
Effect of anxiety on students' academic performance at secondary school level

Mahmood Khan Kakar¹, Sardar Fatima², Muhammad Shafi Malik³

¹. M. Phil Scholar, Chairperson of Education Department, Balochistan University of Information Technology and Management Sciences Sub Campus Muslim Bagh, Pakistan. <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-2043-6965>. mehmood.khan2@buitms.Edu.pk

². PhD Scholar, Department of Advanced Studies in Education IER, University of the Punjab Lahore, Pakistan. <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-8248-7470>.

³. PhD Scholar, Department of Educational Sciences, National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad, Pakistan. <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-3083-8392>.

Abstract

Anxiety has numerous hindering factors that distract students from achieving satisfactory results in their examinations. The purpose of this study was to explore factors anxiety and their effects on students' academic performance at the secondary school level. For this purpose, three research objectives were made. The quantitative research design was used for this study and a convenient sampling technique was used to select the sample of 200 public secondary school teachers from Killa Saif Ullah and Muslim Bagh. The questionnaire comprised 36 close-ended statements developed on 5 5-point Likert-type scale. The reliability of the questionnaire was found at 0.81. The data were analyzed by using analysis and descriptive statistical techniques. The data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics and an independent t-test was used through SPSS to find out the difference between genders' views. The findings of the study indicate that factors of anxiety (academic pressure, exams and assessments, parental expectations, competition, absent-mindedness, learning difficulties, and teacher-student relationships) exist and have a great effect on the academic performance of students. However, the study suggested a few strategies through which students can overcome their anxiety. The study recommended that students should keep themselves busy in productive activities, they should think positively about things and keep themselves focused.

Keywords

Effect, Anxiety, Academic, Performance, Explore and Factors.

Introduction

Anxiety is a common emotional reaction to stress or perceived dangers. It typically presents as feelings of unease, worry, or fear regarding a particular situation or event, particularly when the outcome is uncertain. While mild anxiety can drive individuals to stay vigilant and address challenges, excessive or prolonged anxiety can disrupt daily life and overall well-being. It may also be accompanied by physical symptoms such as rapid heartbeat, sweating, or difficulty in breathing. Horwitz, (2016) describes anxiety as a state of mental confusion or perplexity. Severe

forms of anxiety, often classified as anxiety disorders, are more intense and persistent, sometimes necessitating professional intervention or treatment. Anxiety is a widespread mental health issue that affects people of all age groups, including students. It is marked by feelings of fear, worry, and uneasiness, often paired with physical symptoms like increased heart rate, perspiration, and difficulty focusing (Pascoe et al., 2020). This condition can significantly influence various aspects of a person's life, particularly academic performance (Ruz et al., 2018). Academic achievement, which refers to a student's ability to meet educational objectives, includes grades, test scores, class engagement, and overall performance. Anxiety often hinders students' academic success, leading to adverse outcomes (Lisnyj, 2020). Academic performance is considered a crucial component of formal education systems. It typically refers to the level of success or the marks a student attains in their academic pursuits. This performance is often evaluated through assessments and ongoing evaluations. Throughout their educational journey, students face numerous examinations. Among the various factors affecting academic performance, anxiety is one of the most common psychological challenges. It can impact students' academic scores, self-esteem, peer relationships, and social behaviors (Costello, et al., 2003). Even mild levels of test anxiety can negatively influence students' future academic accomplishments and developmental outcomes students (Grover et al., 2007). Test anxiety can affect students across all levels of academic ability. However, its manifestation varies from person to person. Some students may experience extreme fear during exams due to concerns about their parents' reactions to poor performance or failure. Studies suggest that students dealing with test anxiety often need more time to complete exams and put in greater effort to achieve academic results comparable to those of students without test anxiety (Mavilidi, et al., 2014). Academic performance refers to the extent of success students achieve in their educational activities. It is commonly evaluated through tests, grades, and other measures of learning progress. This performance indicates a student's capacity to comprehend, remember, and apply knowledge and skills across various subjects. Several factors influence academic performance, including academic pressure, exams and assessments, parental expectations, competition, absent-mindedness, learning difficulties, and teacher-student relationships. A strong academic record often paves the way for higher education opportunities, scholarships, and career growth, while also fostering personal growth and self-confidence. Anxiety is a significant factor affecting the academic performance of secondary school students. It can disrupt focus, hinder memory retention, and reduce problem-solving capabilities, making it harder for students to perform effectively in exams and classroom activities (Agboola & Evans, 2015). The stress associated with striving for high grades and the fear of failure can heighten anxiety, resulting in decreased academic efficiency. Anxiety may also lead to physical symptoms like fatigue, headaches, and restlessness, which further impair students' ability to concentrate. Moreover, it often causes procrastination, avoidance of academic tasks, and lower engagement in learning activities. Providing students with counseling, stress-management techniques, and a nurturing school environment is essential to help them overcome these obstacles and achieve their full academic potential (Assuncao, 2020).

