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# **FEAR OF NEGATIVE EVALUATION AS A PREDICTOR OF ACADEMIC ANXIETY IN UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS**

**Mr. Emeka Chukwuemeka Eze**

Enugu State University of Science and  
Technology, Agbani

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**Abstract:** The study investigated the relationship between fear of negative evaluation and academic anxiety among undergraduate students, four hundred and fifty-seven (457) undergraduate students which comprises of 202 males and 255 females with mean age of 20.61 and SD of 2.410 were selected using multi-stage (cluster, simple random: by balloting and purposive) sampling techniques as participants from Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Enugu. Cassady et al. (2019) Academic Anxiety Scale and Watson and Friend (1969) Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE) were used for data collection, Correlational design was adopted based on the fact that the relationships between the predictor variables and dependent variable were investigated and also the researchers did not manipulate or control any of the variables. The statistical test that was used for data analysis was Pearson correlation coefficient SPSS version 27 was used to analysis the data. Findings show there was a significant positive relationship between fear of negative evaluation and academic anxiety at  $r = .261$  at  $p < .01$ . Hence, school authority should come up with a modality or a course work that can help to improve student positive view about themselves, so as to bring about positive evaluation which will reduce fear of negative evaluation.

**Keywords:** fear of negative evaluation, academic anxiety, students, undergraduate

## **Introduction**

Numerous obstacles must be overcome by students attending higher education institutions. They might alter their behaviour in an attempt to get over these challenges, which could have a negative impact on their mental health and cause anxiety. Students are especially affected by this problem, as many of them worry about their capacity to fulfil their academic and extracurricular obligations. Anxiety, however, can also be a motivator, encouraging pupils to consider their goals thoughtfully. Even while students use a variety of coping strategies, some may struggle to control their anxiety, which can result in symptoms that affect their mental health. All things considered, college students' mental health is essential to their perseverance and performance at their schools (VanderLind, 2017). Students feel less strain in their academic careers when they can control their anxiety. On the other hand, if students continue to experience anxiety, it may make it more difficult for them to concentrate on their schoolwork. Their future employability may suffer as a result of anxiety, which can also impair their

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physical and mental health and possibly persist even after graduation (Basudan et al., 2017). It is essential to comprehend the elements that lead to worry in students. This emphasises the need for research on the connection between academic anxiety and fear of negative evaluation, since resolving these problems is crucial to preserving mental health and encouraging students to stick with their studies.

In general, anxiety can be classified as either state or trait anxiety. While state anxiety is triggered by a transient environmental event, such as an exam, an accident, punishment, etc., trait anxiety is a stable attribute or trait of the individual (Bihari, 2023). Anxiety related to the atmosphere of academic institutions, including teachers and specific disciplines like language, science, and mathematics, might be categorised as academic anxiety (Bihari, 2023). The term academic anxiety refers to the apprehension, stress, or fear associated with academic situations or assignments (Rincon, 2021). Exams, assignments, courses (science, maths or reading), peer or parental pressures related to schooling, or just a general apprehension about studying or group projects in class could all be contributing factors. A natural ebb and flow cycle characterises academic anxiety; as the worry's source (an exam, a presentation, etc.) gets closer or more significant, so does the anxiety's intensity (Rincon, 2021). Anxiety will also decrease when the stressor has passed until another stressor becomes pertinent, at which point the cycle will repeat. This cycle makes it feasible to control this worry when it peaks. Additionally, taking preventative action might lessen the level of anxiety felt, making it easier to handle in the present.

All students frequently experience some level of anxiety when faced with academic requirements or homework. A low level of anxiety can help motivate students to achieve their academic objectives (Rincon, 2021). We refer to this as facilitative anxiety. To handle their academic anxiety, students should use coping mechanisms when their worry becomes so severe that it interferes with their ability to succeed academically. Each person experiences academic anxiety for a variety of unique reasons. As a result, there are numerous varieties of academic anxiety symptoms. Academic anxiety has four aspects: social, behavioural, cognitive, and physiological (Rincon, 2021). Not every student will have symptoms from every one of these groups. A person could, for instance, have cognitive and physiological symptoms without ever exhibiting any behavioural ones. Finding the appropriate treatment strategies for your particular worry might be aided by learning to distinguish between the various signs of academic anxiety.

