



## Exploring the Factors of Anxiety Affecting Students' Academic performance: A Study of Higher Education Institution of Larkana

### **Sumeera**

MS Scholar at SZABIST University, Larkana  
[sumeralangah@gmail.com](mailto:sumeralangah@gmail.com)

### **Muhsin Khan**

MS Scholar at SZABIST University, Larkana  
[khanmuhsin181@gmail.com](mailto:khanmuhsin181@gmail.com)

### **Muhammad Ilyas**

MS Scholar at SZABIST University, Larkana  
[m.ilyas.kalhoromi@gmail.com](mailto:m.ilyas.kalhoromi@gmail.com)

### **Paras Abro**

MS Scholar at SZABIST University, Larkana  
[parasabro99@gmail.com](mailto:parasabro99@gmail.com)

### **Naveed Ahmed**

Education & Literacy Department Govt. Of Sindh, Pakistan  
[paknaveedahmedkhan.124@gmail.com](mailto:paknaveedahmedkhan.124@gmail.com)

### **Abstract**

*Anxiety has numerous hindering factors that distract students from achieving satisfactory results in their examinations. The current study aimed to explore the factors of anxiety that influenced students' grades at the higher education institution of Larkana. Qualitative method of research design, specifically case study to explore its factors and their effects on students' grades in depth, was utilized. Semi-structured interviews were utilized for gathering data in this study. Students of HEI of Larkana were taken into consideration for population in current study, whereas five to fifteen students who are facing with anxiety problem, some researchers' friends and also some others, were used as sample for it, through purposive sampling. Data was analyzed to draw out the themes. Findings of present study revealed that numerous factors of anxiety i.e. distraction, absent mind, declining motivation, feeling of fatigue, feeling of loneliness, feeling of fear or panic lead towards depression, and negatively affect students' academic achievement. However, the study suggested few strategies through which students can overcome their anxiety. Study recommended that students should keep themselves busy in productive activities, they should think positively about things and keep themselves focused.*

**Key words:** Anxiety, Academic performance., depression,



## **Introduction**

Anxiety is a broad term to be define. Different studies have shown different definitions of it (Sarason et al., 1990). According to Spielberger & Vagg, (1995) anxiety is an uncomfortable emotional state of a person, whereas emotions are unconditional, i.e. sometimes at a higher degree and sometimes at a lower degree. Horwitz, (2016) defined ‘Anxiety’ as it is simply a perplexing situation in mind. In addition, it is a subjective type of feeling in which students get nervous, feel unwilling to do anything especially study, or it is a worried attack on the nervous system (Liu, 2006). While, anxiety is one of the essential parts of human life which discourages and disables people to do their work when it’s on top, while motivates people when it’s on low degree(Luebbe & Bell., 2009). There have been lots of unsettled discussions for describing the term anxiety (Mounsey et al., 2013). Often it is troublesome for researchers to conduct scientific studies related to anxiety (Pascoe et al., 2020). It becomes very tough for people to live with anxiety. They are unable to do their daily routine work. The higher degree of anxiety results in the disturbance of one’s daily activities (Ruz et al., 2018). According to Scovel, (1978) anxiety is divided into two parts i.e. trait anxiety and specific anxiety. Trait anxiety leads to particular situation, on the other hand, specific anxiety refers to a long-lasting nature of an event. Additionally, according to the studies, anxiety is mostly concerned with exams. Sarason (1978, p.195) referred anxiety as an important part of educational life of a child. In addition, he referred to it as “a type of cognitive response marked by self- doubt, feelings of inadequacy, and self-blame”. Nadeem et al. (2012) identified that anxiety is mostly experienced by people in different situation they suddenly meet, and these accidental meet ups are to be considered as passing and diminishing by the time.

However, anxiety, according to Trifoni & Shahini, (2011) is basic human emotion identified by fear and confusion which is raised whenever any event is taken as challenge to his or her ego. People, who have high level of anxiety, have upper levels of trait anxiety, in accordance with this theory (Roberts et al., 2010). In evaluative conditions, anxiety levels hits up as well. Spielberger & Vagg, (1995) define anxiety as an emotional state characterized by feelings, stress, fear, and their effects of apprehension on the nervous system. Given the impact of anxiety on the mental state of students, the present study aims to investigate the perceptions of higher education students regarding the factors of anxiety that hinder their academic progress.



