

Sources of Academic Anxiety Among Undergraduate Students Contemporary Study Between Private and Government Universities

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to define Academic Anxiety and identify some of its major sources among undergraduate students from Private and Government Universities in Dubai, and to compare the identified Anxiety Sources. Furthermore, to examine significant Academic Anxiety differences. The study sample consists (150) Undergraduate students from private and government Universities, (74) male and (76) female. Data is collected through a paper based questionnaire that consists of (43) items categorized into five domains of academic anxiety study, emotional, social, Foreign Language, and Parental expectations sources. Based on the means related to the sources of Academic Anxiety, the results showed that the five identified Academic Anxiety domains range from: Study Anxiety, Foreign Language Anxiety, Social Anxiety, Emotional Anxiety, and Parental Expectations. Means and Std. Deviation, and T-test were calculated to analyze data, revealing that Study Anxiety Source is dominant in Private Universities compared to Government Universities; while no statistical significance is noted with respect to the Emotional and Social Sources. A relatively significant statistical variance is revealed vis-à-vis Foreign Language Source between Private and Government in favor of Private Universities. Parental Expectations is significant in Private Universities as compared to Government Universities. The study provides a number of recommendations that are incorporated to help undergraduate students cope and deal with the major Academic Anxiety Sources is displayed in this paper.

Keywords: anxiety, academic anxiety, sources, stress, undergraduate students

INTRODUCTION

Academic Anxiety has become an important topic in the educational context. Many psychologists in the field of educational psychology have carried out researches on Academic Anxiety and negative outcomes for different levels of study. They concluded that the topic needs more attention (Anderson, 2007, p. 2). According to (Chang & Lu, 2007, p. 549), "Academic Anxiety in Academic Institutions (i.e. Universities) can have negative results on the students if not well managed". (Lee & Larson, 2000, p.249) indicates that "Academic Anxiety is conceptualized as a state of distress induced by a student's appraisal of excessive academic demands (i.e. overloaded homework, examinations). (Spielberger, 1983) Defined Anxiety "as a psychological and physical response to treat a self-concept, characterized by subjective, consciously perceived feelings of tension. Brenda and Tillson (2010) suggested that "Anxiety is the primary function of Academic Anxiety represented by the cognitive avoidance of threat" (p.3).

In the educational context, Academic Anxiety is not only due to the lack of students' motivation, or his/her insufficient skills, but it is also due to their misperception of courses and negative experiences in previous study classes, Hancock (2001) concludes that "students with high level of Academic Anxiety show significantly less motivation in classrooms

perceived as highly evaluative compared to students with low level anxiety" (p.284). A high level of anxiety also interferes with concentration and memory, which are critical for academic success. However, most of students would lack the concentration of other aspects of Academic Anxiety: exam anxiety, social anxiety, mathematic anxiety, lack of foreign language proficiency, and many anxiety sources.

Researchers have been looking at the correlation between Anxiety Sources and the effect of students' academic performance, McCarty (2012) "suggested that the students with high level of anxiety achieved low academic performance and that Academic Anxiety can become more harmful over time" (p.57). Harris (2012) "pointed out as a student's academic performance suffers, the anxiety level related to certain academic tasks increases" (p.79).

One of the psychological concepts associated to Academic Anxiety is stress. According to (Elzubier and Magzoub, 2010), stress is defined as the body's non – specific response to the demands made upon it; it's not just a stimulus or a response, it is a process by which the student perceives and copes with the environmental challenges. In this paper, the researcher will use the concept Academic Anxiety to highlight uncomfortable student's feelings toward challenging academic tasks (i.e. exams, presentations,

assignments, competition, presentations, and interviews).

The author concludes that feeling discomfort and anxiety in the classroom does not enhance learning of any kind. A number of psychological symptoms of anxiety among undergraduate students can be seen in students feeling nervous before a class, an overwhelming sudden fear, lack of concentration and attention, feeling helpless while doing assignments, or lack of interest of challenging subjects. There are also some predominant physiological symptoms which include sweaty palms, palpitations, stomachache, irritability, and muscle tension.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Most of undergraduate students in both Private and Government Universities experience a general state of anxiety before confronting challenging situations/contexts such as tests, examination, recitals, presentations in a Foreign Language and in the presence of peers. Anxiety can have a negative effect on the information processing system, such as weakness of concentration and attention. Furthermore, (Nelson and Harwood, 2011) suggested that “the student with anxiety have difficulty in memorization (storage and retrieving information) which will affect on student’s academic performance” (p.112). For these reasons, and based on the researcher’s experience in teaching Undergraduate students, this paper identifies the major sources of Academic Anxiety, while comparing its effect on students in both Private and Government Universities.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This research paper aims to highlight three main objectives, per the below:

Define Academic Anxiety among Undergraduate Students in Private and Government Universities.