Anxiety that manifests physically is known as a physiological symptom. Parts of the body may react nervously or fearfully as a result of academic anxiety. These signs may consist of: A twitchy, uneasy feeling in the abdomen (sometimes known as "butterflies"): Feeling queasy: Increased heart rate: Anxiety and fidgeting: Dizziness and headaches: Sweating with anxiety: Breathlessness: Tense muscles, trouble unwinding (Rincon, 2021). Some factors might contribute to academic anxiety, such as fear of negative evaluation. Kumar et al. (2015) postulated that there is a significant positive relationship between anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. This emphasises that FNE and Anxiety are strongly correlated.

Fear of evaluation, which can be divided into two categories—fear of negative evaluation (FNE) and fear of positive evaluation (FPE)—refers to the social anxiety brought on by evaluating other people (Weeks et al., 2008; Birk et al., 2019). Atychiphobia, also known as fear of negative evaluation (FNE), is a psychological construct that reflects anxiety about other people's opinions, anguish over other people's negative opinions, and the

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expectation that one would be poorly evaluated by others (Irena & Randi, 2015). The fear of receiving a poor evaluation is an unjustified dread of receiving a poor evaluation from others (Watson & Friend, 1969; Salazar-Ayala, et al., 2021), It could indicate a sense of distress and anxiety due to a fear of social rejection, which makes the person attempt to stay away from circumstances that require evaluation (Hartmann et al., 2010; Salazar-Ayala et al., 2021).

According to Hwang et al. (2019), people who fear negative evaluation avoid social situations because they fear being blamed, criticised, ridiculed, sarcastic, and receiving other negative feedback that could harm their status, reputation, and even self-confidence (Lombardo & Fantasia, 1976; Heimberg et al., 1988; Zeng & Zhu, 2021). These people may cut back on their on-screen personas or prolong the time between self-disclosures. Social avoidance psychology is the result of people who are afraid of receiving too much praise and expectations from others (Watson & Friend, 1969; Weeks, 2014; Zeng & Zhu, 2021). As a result, they may decide to cut back on the frequency and length of their SNS disclosures to avoid receiving some praise. Therefore, SNS users who are afraid of being judged by others and do not want to be noticed reveal less personal information on their profile pages in order to protect themselves from harm and disappointment because of their negative beliefs and emotional experiences of social interactions (Chen et al., 2019). To put it another way, people may decide to limit their online self-disclosure as the easiest method to lower the dangers of squandering their own time and energy and harming their reputation (Hwang et al., 2019).

The cognitive theory of anxiety was chosen as the study's theoretical framework because it enables people to form more realistic and logical assessments of both themselves and the circumstances they face. Anxiety may result from a person's cognitive processing of events or circumstances. The four factors under investigation were brought together by the cognitive theory. When someone has negative thoughts about a given stimulus, it may cause them to react negatively since the negative stimulus may cause them to feel scared or nervous, which may result in anxiety. According to a cognitive perspective, a person's level of self-concept is determined by the mental image they have of themselves. A person's cognitive beliefs about a certain attribute or set of attributes, or how they process information, determine whether they will show signs of academic anxiety or dread of receiving a poor evaluation. Thus, this hypothesis will be investigated.

Fear of negative evaluation will relate to academic performance.

## **Method Participants**

Four hundred and fifty-seven (457) undergraduate students which comprising 202 males and 255 females, with a mean age of 20.61 and an SD of 2.410, were selected using multi-stage (cluster, simple random: by balloting and purposive) sampling techniques as participants from Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Enugu. The students were cluster according to their faculties, simple random: by balloting was used to pick the faculties, while purposive: a criterion selection-based sampling technique was used to select the participants from: Applied natural sciences (97), Management sciences (107), Environmental sciences (94), Engineering (85) and from Law (74).