### **Problem Statement**

Students at university level are prone to factors that may cause anxiety in them. There are several issues that university students confront with (Assuncao, 2020). If these factors are not properly handled, may cause anxiety in students thereby badly affecting their academic performance (Lisnyj, 2020). There is minimal observational proof on the effect of academic anxiety on academic performance in the Pakistani setting and just barely any connected research has been done (Othieno et al., 2014). Thoughtfully, the analysts do not know of any past research on academic anxiety at the universities of Pakistan. As needs be, this logical and theoretical research gap spurred the current study to concentrate on anxiety in university students. If a student encounters maximized level of anxiety, the nervousness may have a negative consequence, bringing about demolishing learning (Mazzone et al., 2007). These limit levels of academics related anxiety may make some of them even leave the program (Matsuda & Gobel, 2004). Therefore, there is a need of exploring the effects of anxiety on grades of students in higher education institutions of Larkana, Sindh, Pakistan.

Findings of this investigation will improve the information on students as well as the overall population for anxiety so that they might have a superior potential for academic success and could forestall anxiety issues. The discoveries will likewise add to the current body of literature.

### **Limitation and Delimitation**

This study could not be generalized for all students because it is only limited to higher education students of Larkana. Another limitation is semi-structured interviews, as it only utilized semi-structured interviews as data collecting tools. While delimitation of this study is “anxiety and its effects on grades of students”

### **Literature review**

According to Yildirim (2015) numerous factors are there that are the reason for failure of students in their academic career. Examinations at all phases of life, particularly in students' educational life, are very crucial factors. These examinations help educators in decision making for maintaining educational portfolio. According to Zollar & Ben-chain (1990) “current era is the era of test consciousness in which many people are not just influenced but are also known by their progress”. On the other hand, it is also discovered in a study by Zollar & Ben-chain (1990) that pupils frequently consider examination as a means to enhance anxiety and also a situation surrounded by uncertainty or unfairness with respect to their academic performance. While such



situations and attitude towards examination hinder them to perform well in their examination. Thus, it is found in previous studies that anxiety directly affects the students' academic progress (Oludipe, 2009).

In addition, literature showed anxiety is of two types, one is trait anxiety while the other one is state anxiety. Trait is an ability of individuals which enables them to respond the anxiety in a situation. Or it is an ability of pupils to be internally prepared to face anxiety. While state anxiety refers to the emotional state of people, they have for a short time period. This emotional state of individuals is not time bound and keeps changing time to time. Thus, academic progress of learners affected negatively by anxiety as it is typically context-specific in educational settings (Onwuegbuzie, Jiao, & Bostick, 2004).

According to studies not only normal students and students with learning disabilities are affected by anxiety but students who are considered God gifted are also affected badly. Fletcher & Speirs (2012) showed in their study how negatively perfect students experienced anxiety during their examinations as a result of their own or other people's unreasonable expectations. However, it is clear that perfectionism is not limited to gifted students.

On other hand, it is reported by Huberty (2009) that anxiety influences learners' way of behaving, their perception and their philosophy. For instance, risk taking examinations are extremely challenging for students who are victims of anxiety. Pupils with anxiety may likewise experience ill effects of depression. It is suggested that parents in collaboration with teachers should work to help their child to tackle anxiety. At the University of Bahawalpur, Pakistan, Nadeem, Ali, & Zaidi (2012) investigated the impact of anxiety on students' academic progress. Their insightful and analytical data showed that academic achievement of learners is influenced by anxiety. It showed that academic achievement of both genders, whether male or female, declines when level of anxiety rises.

An exploration led by Agboola & Evans (2015) for investigating relationship among anxiety and students' academic achievement in international learners in the colleges of UK. It was clearly showed in their study that anxiety had a significant impact on academic performance. While a study by Singh (2015) emphasized to gauge the effects of anxiety on undergraduates learners' academic achievement. The nature of this study was descriptive. It was observed that learners with low or moderate anxiety tend to have a positive relationship with their academic



achievement. In contrast, an exploratory study by Shibli (2015) found to have no significant correlation between anxiety and college students' academic achievement.