Identify the major Sources of Academic Anxiety among private and government Universities’ Undergraduate students.

Compare Sources of Undergraduate Students Academic Anxiety in Private and Government Universities.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To achieve the objectives of this research, the following research questions were formulated to guide the research:

What are the major Sources of Academic Anxiety among Private and Government Universities’ Undergraduate students?

Are there any statistical differences between the identified Academic Anxiety Sources among Private

and Government Universities’ Undergraduate students?

LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The scope of the study was limited to private and government universities in United Arab Emirates, Emirate of Dubai. Given more time and resources, a wider scope, that involves both private and government universities would provide a more data – rich picture of issue under investigation. Further, to make the results more generalized to enter UAE context, a wider sample, involving more emirates would suffice.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Anxiety is defined as “a painful or apprehensive uneasiness of mind usually over an impending or anticipated ill” (Merriam-Webster, 2012). The American Psychological Association (2007) defines Anxiety “as an emotion characterized by feelings of tension, worried thoughts and physical changes like increased blood pressure”. People with anxiety usually have recurring intrusive thoughts or concerns. They may avoid certain situations out of worry. They may also have physical symptoms such as sweating, trembling, dizziness or a rapid heartbeat.

Academic Anxiety: Academic anxiety can become more detrimental over time. As a student’s academic performance suffers, the anxiety level related to certain academic tasks increases (Huberty, 2012, p12).

Study Anxiety is a situation that refers to anxiety condition during study in term of the perception that high level anxiety relate to obtain of low academic performance (Harris and Coy, 2003, p 115).

Foreign language anxiety (or **xenoglossophobia**) is the feeling of unease, worry, nervousness and apprehension experienced when learning or using a second or foreign language. These feelings may stem from any second language context whether associated with the productive skills of speaking and writing, or the receptive skills of reading and listening (McCarty, 2003, p 78).

Social Anxiety is the fear of interaction with other people, feelings of being negatively judged and evaluated, and, as a result, leads to avoidance. Physical symptoms associated with this anxiety include heart palpitations, faintness, blushing and profuse sweating.

Emotional Anxiety is associated with Students emotions, mood and feelings. It is a heightened fear of what other students/peers/instructor think of the student. It is also a Fear of making mistakes.

Parental Expectations

Parents an academic expectation is defined as a strong predictor of students’ achievement at all age levels, beginning in elementary school, continuing to middle school, to high school till University (Catsambis, 2001, p149).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework of this study is based on different researches related to students Academic Anxiety. Following a research conducted by Vitasri, Wahab, M, & Othman, (2010). two sources of Academic Anxiety were identified: Exam Anxiety and Class Presentation Anxiety. (P.189).

Based on his teaching experience, the author concurs with Vitasri findings and evokes circumstances where students express their unwillingness to deliver a presentation assignment and would alternatively suggest to submit their assignment as a hard copy; which justifies a form of Academic Anxiety. Students would also “negotiate” the possibility to postpone the assignments or exams.

Sansgiry and Kaviat, (2006) concluded that “Exam Anxiety, as a “situation-specific trait, is one of academic anxiety sources among university students” and that “too much anxiety can interrupt exam performance” (p.75). Supporting this conclusion, Pecarora, (2006. P. 200). confirmed that “a high degree of anxiety can block thoughts, create negative frame in mind, and is a potential of poor exam performance”.

Stress and anxiety are increasing on college campuses. Research shows that anxiety levels in college students have increased substantially during the past three decades. A 2006 University of California–Los Angeles survey of college freshman found that more than 30 percent reported feeling “overwhelmed” a “great deal of the time,” and 38 percent of the college women surveyed, reported feeling “frequently overwhelmed.”

Anxiety has been linked to poor academic performance. High levels of academic anxiety can negatively affect working memory Owen and Stevenson and Hadwin (2012. P. 434) Anxiety is also associated with high levels of worry that can affect academic performance. However, further research demonstrated that, without any anxiety, most of us would lack the motivation to study for exams, write

papers, or do daily homework (especially in classes that we find boring). A moderate amount of anxiety actually helps academic performance by creating motivation.