## **Instrument**

These set of instruments will be used:

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- Cassady et al. (2019) Academic Anxiety Scale and
- Watson and Friend (1969) Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE)

### Cassady et al. (2019) Academic Anxiety Scale

This was measured through the 11-item Academic Anxiety Scale (AAS) developed by Cassady et al. (2019). The scale uses a 4-point Likert type scale (1 = not at all typical for me; 4 = very typical of me). A sample items in the scale is: "I often worry that I am not doing my assignments properly." The authors reported excellent internal consistency ( $\alpha = .90$ ) of the scale. Further, CFA indicated a good model fit,  $\chi^2(33, N = 260) = 70.02, p < .001$ ;  $2/df = 2.12$ ; RMSEA = .059; RMSEA 90% CI [.04; .08]; CFI = 0.97; TLI = 0.96; NFI = 0.96; SRMR = 0.037. Cronbach's alpha indicated a good internal consistency of the scale ( $\alpha = .88$ ). Factor loadings ranged from 0.66 to 0.88. Higher scores on the AAS indicate greater academic anxiety experienced.

### Watson and Friend (1969) Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE)

Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE) was a 30-item instrument designed to measure social anxiety characterized by marked and persistent fear of social or performance situations appraised from being evaluated by others. It was scored true 'T' or false 'F' responses format. All the items are directly scored. Watson and Friend (1969) reported reliability coefficient of

KR -20 = .94 and one month interval test-retest = .78 for FNE. On Nigerian validity, Oyedeki (2004) in correlating FNE with STAI Y-2 (Spielberger, 1983), obtained a concurrent validity coefficient of .63.

## Procedure

Undergraduate students were drawn as participants from five faculties in Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT) using multi-stage sampling (cluster, simple random, by balloting, and purposive) techniques for this study. The students were clustered according to their faculties. simple random sampling by balloting was used to pick the faculties, while purposive sampling techniques were used to select students from the selected faculties. The researchers employed the research assistants, who are students, faculty executives from the selected faculties, to help distribute and retrieve the questionnaire. four hundred and sixtytwo (462) copies of the instrument were sent out, and four hundred and fifty-nine (459) were returned. Among the returning ones, two were not properly responded to, which makes the number properly responded to be four hundred and fifty-seven, which was used for data analysis.

## Design and Statistics

A correlational design was adopted based on the fact that the relationships between two variables had been investigated, and also that it does not manipulate or control any of the variables. The statistical test that was used for data analysis is the Pearson correlation coefficient. SPSS version 27 was used to analyse the data

### Result Table I: Descriptive and Correlational Statistics

S/N	Variables	M	S.D	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	Fear of negative evaluation	13.70	5.281	1	.261**	-.069	-.004	-.098	-.127

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2	Academic anxiety	22.87	6.797	1	-.044	-.086	-	-.097
							.259**	
3	Age	20.61	2.410		1	-.210*	.558**	.198*
4	Gender	1.675	.4704			1	-.016	-.067
5	Year of Study	246.0	123.1				1	.117
6	Entry mode	1.032	.1760					1

At  $p < .05^*$ ,  $p < .01^{**}$

Table I above shows fear of negative evaluation and academic anxiety were related at  $r = .261$  at  $p < .01$ , which indicates that an increase in fear of negative evaluation will lead to an increase in academic anxiety among undergraduate students. The demographic variables of age  $r = -.069$ , gender  $r = -.004$ ,  $r = -.098$  and entry mode  $r = -.127$  did not correlate with fear of negative evaluation though there were negative interactions in all of them, these indicates increase in the mentioned variables will lead to decrease in fear of negative evaluation. There was a negative relationship between year of study and academic anxiety at  $r = -.259$  at  $p < .01$ , this implies that increase in year of study will lead to decrease in fear of negative evaluation among undergraduate student. The others demographic variables of age  $r = -.044$ , gender  $r = -.086$  and mode of entry  $r = -.097$  did not correlate with academic anxiety but have a negative interaction, this shows that increase in the listed variables mentions will lead to the decrease in academic anxiety.

