

The Impact of Social Anxiety on Academic Performance and Behavioral Outcomes among University Students in Nangarhar Province, Afghanistan

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Abstract

Aim: this study is to assess the level of social anxiety among students which enrolled in public and private universities in Nangarhar Province, and to examine its impact on academic performance and behavioral outcomes.

Research Methods: A quantitative research design is employed, and data are collected from 210 university students using a convenience sampling technique through a Google Forms questionnaire. The data analyzed through SPSS Version 26, applied descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, simple linear regression, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), and Tukey's Honest Significant Difference (HSD) post hoc test.

Result: findings revealed that the overall level of social anxiety among university students is moderate ($M = 2.75$). Furthermore, social anxiety demonstrated a strong and statistically significant relationship with academic performance ($r = .749$, $p < .001$), explaining 56.1% of the variance in academic performance. In addition, social anxiety is positively and significantly associated with behavioral outcomes ($r = .493$, $p < .001$), explain 24.3% of the variance in behavioral outcomes. However, no statistically significant differences were observed in the level of social anxiety among students across different years of study.

Conclusion: In conclusion, the study indicates that social anxiety negatively affects students' academic performance and behavioral functioning. Therefore, strengthening psychological support services and university counseling programs is essential to reduce social anxiety and enhance students' academic success and overall well-being.

Keywords: Social Anxiety; Academic Performance; Behavioral Outcomes; University Students.

Introduction

Education is considered one of the fundamental pillars of individual and societal development. However, numerous psychological and social factors influence students' academic achievement. One of the most significant psychological challenges is social anxiety, which affects individuals' participation and performance in social interactions, classroom activities, and educational environments. Social anxiety is a condition in which an individual experiences an intense fear of being evaluated, criticized, or rejected by others, negatively affecting their behavior, self-confidence, and academic performance. University students encounter a wide range of social and academic challenges throughout their educational journey. Activities such as delivering classroom presentations, participating in group discussions and collaborative tasks, interacting with instructors and classmates, and engaging in university programs can be particularly difficult for students experiencing social anxiety. As a result, some students withdraw from social and academic activities, which adversely affects their academic performance, classroom participation, and educational achievements. In recent years, international research on social anxiety and its effects on education has increased considerably. These studies indicate that high levels of social anxiety create significant barriers to students' academic progress, social interaction, and psychological well-being. Despite this growing body of evidence, limited research has been conducted in Afghanistan, particularly on the prevalence of social anxiety among university students and its impact on their academic performance.

Research Problem :

Social anxiety is one of the major psychological challenges faced by university students and has the potential to negatively affect their academic performance, social participation, and educational achievement. Although numerous studies have investigated this issue worldwide, there is limited empirical evidence regarding the prevalence of social anxiety and its impact on students' academic performance in Afghanistan, particularly in Nangarhar Province. This lack of research creates a significant knowledge gap and limits the ability of higher education institutions to develop effective interventions for supporting students' mental health and academic success. Therefore, the primary research problem of this study is to assess the level of social anxiety among university students and evaluate its effects on their academic performance and behavioral outcomes. The findings are expected to provide evidence-based recommendations for strengthening students' psychological well-being and improving educational achievement.

Research Questions:

What is the level of social anxiety among university students?

Does social anxiety affect the academic performance of university students?

How does social anxiety influence the behavioral outcomes of university students?

Are there significant differences in the level of social anxiety among students across different years of study?

Research Objective:

To assess the level of social anxiety among university students.

To examine the relationship between social anxiety and academic performance among university students.

To analyze the behavioral effects of social anxiety on university students. To compare the levels of social anxiety among students across different years of study.

Hypotheses:

H1: Social anxiety has a significant negative effect on the academic performance of university students.

H2: Social anxiety is positively associated with behavioral avoidance among university students.

H3: First-year university students experience higher levels of social anxiety than students in higher years of study.

Literature Review :

Strahan (2003) found that university students' academic success is not determined solely by social anxiety. Students who tend to suppress their emotions are less likely to persist in their studies and often achieve lower academic grades. In contrast, students with stronger social and academic skills, a solid prior academic background, and better adjustment to university life tend to achieve higher academic performance.

Brook and Willoughby (2015) reported that social anxiety has both direct and indirect negative effects on students' academic achievement. Social anxiety hinders the development of social relationships, which in turn reduces academic success. Conversely, better academic achievement can strengthen social relationships and help reduce levels of social anxiety.