REASERACH METHODOLOGY

a. Participants

Subjects of the present study include a total number of (150) undergraduate students; (74) males and (76) females from different academic levels enrolled in different programs in Private and Government Universities in Dubai.

b. Instrument

A questionnaire with a set of five major Academic Anxiety Sources developed by the Author was used to explore students ‘main Sources of Academic Anxiety. The questionnaire consists of (43) items divided into five categories of Academic Anxiety: Study, Emotional, Social, Foreign Language and Parental Expectations. It has been found in a pilot study that the Cranach’s alpha coefficient was (0.88). Experts’ opinions were taken into consideration to assess the validity of the scale.

c. Procedure

After obtaining permission from Universities, the researcher explained the objectives of the study to the students and asked them to provide responses to the questionnaire. The questionnaire applies individually for an estimated time for responses of 20 minutes after circulation. The data collected was analyzed using SPSS.

d. Data analysis

Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) was used to analyze data, means and standard deviation, and t- test were used to answer research questions.

THE RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Research Question-1

What are the major Sources of Academic Anxiety among Private and Government Universities’ undergraduate students?

To answer this question, Means and Standard Deviation were calculated for each source of Academic Anxiety. Table-1 illustrates the results.

Table (1): Means and Std. deviations for Sources of Academic Anxiety among Private and Government Undergraduate students

Sources	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Rank
Study	150	30.5667	5.42108	1
Foreign Language	150	29.7333	6.20096	2
Social	150	29.3600	6.44781	3
Emotional	150	25.6800	4.78577	4
Parental Expectations (Family)	150	16.9600	5.81006	5

Research Question- 2

Are there any statistical differences between the identified Academic Anxiety Sources among Private and Government Universities’ Undergraduate students?

To answer this question, means and Std. Deviations were calculated to compare between Private and Government Universities. Table -2 illustrates the results.

Table (2): Comparison of Means and Std. Deviation between Private and Government Universities. Group Statistics

	Uni type	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Study	Private	95	30.1263	6.33505	.64996
	Government	55	28.0364	6.48349	.87423
Emotional	Private	95	25.9158	4.19134	.43002
	Government	55	25.2727	5.68772	.76693
Social	Private	95	30.7684	5.51488	.56581
	Government	55	30.2182	5.28692	.71289
Language	Private	95	32.8909	6.04272	.61997
	Government	55	30.2211	6.43392	.86755
Family	Private	95	17.5789	5.80275	.59535
	Government	55	15.8909	5.71766	.77097

To make sure that results in Table- 2 are accurate (means carry statistical significance)

T-test was calculated. Table 3 illustrates the results.

Table (3): Independent T-test for Statistical differences between Private and Government Universities’ Sources of Academic Anxiety

		Levene’s Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Study	Equal Variances assumed	63.528	.000	7.768	148	.000	6.91750	.89051	5.15773	8.67726
	Equal Variances not assumed			7.833	108.661	.000	6.91750	.88309	5.16717	8.66782
Emotional	Equal Variances assumed	14.923	.125	3.151	148	.002	2.39189	.75917	.89167	3.89211
	Equal Variances not assumed			3.169	127.046	.002	2.39189	.75480	.89829	3.88550
Social	Equal Variances assumed	8.458	.136	-.178	148	.859	-.15825	.88823	-1.91350	1.59700
	Equal Variances not assumed			-.178	143.433	.858	-.15825	.88579	-1.90914	1.59264
Language	Equal Variances assumed	9.826	.000	5.321	148	.000	4.95377	.93096	3.11408	6.7934
	Equal Variances not assumed			5.341	139.521	.000	4.95377	.92756	3.11987	6.78766
Family	Equal Variances assumed	3.633	.000	10.260	148	.000	7.46693	.7278	6.02869	8.90516
	Equal Variances not assumed			10.281	145.537	.000	7.46693	.72620	6.03151	8.90234

DISCUSSION

This section recapitulates the results of the above study, Literature review, and psychological theories related to Anxiety, Academic Anxiety, and Stress. Table-1 illustrates the five major Sources of Academic Anxiety: Study Tasks (assignments, presentations, projects, tests ..) occupies the first rank followed by Foreign Language (associated with

English as any other foreign language stands as a major and common handicap among students); Social (due to stigmatization, which is a dominant aspect preventing students to express themselves in a foreign language and to deliver presentations); Parental expectations (associated with this permanent feeling that students’ efforts will not match the parents’ expectations to achieve excellent marks/

outstanding performances). This categorization of Academic Anxiety Sources has been examined by Al Tarawneh & Kahtoon, 2014.

Table-2 indicates that Academic Anxiety subsequent to study tasks is dominant (mean 30.1263) in Private Universities compared to Government Universities (28.0364); while no differences are noted with respect to the Emotional and Social Sources. A significant variance is shown vis-à-vis Foreign Language in Private (32.8909) and Government Universities (30.2211); Parental expectations score (17.5789) in Private Universities and (15.8909) in Government Universities. A study by the University of Central Florida has found that a student's anxieties are often based on exaggerated perceptions of what their parents expect. UCF psychologist Renk (2008) stated that many parents and students have different perceptions of what the parents' expectations really are; students are often trying to meet goals that are far tougher than the ideals that their parents have in mind.