## Discussion

The hypothesis tested in this study posited that there exists a significant relationship between the fear of negative evaluation and academic anxiety. This hypothesis was confirmed, leading to its acceptance. The findings reveal that a student's negative self-assessment can considerably influence their academic performance within the school environment. Specifically, students who are apprehensive about being judged unfavourably or believe that their strengths will go unrecognized may suffer from heightened levels of academic anxiety. This form of anxiety can detrimentally affect their performance not only in academic tasks but also in various schoolrelated activities, such as presentations, group projects, and examinations.

Moreover, the impact of the fear of the unknown plays a critical role in this dynamic. When students foster concerns that their efforts or outcomes may not be viewed positively, it can create a paralyzing effect, leading to decreased motivation, increased stress, and ultimately inferior performance. Such fears can also contribute to a cycle of self-doubt, as students may withdraw from engaging in challenges that could further expose them to potential negative evaluations. Consequently, addressing these issues becomes imperative for educators and mental health professionals to foster a supportive environment that mitigates academic anxiety and enhances student performance.

## Implications of the result

The result was in congruity with cognitive theory of anxiety which was adopted as the theoretical framework for this study because the theory helps individuals develop more realistic and rational appraisals of themselves and the situations they encounter. The way individual process events or situations cognitively may lead to anxiety.

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The cognitive theory helped to bring the four variables understudy together, once an individual possesses negative thought towards a particular stimulus it might trigger negative responses, because the thought of the negative stimuli might invoke fear and anxiousness, which might lead to the anxiety. In cognitive perspective, the mental picture one has about him/her determines the level of selfconcept. The way and manner the individual process information or the cognitive believe about a particular attribute or a given characteristics determine if the person will exhibit fear of been evaluated negatively, this might lead to academic anxiety.

The study was in affirmation with the empirical wok reviewed like the work of Kumar et al., (2015) which postulated that fera of negative evaluation and academic are negatively related. The study also adds to literature which can be cited by future researchers

The result obtained shows that fear of negative evaluation and academic anxiety are correlated positively, that is, increase in one will case a decrease in the other one. Academic anxiety and years of study were negatively related. Hence, school authority should come up with a modality or a course work that can help to improve student positive view about themselves, so as to bring about positive evaluation which will reduce fear of negative evaluation. Lecturers schools make their lecture period an interactive one, so as to give room for the student to express themselves, this will help to build their confident which will help to reduce academic anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. Bully, talking down and other form of activities that can contribute to student withdrawing inwards during academic activities should be discourage, this will give room for student to engage themselves in an interactive academic activity.

## **Limitations of the study**

Many factors worked against this study, one of such factors is the general insecurity in the south east, most especial the calling for sit at home by none state authors. This reduces the numbers of days that student comes to school, and it affected the numbers of participants that the researcher drawn for this this study. The numbers of student would have increase assuming there was no call for sit at home.

Sampling participants from only one university also, affected the numbers of student that participated in the research. The numbers of participants would have increase assuming more than one institution was considered.

The sampling techniques adopted by the researcher also militated against the study, more participants would have been drawn assuming a favourable sampling technique was adopted.

## **Suggestions for further studies**

Future researcher should carry out this study when student are saved to come to school so as to increase the numbers of participants that will participate in the research.

More than one institution should be sampled by the future researcher so as to give room for more participants.

Other sampling techniques such as longitudinal, mix research and other sampling techniques should be consider by future researcher.

## **Summary and conclusion**

The study investigated the relationship between fear of negative evaluation and academic anxiety among undergraduate student, the findings revealed that there was a positive relationship between the two variables.



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Hence school authority should try and develop a program that help reduce student fear of negative evaluation, so as to reduce academic anxiety. Clinical psychologist and guidance and counsellors should work on the student self-confidence and self-worth so as to reduces the negative thought they have about themselves, for academic anxiety to reduce.

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