Cruz (2021) demonstrated that individuals with social anxiety experience poorer academic performance throughout all stages of education, from primary school to higher and professional education. Even after controlling for family background and other influential factors, social anxiety remained strongly associated with lower academic achievement. The findings emphasize the importance of early diagnosis and treatment to reduce the long-term social and economic consequences of this disorder.

Manuel Prieto et al. (2023) investigated how primary school students evaluated their academic performance during the COVID-19 pandemic and how these evaluations were associated with social anxiety, gender, and grade level. The findings revealed that most students believed their academic performance had neither improved nor worsened. However, social anxiety increased over time and is associated with poorer academic performance, particularly in physical education. In contrast, students with lower levels of social anxiety were more likely to report improvements in their academic performance.

Majeed, Munir, and Malik (2022) examined the relationship between academic self-efficacy, social anxiety, and academic achievement among university students. Their findings indicated that higher academic self-efficacy is positively and significantly associated with better academic performance, whereas social anxiety is negatively associated with both academic self-efficacy and academic achievement. Overall, academic self-efficacy emerged as a positive predictor of academic success, while social anxiety had a detrimental effect. The authors concluded that strengthening students' self-efficacy and effectively managing psychological problems such as social anxiety are essential for improving academic performance.

Gültekin and Dereboy (2011) assessed the prevalence of social anxiety and its associated factors among university students. The study found that nearly one-fifth of the students experienced social anxiety, with higher prevalence among females, urban residents, and students with a family history of mental illness. Social anxiety is associated with poorer quality of life, identity disturbances, and increased suicidal ideation. However, no significant difference is found between students with and without social anxiety in terms of their self-reported academic performance.

Djidonou et al. (2016) investigated the impact of social anxiety on the academic performance of university students. The findings revealed that approximately 11.6% of students experienced social anxiety, with the condition being more prevalent among female students. Furthermore, gender, place of residence (urban or rural), and field of study were significantly associated with the disorder. Social anxiety negatively affected the academic performance of more than half of the affected students, although some students reported no noticeable impact. To cope with their anxiety, some students resorted to alcohol consumption and sedative medications. Although the risk of addiction is relatively low, these coping strategies had considerable negative implications for their health and future social and professional lives.

Van Ameringen, Mancini, and Farvolden (2003) reported that social anxiety, particularly Generalized Social Phobia, is associated with school dropout. Nearly half of the participants had left school before

completing their education, and many identified anxiety as the primary reason for their decision. Students who dropped out were more likely to experience severe anxiety and other psychological disorders. These findings highlight the importance of early identification and treatment of anxiety disorders to improve students' academic success.

Laldinpui et al. (2024) found that social anxiety is common among students, particularly first-year university students. The condition negatively affects their interpersonal relationships, self-confidence, and daily functioning while also reducing academic achievement. The authors emphasized the importance of creating a supportive educational environment to help students cope with social anxiety.

Kedia and Kumar (2025) reported that social anxiety has a negative impact on students' academic performance, classroom participation, and social interactions. Fear of negative evaluation and avoidance of social situations hinder students' learning and their ability to establish meaningful relationships. The study emphasized the need for timely psychological support and a supportive educational environment to improve students' academic and social development.

Sultana, Shirin, and Islam (2017) found that children with lower levels of social anxiety achieved better academic outcomes, whereas higher levels of social anxiety were associated with poorer academic performance.

Khan (2021) examined the relationship between social anxiety and academic performance among university students. The study included **60 students** selected through simple random sampling from a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed. Hons.) program. The Social Phobia Inventory (SPIN) is used to assess social anxiety, and the data were analyzed using SPSS with Chi-square, regression, and Levene's t-test. Students' Grade Point Average (GPA) is used as the measure of academic performance by comparing students with high and low GPAs. The results showed that the p-value (0.333) exceeded the significance level of 0.05, indicating no statistically significant relationship between social anxiety and academic performance. Overall, the study concluded that social anxiety did not have a significant effect on students' academic achievement.

Russell and Topham (2012) conducted a web-based survey involving 787 university students in the United Kingdom to assess the prevalence of social anxiety and its impact on higher education and students' psychological well-being. The findings indicated that social anxiety is a persistent and often hidden problem affecting a substantial proportion of university students, with negative consequences for both academic performance and mental well-being. The authors recommended that universities strengthen teaching practices and student support services to better assist students experiencing social anxiety.

