievement is influenced by psychological as well as academic factors.

Recommendations

- Mental Health Support: Institutions should implement counseling services, faculty training, and stress management programs to reduce academic anxiety and fear.
- Early Intervention: Peer support groups, mindfulness practices, and cognitive-behavioral strategies can help students build resilience.
- Curriculum Reform: Introduce non-evaluative assessments and formative feedback to lower performance pressure and enhance intrinsic motivation.

Limitations and Future Research

Being cross-sectional, the study can't infer causality. Future research should use longitudinal designs, include objective academic data, and explore moderating variables like personality traits, coping skills, and self-efficacy to deepen understanding.

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Conflict of Interest
The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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