Objectives of the Study

To find out the effect of anxiety on students' academic performance at secondary school level.

To explore factors of anxiety that effect students' academic performance at secondary school level.

To examine teacher's perceptions about the effect of anxiety on students' academic performance at secondary school level.

Research Questions

What is the effect of anxiety on students' academic performance at secondary school level?

What are the factors of anxiety that effect students' academic performance at secondary school level?

What are the teacher's perceptions about the effect of anxiety on students' academic performance at secondary school level?

Literature review

Anxiety significantly affects students' academic success, as high levels of anxiety can disrupt their ability to concentrate, absorb knowledge, and perform well in academic tasks. When students are highly anxiety, they may struggle to focus during classes or while studying, as their thoughts are often consumed by worries about failing or not meeting expectations (Singh, 2015). According to Trifoni & Shahini (2011), anxiety is a fundamental human emotion characterized by feelings of fear and confusion, often triggered when an individual perceives a situation as a challenge to their self-esteem. Roberts et al. (2010) highlight that individuals with elevated levels of anxiety tend to exhibit heightened trait anxiety. Anxiety can be categorized into two types: trait anxiety and state anxiety. Trait anxiety refers to an individual's predisposition to respond to stressful situations with anxiety, demonstrating their internal readiness to face such challenges. In contrast, state anxiety represents a temporary emotional response that fluctuates depending on specific circumstances. These context-specific instances of anxiety can have a direct negative impact on students' academic performance, particularly in educational settings (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2004). Research also shows that anxiety affects not only average students and those with learning difficulties but also high-achieving or gifted students. Fletcher & Speirs (2012) found that perfectionist tendencies in such students often result in heightened anxiety during exams due to their own or others' unrealistic expectations. However, perfectionism and anxiety are not confined to gifted learners alone. This research examines the various factors contributing to anxiety among secondary school students like academic pressure. High expectations from teachers, parents, and peers to achieve excellent grades can create significant stress and anxiety. Academic pressure at the secondary school level is a leading cause of anxiety among students. The constant push to achieve top grades, excel in competitive exams, and meet high expectations from parents, teachers, and society creates an overwhelming sense of stress. This pressure is often compounded by a heavy workload, tight deadlines, and the fear of failure, which can erode students' confidence and ability to focus. Additionally, the comparison with peers and the race for academic superiority intensify feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt. The mental toll of such pressure can lead to persistent anxiety, affecting both academic performance and overall well-being. Addressing this issue requires creating a supportive environment that prioritizes emotional health alongside academic achievement (Lisnyj, 2020). Another factor is examination and assessment. The fear of failing or performing poorly in exams is a major source of anxiety for many students. Examinations and assessments are a significant source of anxiety for students, particularly at the secondary school level. The pressure to perform well and achieve high scores can create a constant state of stress, as students often equate their academic success with their prospects and self-worth (Bećirović, 2020). The fear of failure, coupled with time constraints and high-stakes testing environments, amplifies this anxiety. Additionally, the anticipation of judgment from parents, teachers, and peers further exacerbates these feelings. Physical symptoms such as headaches, sleep disturbances, and fatigue often accompany exam-related anxiety, reducing students' ability to focus and perform effectively. To mitigate this, educators and parents must emphasize a balanced approach, fostering resilience and understanding that learning is more important than mere grades (Hadi et al., 2018). Parental expectations also effect on students' academic performance. Unrealistic or excessive demands from parents regarding