Mirawdali, Morrissey, and Ball (2018) reported that academic anxiety negatively affects students' educational performance. Among pharmacy students, examination anxiety, poor time management, and heavy academic workloads were identified as major contributing factors. In addition, social and family-related concerns also influenced academic outcomes. The study emphasized the importance of implementing effective strategies to reduce students' stress and improve their academic achievement.

Tayag and Gonzales (2021) used quantitative methods to investigate whether social anxiety influences university students' academic performance. The findings revealed no significant relationship between social anxiety and students' Grade Point Average (GPA), and most participants did not experience severe levels of social anxiety.

Hakami et al. (2017) assessed the prevalence and impact of social anxiety among university students in Saudi Arabia. The study found that approximately 25.8% of students exhibited symptoms of social anxiety, with varying levels of severity. Students affected by social anxiety experienced significant difficulties in academic, social, and family domains, which negatively influenced their quality of life. The authors emphasized the importance of early identification and appropriate treatment of social anxiety to minimize its adverse consequences.

Mihăilescu et al. (2016) demonstrated that anxiety and depression among first- and second-year medical students were associated with lower academic achievement. Using standardized assessment instruments,

the study found that higher levels of anxiety and depression before examinations were linked to lower examination scores. Depression is identified as a significant predictor of poor academic performance, particularly among first-year medical students, regardless of gender. These findings highlight the importance of preventing and treating psychological problems to improve students' academic achievement and, ultimately, the quality of future healthcare services.

Research Methodology:

Research Design:

This study adopted a quantitative research design to examine the relationship between social anxiety, academic performance, and behavioral outcomes among university students in Nangarhar Province, Afghanistan. A cross-sectional survey approach is employed to collect quantitative data from the participants.

Population of the Study:

The target population comprised students enrolled in public and private universities in Nangarhar Province, Afghanistan. Students from different faculties and academic years were included to ensure a representative assessment of social anxiety across the university student population.

Sampling Technique and Sample Size:

A convenience sampling technique is employed to select the study participants. This non-probability sampling method is chosen because it enabled easy access to respondents who were willing to participate in the survey. A total of 210 university students from various faculties of both public and private universities participated in the study.

Data Collection

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered through Google Forms. The questionnaire consisted of items measuring students' levels of social anxiety, academic performance, and behavioral outcomes. The online survey link is distributed to university students, and participation is voluntary. Before completing the questionnaire, respondents were informed about the purpose of the study, and confidentiality and anonymity were assured.

Data Analysis

The collected data were entered into and analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 26. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to summarize the demographic characteristics of the respondents and the levels of social anxiety. To test the study hypotheses, Pearson correlation analysis is employed to examine the relationships among the study variables, while simple linear regression is used to determine the effect of social anxiety on academic performance and behavioral outcomes. In addition, One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) is conducted to compare social anxiety levels across different years of study, followed by the Tukey Honestly Significant Difference (Tukey HSD) post hoc test to identify significant group differences. All statistical tests were performed at a 5% significance level ($\alpha = 0.05$).

Result:

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Social_Anx	210	1.00	4.60	2.7495	.87404
Valid N (listwise)	210				

Table 01 stated the descriptive statistics indicate that the participants exhibited a moderate level of social anxiety overall ($M = 2.75$). The participants' responses ranged from 1.00 to 4.60, while the standard deviation ($SD = 0.874$) suggests a moderate degree of variability in their responses. Overall, the findings demonstrate that the study participants experienced a moderate level of social anxiety.

Table 2

Correlations			
		Social_Anx	Academic_Perfo
Social_Anx	Pearson Correlation	1	.749**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	210	210
Academic_Perfo	Pearson Correlation	.749**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	210	210

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

To assess the relationship between social anxiety and its impact on the academic performance of university students, a Pearson correlation analysis is conducted. The results revealed a strong positive correlation between social anxiety and its impact on academic performance ($r = 0.749$, $p < .001$). This finding indicates that students with higher levels of social anxiety experience greater negative effects on their academic performance. Therefore, the first hypothesis (H1), which stated that there is a statistically significant relationship between social anxiety and its impact on academic performance, is supported.

Table 3

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.749 ^a	.561	.559	.58654

a. Predictors: (Constant), Social_Anx

The above table stated that a Simple Linear Regression analysis is conducted to determine the extent to which social anxiety predicts its impact on the academic performance of university students. The results indicated a strong relationship between the variables ($R = 0.749$). The coefficient of determination ($R^2 =$

0.561) shows that social anxiety explains 56.1% of the variance in the impact on academic performance. Furthermore, the adjusted coefficient of determination (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.559$) indicates that the regression model is stable and provides a reliable estimate of the relationship between the variables.