However, a systematic literature review conducted by Rehman (2016) focused on determining the factors of anxiety that affect learners' academic progress at higher education level in India. However, numerous factors were found to be there which led to extreme anxiety among higher education students, such as distraction in workflow, declining motivation, fatigue and tiredness.

### **Gaps Identified (Summary)**

A large portion of literature assessed above has some insignificant importance to the current study methodologically. Additionally, various fragments of scholastic works have been expressed fairly yet not as much as the current research work sufficiently talk. As to strategy, very few studies have focused on students or there is no single assessment which influences scholarly outcomes among students' higher education institutions of Larkana. Methodological issues like testing methodology and research plans among others depict the assessments evaluated already. In like manner, from the above assessments, the investigators didn't find any dispersed assessment that broke down the effect of academic anxiety among undergrads in Pakistan with phenomenal reference to higher education institutions of Larkana. Likewise, the irregularities make these examinations not conclusive in this space hence requiring further studies around here. A few examinations above shed light on what this current study set off to achieve by reporting that extended strain levels had an orientation on lower scholastic achievement. Like the current study reasonable clarifications advanced recorded as a hard copy evaluated in this fragment, anyway unimportant, accumulate a relationship among anxiety and academic achievement. Pertinently, the current study bid to develop if this comparable association found in the assessments discussed here most likely happens particularly at higher education institutions of Larkana.

### **Methodology**

Researchers believe that knowledge is the construction of the human mind, so their ontological stance is subjective, and so for constructing knowledge our experiences will help to do that. Moreover, things around can be interpreted according to the situation, time and development, or in simple words, the reality can be interpreted accordingly. So, the epistemological stance of researchers in this study is interpretive. It will help them to disclose unrevealed events and situations about the topic. It is believed that World must be interpreted to comprehend the hidden



meaning of it (Schwandt, 1997). Researchers thought to utilize the qualitative methods for understanding the topic in depth, because of the descriptive of study.

In addition, a case study is an illustration of circumstances (Merriam and Oxford). In contrast, case is defined in subtleties and has diverse views (Yin, 2002). Case study is one of the famous research methods which allow inquirers to get in depth knowledge about their topic. Moreover, the current study is very comprehensive, therefore, it will help researchers to gain detailed data about the anxiety and its influence on students' grades. It will help to understand how anxiety declines students' motivation, how it affects their study techniques, their strategies of study, and so on.

The research was conducted using qualitative methodology, as the topic of this study needed detailed data about a particular case so that it could be effective for generalizing. It is mentioned that one can gather data as deep as by utilizing interviews, a data collection tool (Berg, 2004). In a qualitative research, open ended questions i.e. how, are used to gain the data in detail. As anxiety is hindering the issue for students, qualitative research, particularly the interviews will help experts to gather the data from the participants in an easier way. Hence, its use has been made in this study.

All the students who are enrolled in higher education institutions of Larkana were population of this study. A total of 20 students were taken into consideration as samples of this study and out of them 18 students agreed to be interviewed, from whom the interviews were conducted. As purposive sampling technique was utilized for selection of the sample, the designed criteria for purposive sampling was participant should be enrolled in higher education institutions of Larkana, and participant should be facing anxiety problem during their study

However, for collecting the data in current study, semi-structured interviews were resorted to. These interviews are very helpful tools as these enable the participants to feel free to speak and also make it easier for researchers to gain in-detail information. The participants were contacted through e-mail, or WhatsApp if possible. The data was collected on their willingness to participate. Additionally, interviews were conducted in the language in which the participants would feel free, i.e. Sindhi, Urdu, or English. On the other hand, the interviews were conducted by setting a particular time or day on which participants felt easy to join. The data was converted into coding and decoding and then was analyzed by conducting interviews and bringing those interviews in text format and then text was categorized accordingly called themes.