academic performance can put undue pressure on students. High parental expectations can significantly contribute to anxiety among students. When parents set unrealistically high academic standards, children may feel immense pressure to meet these goals, leading to stress and fear of failure. This pressure often results in students dedicating excessive time to studying, which can increase academic stress and negatively impact their mental health (Brady et al., 2018). The competitive environment in schools, where students constantly compare their performance with peers, can lead to feelings of inadequacy and anxiety. Academic competition can significantly contribute to anxiety among students. The pressure to outperform peers and achieve top rankings often leads to heightened stress levels. Research indicates that students who perceive their classroom environments as highly competitive have a 69% higher likelihood of experiencing anxiety. This competitive atmosphere can foster a fear of failure, diminish self-esteem, and create a relentless pursuit of perfection, all of which exacerbate anxiety. Additionally, the constant comparison with classmates may lead to feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt, further impacting mental health. To mitigate these effects, it's essential to cultivate a supportive educational environment that emphasizes personal growth and learning over rivalry. Encouraging collaboration and recognizing individual achievements can help reduce the anxiety associated with academic competition (Roberts et al., 2010). A heavy curriculum, combined with homework and extracurricular activities, can overwhelm students and contribute to stress. Excessive homework and classwork workloads are significant contributors to student anxiety. Research suggests that spending more than two hours on homework each night can have adverse effects, including increased stress, physical health issues, and a disruption of work-life balance. Anxiety is considered a mental health condition that can significantly affect individuals' focus and concentration. When people experience anxiety, their minds often become preoccupied with negative thoughts, which divert attention from their primary tasks and lead to absent-mindedness (Bećirović, 2020). One participant in a study shared their experience, stating, "I often find myself absent-minded, even during classes. I struggle to grasp what is being taught." Anxiety also amplifies overthinking, further contributing to mental disengagement. Another participant described their situation, saying, "When anxiety takes over, I get caught up in aimless overthinking. While I may be physically present in the classroom, mentally, I'm consumed by my anxious thoughts. This makes it difficult for me to learn anything during the lesson, and as a result, my academic performance suffers." Anxiety-induced absent-mindedness directly impacts students' ability to absorb information in class, which negatively affects their learning outcomes and exam performance. As students lose focus due to anxiety, their classroom engagement diminishes, resulting in lower academic achievement (Hegde et al., 2020). Future uncertainty also badly affects the academic performance of students. Worries about career choices, college admissions, and life after school often cause stress at the secondary level. Uncertainty about the future is a significant source of anxiety for students, particularly those nearing pivotal transitions such as graduation. Concerns about career prospects, higher education opportunities, and personal goals can create a sense of unpredictability, leading to heightened stress levels. This anxiety is often exacerbated by external pressures to succeed and the fear of making wrong decisions that could impact long-term outcomes (Kader, 2016). The inability to foresee or control future events disrupts students' ability to plan effectively, resulting in feelings of helplessness and apprehension. To manage this anxiety, students need to develop coping strategies that focus on embracing uncertainty and building resilience. Techniques such as mindfulness and staying present can help reduce the impact of anxious thoughts related to the future (Horwitz et al., 2016). Students with learning difficulties in understanding certain subjects may feel anxious about keeping up with their peers. Students with learning difficulties often experience heightened anxiety due to the challenges they face in academic settings. Struggling