Table 4

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	91.501	1	91.501	265.971	.000 ^b
	Residual	71.557	208	.344		
	Total	163.058	209			
a. Dependent Variable: Academic_Perfo						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Social_Anx						

A Simple Linear Regression analysis is conducted to evaluate the effect of social anxiety on the academic performance of university students. The results indicated that the regression model is statistically significant ($F(1, 208) = 265.971, p < .001$). Furthermore, the model explained 56.1% of the variance in the impact on academic performance ($R^2 = .561$). These findings suggest that social anxiety is a significant predictor of its impact on the academic performance of university students.

Table 5

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.616	.134		4.598	.000
	Social_Anx	.757	.046	.749	16.309	.000
a. Dependent Variable: Academic_Perfo						

The above table show the regression analysis revealed that social anxiety is a significant predictor of its impact on the academic performance of university students. The results showed that the regression model is statistically significant ($F(1, 208) = 265.971, p < .001$) and explained 56.1% of the variance in the impact on academic performance ($R^2 = .561$). Furthermore, the standardized regression coefficient ($\beta = .749$) indicated a strong positive effect of social anxiety, which is also statistically significant ($t = 16.309, p < .001$). These findings suggest that university students with higher levels of social anxiety are more likely to report greater negative effects on their academic performance. Therefore, the first hypothesis (H1) is supported.

Correlations			
		Social_Anx	Behavioral_Imp
Social_Anx	Pearson Correlation	1	.493**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	210	210

Behavioral_Imp	Pearson Correlation	.493**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	210	210
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

To evaluate the relationship between social anxiety and behavioral impacts among university students, a Pearson correlation analysis is conducted. The results revealed a moderate positive and statistically significant correlation between social anxiety and behavioral impacts ($r = .493$, $p < .001$). This finding indicates that students with higher levels of social anxiety are more likely to experience behavioral problems, including avoiding classes, refraining from participating in group study activities, and avoiding involvement in various university programs and extracurricular activities. Therefore, the second hypothesis (H2) is supported.

Table 7

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.493 ^a	.243	.239	.69216
a. Predictors: (Constant), Social_Anx				

The above table stated that A Simple Linear Regression analysis is conducted to evaluate the effect of social anxiety on the behavioral impacts experienced by university students. The results indicated a moderate relationship between the variables ($R = .493$). The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = .243$) showed that social anxiety explained 24.3% of the variance in behavioral impacts. Furthermore, the adjusted coefficient of determination (Adjusted $R^2 = .239$) indicates that the regression model provides reliable and relatively stable estimates of the relationship between the variables.

Table 8

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	31.956	1	31.956	66.703	.000 ^b
	Residual	99.650	208	.479		
	Total	131.606	209			
a. Dependent Variable: Behavioral_Imp						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Social_Anx						

The above table stated that A Simple Linear Regression analysis is conducted to evaluate the effect of social anxiety on the level of behavioral impacts among university students. The results of the ANOVA indicated that the regression model is statistically significant ($F(1, 208) = 66.703$, $p < .001$). This finding demonstrates that social anxiety is a significant predictor of behavioral impacts among university students. Therefore, the second hypothesis (H2), which states that social anxiety is positively associated with behavioral avoidance, is supported.

Table 9

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.408	.158		8.911	.000
	Social_An _x	.447	.055	.493	8.167	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Behavioral_Imp

The above table stated that the results of the regression analysis indicated that the regression model is statistically significant ($F(1, 208) = 66.703$, $p < .001$) and explained 24.3% of the variance in behavioral impacts ($R^2 = .243$). Furthermore, social anxiety is found to be a significant predictor of behavioral impacts ($\beta = .493$, $t = 8.167$, $p < .001$). These findings suggest that university students with higher levels of social anxiety are more likely to exhibit behavioral avoidance and refrain from participating in social and academic activities. Therefore, the second hypothesis (H2) is supported.

Table 10

ANOVA					
Social_An _x					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	3.873	3	1.291	1.707	.167
Within Groups	155.792	206	.756		
Total	159.665	209			

The above table show that A One-Way Analysis of Variance (One-Way ANOVA) is conducted to compare the levels of social anxiety among university students across different years of study (first, second, third, and fourth year). The results indicated that there is no statistically significant difference in the level of social anxiety among students from different academic years ($F(3, 206) = 1.707$, $p = .167$). Therefore, the students' year of study did not have a significant effect on their level of social anxiety. Consequently, the third hypothesis (H3), which proposed that social anxiety levels differ across years of study, is not supported.