## Findings

### **Distraction**

Anxiety is such a feeling that creates a feeling of wearisomeness inside people, and this distracts them from doing their work. As one of the participants in an interview said, “I feel fear of doing work. I don’t know why but whenever I start doing my work, hindering thoughts come inside my mind and those thoughts distract me from doing this”.

Moreover, anxiety also declines the memory of individuals in such a way that they forget to even do their important work like educational assignments. Another participant in her interview mentioned that “Whenever I feel anxiety, I don’t even remember what I have to do and what I am doing at that time”. However, when students could not do their assignments and other study related works on time this might influence their overall academic performance and also their grades.

### **Absent mindedness**

Anxiety is termed as a mental disorder. Whenever any person feels anxiety numerous negative thoughts surround their mind and those thoughts divert their mind from the main area of focus. So, people become absent minded. It is also mentioned by one of the interviewee that “I remain absent minded most of the time even in classroom. I feel difficulty in getting whatever is being taught in the classroom.”

Moreover, anxiety enhances overthinking which also leads them towards absent mindedness. According to a participant “Whenever I feel anxiety aimless overthinking surrounds me, so physically I am sitting in the class while mentally I am at a place where anxiety is my best partner. Thus, anxiety makes me absent minded and I fail to learn anything in the class and consequently fail to perform well in my examinations.” Thus, anxiety makes students mentally absent from the class and this directly impacts their learning as well as performance in the class. As students become absent minded their learning in the classroom is minimized and thus their performance in examinations get influenced negatively.

### **Declining motivation**

The analyzed data shows that people who are having low level of anxiety are more motivated, while people who are having high level of anxiety are less motivated. This shows that anxiety decline motivation of individuals. A participant in her interview told that “when I feel high level of anxiety I feel depressed and become unwilling to do anything.” At another place the



participant mentioned that “sometimes I feel so much motivated to do some big tasks and this is all because at that time I am away from the feelings of anxiety and overthinking.” According to the participants and their point of views anxiety is directly proportional to motivation of people. When people have low anxiety level, they are more motivated. In contrast, when people have high level of anxiety, they become less motivated. Moreover, findings of this study expose that lack of motivation in students makes them less productive and affects their academic performance.

### **Feelings of fatigue**

According to the data anxiety creates feelings of fatigue in individuals. A participant mentioned that “I feel fatigue and tired most of the times and sometimes such feelings become so immense that I feel difficulty in breathing. “As anxiety makes learners feel tired so they remain distracted from learning and eventually their academic performance suffers.

Another participant mentioned that “when I feel anxiety, I become tired of everything, I become useless to make any effort. Moreover my mind becomes heavy and I feel breathlessness.” The findings also revealed that when the students become victims of anxiety irrelevant and aimless ideas encircle their mind which prevents them to even think properly. These ideas make them fatigued to focus on their main goal.

### **Feelings of loneliness**

Interaction with peers or other friends is crucial to be active inside or outside of the classroom, but according to the analyzed data anxiety creates a feeling of loneliness among individuals.

Participant three said in her interview that “whenever I feel I am anxious I just get make myself away from people and want to remain alone”. While another respondent in his interview claimed that “anxiety creates loneliness in me. Whenever, I feel anxiety I feel like my body parts are shivering and are not in my control, so I just make myself far from people around me.”

The data analyzed showed that anxiety makes people introverted. People with anxiety always remain silent and they just do what they are willing to do otherwise, they do not do things by their own. As one of the respondents said, “anxiety does not allow me to do anything whether it is important or not. It prevents me to talk with my friends and classmates. Keeping myself silent due to anxiety also negatively effects my performance in the class and this put negative impression on overall grades.” So according to the analyzed data anxiety creates loneliness





among students which leads them towards the introvert nature in them and this nature disables them from participating in their class activities and exams.

### **Feelings of fear or panic**

According to the analyzed data of this study anxiety creates fear inside pupils when they appear in their exams. As a respondent said “Though I prepare myself for exams very well, but I don’t know why I do not perform well there. In my last exams I was very fine but when I entered the exam hall numerous unintentional thinking were distracting me so I could not perform well in that exam, and I just failed in that.”.