to keep pace with peers can lead to feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt, exacerbating stress levels. Studies show that nearly 70% of students with specific learning disabilities (SLD) experience elevated levels of anxiety compared to their peers without SLD (Mihăilescu et al., 2016). Harsh or unsupportive teachers can discourage students and contribute to anxiety in the classroom. Negative teacher-student relationships, characterized by conflict, lack of support, or perceived injustice, can significantly contribute to student anxiety (Nadeem et al., 2012). When students experience hostility or indifference from educators, it undermines their sense of security and belonging within the academic environment. This lack of emotional support can lead to increased stress and anxiety, hindering academic performance and overall well-being. Research indicates that such adverse relationships may result in heightened levels of student anxiety and aggression (Najmi et al., 2018). Teachers play a vital role in understanding and addressing the factors that influence students' academic performance, including anxiety. At the secondary school level, anxiety often manifests due to academic pressures, absent-mindedness, examination and assessment, parental expectations, competition and learning difficulties, and it can significantly impact students' learning outcomes (Pascoe et al., 2020). Teachers' perceptions of this effect are crucial as they interact with students daily and can observe behavioral changes and academic struggles firsthand. Many teachers recognize that anxiety can lead to decreased concentration, poor time management, and lower motivation, which hinder students' ability to perform well academically (Rehman, 2016). Furthermore, teachers believe that addressing anxiety through supportive classroom environments, personalized teaching strategies, and open communication can help mitigate its adverse effects, enabling students to achieve their full potential. Their insights emphasize the need for teacher training and school policies that prioritize mental well-being alongside academic excellence (Ruz et al., 2018).

Material and Methods

The quantitative research design was used for this. The survey was used to conduct the data. All the teachers (males & females) of the Public secondary school of Killah Saif Ullah and Muslim Bagh Balochistan were the population of the study. The convenience sampling techniques were used to select the 200 teachers from public secondary schools Killah Saif Ullah and Muslim Bagh Balochistan.

Instrumentation

The research instrument for this study was a questionnaire that was developed on a five point Likert Scale. The questionnaire has two parts, the first part was about demographics variables and the second part consisted of 36 close-ended statements about effect of anxiety on students' academic performance at the secondary school level. The reliability of the questionnaire was found 0.81 by Cronbach's alpha formula. The instruments were validated by experts in relevant fields.

Data Collection

The data were collected through a questionnaire from 200 secondary school teachers of both genders (males & females). Researchers personally visited the selected schools and gathered the data.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed through descriptive and inferential statistical methods. An independent t-test was applied to identify gender-based differences.

Results and Discussion

Table 1

Mean Score of Effect of Anxiety on Students' Academic Performance

Sr. No	Statements	M	SD
1.	Anxiety reduces students' performance in exams, even when they are well-prepared.	3.76	1.031
2.	Anxiety reduces students' ability to organize answers in exams effectively.	4.06	.987
3.	Students feel pressure to achieve high grades due to anxiety.	4.04	1.150
4.	Students under stress often forget key concepts during examinations and assessments.	4.01	.944
5.	Competition among peers increases student academic anxiety.	4.04	.917
6.	Anxiety affects students' ability to concentrate during class.	4.27	.969
7.	Students often express concern about their academic performance.	4.10	1.086
8.	Anxiety seems to affect students' ability to participate actively in classroom discussions.	4.04	.896
9.	Students with high anxiety levels tend to underperform compared to their capabilities.	3.93	1.076
10.	Academic pressure from parents contributes to students' anxiety.	4.04	.989
11.	Anxiety interferes with students' ability to learn and retain new concepts.	4.12	1.078
12.	Fear of punishment or criticism increases anxiety in students.	4.14	.893

Total N = 200

This table shows descriptive scores about the effect of anxiety on students' academic at secondary school level. The research question included twelve statements, with responses predominantly falling under the "strongly agree" and "agree" categories. The statement "Anxiety affects students' ability to concentrate during class" had the highest mean score of 4.27, placing it in the top category. These findings indicate that there is a significant effect of anxiety on students' academic performance.