Table 11

Multiple Comparisons						
Dependent Variable: Social_Anx						
Tukey HSD						
(I) Year of Study	(J) Year of Study	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1st Year	2nd Year	-.00813	.19259	1.000	-.5070	.4907
	3rd Year	-.29748	.16217	.260	-.7175	.1226
	4th Year	-.05737	.18437	.990	-.5349	.4202
2nd Year	1st Year	.00813	.19259	1.000	-.4907	.5070
	3rd Year	-.28935	.17033	.327	-.7305	.1518
	4th Year	-.04924	.19159	.994	-.5455	.4470
3rd Year	1st Year	.29748	.16217	.260	-.1226	.7175
	2nd Year	.28935	.17033	.327	-.1518	.7305
	4th Year	.24011	.16099	.445	-.1769	.6571
4th Year	1st Year	.05737	.18437	.990	-.4202	.5349
	2nd Year	.04924	.19159	.994	-.4470	.5455
	3rd Year	-.24011	.16099	.445	-.6571	.1769

To further examine the differences in social anxiety levels among students across different years of study, a Tukey HSD post hoc test is conducted. The results indicated that there were no statistically significant differences in social anxiety levels between any pair of academic years (all $p > .05$). For example, the difference between first-year and fourth-year students is not statistically significant ($MD = -0.057$, $p = .990$), and the difference between first-year and third-year students is also not statistically significant ($MD = -0.297$, $p = .260$). These findings confirm the results of the One-Way ANOVA, indicating that the level of social anxiety is relatively similar across all years of study.

Discussion:

This study revealed that social anxiety has a negative impact on both the academic performance and behavioral outcomes of university students. Students with higher levels of social anxiety experience greater academic difficulties and are more likely to avoid participating in classroom activities and social events. These findings are consistent with those reported by Brook and Willoughby (2015), Cruz (2021), Majeed et al. (2022), Laldinpui et al. (2024), and Kedia and Kumar (2025), all of whom concluded that social anxiety is associated with poorer academic achievement and limited social interaction. However, no significant differences in social anxiety levels were found across different years of study, a finding that contrasts with the results reported by Mihăilescu et al. (2016). Overall, the findings suggest that social anxiety adversely affects both the academic and social lives of university students. Therefore, universities should implement psychological support and counseling programs to help reduce social anxiety and improve students' academic performance and overall well-being.

Conclusion:

The findings of this study revealed that social anxiety has a negative impact on both the academic performance and behavioral outcomes of university students. Students with higher levels of social anxiety experience greater academic difficulties and are more likely to avoid participating in classroom activities and social events. These findings are consistent with those reported by Brook and Willoughby (2015), Cruz (2021), Majeed et al. (2022), Laldinpui et al. (2024), and Kedia and Kumar (2025), all of whom concluded that social anxiety is associated with poorer academic achievement and limited social interaction. However, no significant differences in social anxiety levels were found across different years of study, a finding that contrasts with the results reported by Mihăilescu et al. (2016). Overall, the findings suggest that social anxiety adversely affects both the academic and social lives of university students. Therefore, universities should implement psychological support and counseling programs to help reduce social anxiety and improve students' academic performance and overall well-being.

Recommendations:

Universities should strengthen psychological counseling and student support services to help reduce the level of social anxiety among university students.

Training workshops and programs should be organized to enhance students' public speaking, communication, and social interaction skills.

University instructors and administrators should create a supportive classroom and campus environment that encourages students to participate confidently in academic and social activities. Future research should be conducted in other universities across Afghanistan using larger sample sizes to produce findings that are more reliable and generalizable.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this research.

Ethics Approval

This study is conducted in accordance with the ethical principles of research involving human participants. Ethical approval is obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of Rokhan University before data collection. Participation is voluntary, and respondents' anonymity and confidentiality are strictly maintained throughout the study.

Informed Consent

Informed consent is obtained from all participants before they completed the questionnaire. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, their right to withdraw at any time without penalty, and the confidentiality of the information they provided.

Data Availability

The datasets generated and analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. The data are not publicly available because they contain information collected from human participants.

Author Contributions

Irfan Ullah Stanikzai: Conceptualization, research design, methodology, questionnaire development, data collection, statistical analysis, interpretation of results, manuscript writing, review, and supervision.

Iftikhar Ahmad Zegar: Literature review, data collection support, interpretation of findings, manuscript review, editing, and final approval of the manuscript.

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