Moreover, the data also revealed that people with anxiety feel like they would not be able to perform well and just because of this they fail to perform well. A participant in her interview said that “I was fully prepared to take my exams but when I saw the question paper, I just forgot all the material which I had studied. I became fearful of being unable to attempt the paper properly and that really happened that I could not attempt the paper as per the level of my expectations and preparations”. Thus, the analyzed data showed that the students with higher anxiety levels could not reach satisfying academic performance, while students with less anxiety levels could somehow get satisfying results in their exams.

### **Tendency towards depression**

Data in this study revealed that anxiety is a step towards depression. When learners cross the limit of anxiety they just go towards depression. While collecting data a participant mentioned that “when I feel anxious I lose control on myself and start subjecting everything to overthinking even that they might be of trivial nature.”

In addition, anxiety according to the data is a step towards depression. A respondent in his interview said that “when I feel anxiety overthinking surrounds my mind and disables me to think positively. I take every possible step to take myself out of it but fail to do so. That overthinking puts me in depression which negatively affects my grades”. However, the study showed that anxiety leads learners towards depression, while depression negatively affects their academic performance and ultimately their grades.

### **Tackling Strategies**

Below are given some tackling strategies which participants of this study mentioned.

- To avoid anxiety, one needs to change one’s surroundings first.



- Get yourself both mentally and physically active by doing something unique, such taking some exercise.
- Keep yourself busy with productive activities like reading books and playing sports.
- Take healthy food and drinks like fresh food and fresh fruit beverages.
- Maintain proper time for your sleep. It will help you to remain active.
- Interact with people about productive topics.
- Take appointment of good counselor. It will make you keep check on your anxiety level.
- Get yourself away from the things that make you distract.
- Avoid thinking about the same thing for long.
- Try not to isolate yourself, rather be with loved and close ones.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

#### **Discussion**

The main aim of the present study was to explore factors of anxiety that affects students' grades. The findings show numerous factors of anxiety which are directly or indirectly effecting students' grade. Previous studies had revealed that students with anxiety tend to not perform well academically (Cassady, 2010). The findings of this analysis showed that anxiety has numerous factors like distraction, absent mindedness, declining motivation, feelings of fatigue, feelings of loneliness, feelings of fear or panic, and tendency to lead towards depression These factors negatively affect students' grades. These factors have also been indicated in numerous other studies (Alharbi, 2015). In addition, numerous studies in other contexts showed other than these factors.

The study showed that due to anxiety students get discouraged and lose their confidence thus they can't perform well in their class or in exam hall. Anxiety also declines motivation of learners and declines their interest towards study. The study also showed that learners with higher anxiety level had less motivation for learning purpose (Cheng & Abdullah, 2013).

Findings of present study revealed that students with anxiety become absent minded and they cannot catch what is being taught in the classroom. Thus, they cannot be able to attempt the questions asked in exam halls. In addition, anxiety makes students panic at certain times. This is also a factor that they fail to perform well in the educational field.

Feeling fatigue and feeling of loneliness are also major factors which cause pupils to perform not well in their academic career. Previous studies showed that students who are victims of anxiety



tend to be tired and fatigued. While they are tend to live alone and enjoy their own company (MacIntyre, 1995). However, the present study recommended some strategies through which students can minimize their anxiety level and can concentrate on their studies in order to perform well in their examinations. The strategies are changing the environment where one is currently living, doing exercise, getting oneself busy reading books and playing sports. These strategies would help individuals in making themselves away from anxiety.

### **Conclusion**

The objective of the present study was to explore factors of anxiety that affect students' academic achievement at higher education institutions of Larkana. It is found in this study that there are various factors of anxiety that affect students' academic achievement. Some factors like distraction, absent mindedness, declining motivation were found to be hindering factors in academic progress of higher education students.

On the other hand, feelings of fatigue, feelings of loneliness, feelings of fear or panic, and depressive tendencies were also triggering factors of anxiety that were affecting students' academic progress. However, the study recommended different strategies which students could use in order to overcome anxiety and improve their progress in academics. 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. Maintaining sleeping time, interacting with different people, and avoiding indulging oneself in same routine or things are also some strategies which can help pupils to avoid anxiety.

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