Table 2
Mean Score of Factors of Anxiety that Effects on Students' Academic Performance

Problems	M	SD
Academic Pressure	4.14	.629
Examination and Assessment	4.01	.696
Parental Expectations	4.13	.795
Competition	3.83	.644
Absent Mindedness	3.90	.577
Learning Difficulties	4.16	.899
Teacher-Student Relationship	4.01	.677

N=200

This table describes the descriptive score of factors of anxiety that effects students' academic performance at secondary school level. Seven types of factors were explored in this research and the results of this study indicate that these factor existed. The highest mean is 4.16-factor learning difficulties and this mean score falls in the highest category.

Table 3
Mean Score of Teachers' Perception of the Effect of Anxiety on Students' Academic Performance

	N	M	SD
Teacher Perceptions	200	4.12	.559
Valid N (listwise)	200		

This table presents descriptive scores reflecting teachers' perceptions of how anxiety effects students' academic performance at the secondary school level. The results indicate a significant effect of anxiety on students' academic performance at this stage. Because this is a terminal stage for students.

Table 4
Independent Sample T-test Analysis on Gender Differences

Gender	N	M	SD	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Male	110	.90	.636	-1.532	398	.126
Female	90	3.99	.568			

Table 4 shows that there is no statistically significant difference between males and females ($p > .05$). A t-test was conducted to analyze the scores and determine differences between male and female scores. This table presents that equal variance assumed and there was no significant difference in scores for males ($M = 3.90$, $SD = .636$) and females, ($M = 3.99$, $SD = .568$); $t (-1.532)$, $p = .12$ (two-tailed).

Discussion

The objective of this study was to examine the effect of anxiety on students' academic performance at the secondary school level. The first research question was what is the effect of anxiety on students' academic performance at secondary school level? Descriptive statistics were used to address this question. The findings from all relevant statements indicated that anxiety

has a significant effect on students' academic performance. The study also revealed that students with higher levels of anxiety were less motivated to engage in learning (Cheng & Abdullah, 2013). The second research question was what are factors of anxiety that effect students' academic performance at secondary school level? Seven factors of anxiety were explored: academic pressure, examinations and assessments, parental expectations, competition, absent-mindedness, learning difficulties, and teacher-student relationships. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the impact of these factors. The results showed that all these factors were strongly associated with increased anxiety, which negatively affected students' grades. These factors have been discussed in other studies as well (Alharbi, 2015). Furthermore, additional studies in different contexts have identified other factors contributing to anxiety. The third research question was what are the teachers' perceptions of the effect of anxiety on students' academic performance at the secondary school level? Descriptive statistics were applied to gather teachers' views. Previous research has shown that students with anxiety often struggle to perform well academically (Cassady, 2010). Nadeem, Ali, & Zaidi (2012) also investigated the effect of anxiety on students' academic progress. The results indicated that, according to teachers, anxiety strongly affects students' academic performance.

Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the effect of anxiety on students' academic performance at the secondary school level. The findings revealed several factors of anxiety that significantly influence academic achievement. Seven specific factors were examined, including academic pressure, exams and assessments, parental expectations, competition, absent-mindedness, learning difficulties, and teacher-student relationships. Teachers' perceptions indicated that these factors have a considerable effect on students' academic performance. The perceptions of teachers indicate that all the above factors have a high effect on students' academic performance. Based on these findings, the study recommended several strategies to help students manage anxiety and enhance their academic progress. The strategies were to change the currently inhabited surroundings, to remain active mentally as well as physically and to eat healthy food. In addition, keeping oneself busy in productive activities is another strategy for avoiding anxiety.

Recommendation

1 Teachers should guide students in adopting effective study techniques, as poor study habits are often a key cause of test anxiety.

Students should focus on understanding concepts rather than cramming for exams.

Students should recognize the importance of taking short breaks during study sessions to relax and refresh their minds.

To address the factors affecting students' academic performance in secondary schools, relevant authorities must take these issues seriously.

Teachers should employ effective teaching methods and work on improving students' learning skills.

Parents and families play a crucial role in supporting students' educational success.

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