CONCLUSIONS OF THE STUDY

The aim of this paper is to investigate major Sources of academic anxiety among Undergraduate students in Private and Government Universities in Dubai. A subsequent comparative study revealed that Study Task Anxiety is dominant in Private Universities compared to Government Universities while no variance is noted with respect to the Emotional and Social Anxiety Sources. A significant variance is shown vis-à-vis Foreign Language Source between Private and Government; Parental expectations is significant in Private Universities as compared to Government Universities. In light of the author's investigation, it has been proved by a number of researchers that academic anxiety, through constructive criticism, can motivate students to do the required academic tasks rather than increase their anxiety. However, for instances where the anxiety level is too high, it becomes paralyzing rather than motivating.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY

Based on the research results, the author would suggest the following recommendations:

- 1- Students should find out what triggers their Academic Anxiety and when they are feeling anxious or stressed.
- 2- To avoid that anxiety prevents students from fulfilling their academic potential, students have to talk to someone about it. The Guidance and Counseling Center/Academic Advisors/Supervisors who are very experienced at helping students deal with anxiety related to their academic requirements (assignments, exams, presentations, projects...).
- 3- Since perfection is not possible, it is advisable that students do their best instead of trying to be perfect.

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Appendix 1

Academic Anxiety Sources instrument

Dear student:

This survey is divided into two parts; the first part is asking about the demographic information, whereas the second part aims to identify academic sources and asking you to fill the questionnaire based on your feelings, experience, and thoughts regarding anxiety during your study process. For each question choose one of the following alternatives. Please answer the questions as truthfully as possible.

Part one: Demographic information

- 1- Gender: Male Female
 2- University type Private Governmental

Part Two: Academic anxiety sources:

A- Study tasks source

No	Questions	Never	Almost never	Rare	Fairly often	Very often
1	I feel anxious during exam due to the lack of preparation.					
2	I feel anxious when I am unable to understand questions in the exam.					
3	I feel anxious because mathematics is a difficult subject for me.					
4	I study hard, but there is no success yet in the mathematics subject.					
5	I always write down everything during mathematics class.					
6	I feel anxious when I don't understand the mathematics subject.					
7	I think I have lost interest in mathematics subject.					
8	If exams could be done away with, I think I would actually learn more about my courses.					

B- Emotional Source

No	Questions	Never	Almost never	Rare	Fairly often	Very often
1	I feel depressed after taking an exam.					
2	I feel that I have lost my concentration during the exam.					
3	I feel tensed during study for exam.					
4	I have experienced about anxiety when I take surprise test.					
5	I felt nervousness when my lecturer interrupts to correct my speaking.					
6	I feel anxious when trying to find references in the library.					
7	I feel anxious when I don't know how to complete academic assignment.					
8	I do not enjoy eating before or after an important test.					

C- Social Sources

No	Questions	Never	Almost never	Rare	Fairly often	Very often
1	I feel anxious during attending foreign class.					
2	I feel anxious when speaking activities are held in a language class.					
3	I feel that my language's lecturer is like a native speaker in the classroom.					
4	I have problems facing my peers.					
5	I feel anxious because of lack of confidence during presentation class.					
6	I felt that my heart beat very fast during the presentation.					
7	I had an experience of being tongue tied in my presentation.					
8	I find that class presentation has a low contribution of my study.					
9	I felt racial diversity during the study.					
10	I have faced difficulties during studies when there are too many roommates.					

D- Language source

No	Questions	Never	Almost never	Rare	Fairly often	Very often
1	I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my foreign language class.					
2	I don't worry about making a mistake in language class.					
3	During language class, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course.					
4	In the language class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know.					
5	I always feel that the other students speak the foreign language better than I do.					
6	I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my language class.					
7	I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language.					
8	I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of the foreign language.					
9	It wouldn't bother me at all to take more foreign language classes.					
10	I feel confident when I speak in foreign language class.					

E- Family Sources

No	Questions	Never	Almost never	Rare	Fairly often	Very often
1	I feel that insufficient family income will affect on my academic performance.					
2	I find that my childhood experiences make me feel anxious.					
3	I felt anxious that if there are many members in my family, it will affect my study.					
4	I felt anxious when I think about my parents' disappointment with my academic performance.					
5	I often felt anxious about problems in my family.					
6	I felt anxious when my family looks at me as a weak student in my academics.					
7	My family will be disappointed with me if my score is low.					