

Exploration of the Influence of Social Anxiety on Communication Style in College Students: Grounded Theory Approach

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Abstract

This study explored the impact of social anxiety on communication styles, academic and social performance, as well as strategies used to cope with this condition. The main findings show that social anxiety correlates with a tendency towards a passive communication style and the use of avoidance strategies. Individuals with social anxiety tend to avoid active participation in group discussions and opt for silence, which is influenced by feelings of inadequacy and fear of negative evaluation. Avoidance strategies, such as avoiding public communication situations, are used as coping mechanisms to reduce perceived anxiety. Social anxiety also had a significant impact on academic and social participation. Study participants reported decreased academic participation, such as fear of asking questions or participating in class discussions, which affected understanding of subject matter and academic performance. In addition, social anxiety often leads to social isolation, exacerbating loneliness and anxiety levels. Strategies used to cope with social anxiety include seeking social support from friends and family. This emotional support was shown to help individuals feel more comfortable and safe in social situations, reduce stress and These findings emphasize the importance of social support and interventions that promote social interaction to improve mental well-being and reduce the negative impact of social anxiety.

Keywords: Social Anxiety, Passive Communication Style, Social Isolation, Confrontation Avoidance, Communication Behavior

Introduction

In the context of globalization and rapid advancement of information technology, interpersonal communication plays a vital role in academic settings, especially for students facing social and emotional challenges such as social anxiety (Irina Vasilievna Tolstoukhova, 2023). Research emphasizes the importance of interpersonal interactions within student groups, highlighting the benefits of collaborative work in small groups to improve communication skills and build positive relationships (Ramainim Saragih, 2023). Furthermore, research shows that group tutoring services and activities such as guessing games can significantly improve

students' interpersonal communication skills (Loredana Ivan, 2022). Furthermore, the ability to collaborate and communicate effectively in groups, both verbally and nonverbally, is a key component of interpersonal competence, influencing how individuals interact and understand the emotions of others (Suwarti Suwarti, 2022). As students navigate this important transition period in their lives, developing strong interpersonal communication skills becomes essential to overcome social anxiety and foster successful interactions in academic settings. Social anxiety disorder (SAD) is a common mental health condition characterized by excessive fear and worry in social situations due to anticipation of negative evaluation (Diana Vieira Figueiredo,, 2023). Individuals with SAD often experience somatic, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral symptoms, leading to avoidance of social interactions (Kathleen R. Merikangas,, 2010). The impact of SAD on communication style can be profound, affecting self-confidence, clarity in conveying messages, and the ability to listen and respond effectively to others (Nasser A Alomari, 2022). This disorder can significantly impede personal, social, and occupational life, emphasizing the need for professional treatment (Elena Grassi, 2021). Understanding the multidimensional nature of social anxiety and implementing appropriate interventions, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy and mindfulness-based approaches, is essential in addressing the complexity of SAD and its impact on communication style. Research on college student social anxiety and communication style is essential because of the importance of effective communication in academic and social settings. Several studies have explained this relationship: adult attachment plays a role in levels of social anxiety, with attachment avoidance and anxiety significantly correlated with social anxiety (Abigail Millings, 2013). Additionally, mental resilience is inversely correlated with social anxiety, suggesting that increasing resilience may reduce social anxiety among college students (Nayeli Lucía Ampuero-Tello, 2022). Furthermore, fear of positive evaluation and negative interpretation of positive events mediate the relationship between behavioral inhibition and social anxiety, with gender differences noted in this relationship (Hae-Rin Kim, 2023). Social media use also impacts social

anxiety, with passive use increasing anxiety levels while active use decreasing it, mediated by communication capacity (Fengxia Lai, 2023). Understanding these dynamics may be helpful in supporting students with social anxiety to improve their communication skills and overall well-being in the college environment.

Based on the exploration of social anxiety and communication styles among college students, this study used a theory-based approach to develop a theory based on empirical data directly from participants, aiming to uncover complex dynamics and hidden patterns that are not easily seen through traditional research methods (Lillian Reuman, 2023).

This study explored a significant negative correlation between mental resilience and social anxiety in college students, highlighting the predictive effect of psychological resilience on social anxiety levels, suggesting that enhancing mental resilience can improve social anxiety. In addition, this study examined the impact of social media use on anxiety levels, finding that although there was no strong positive or negative relationship between the two, the negative effects of social media could increase social anxiety among college students. Furthermore, the investigation of adult attachment and social anxiety revealed significant correlations, especially in the dimensions of attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety, emphasizing a moderate significant relationship between attachment anxiety and social anxiety. This comprehensive approach explains the complex interactions between social anxiety, communication styles, and various influencing factors among college students.

Understanding the relationship between social anxiety and communication styles is essential for developing effective intervention strategies for college students. Research shows that adult attachment, parenting style, resilience, and social media use are all associated with social anxiety among college students. For example, the adult attachment dimensions of avoidance and anxiety showed significant correlations with social anxiety (Abigail Millings, 2013), while authoritative parenting was associated with lower prevalence of social anxiety in adolescents (MinJun Choong, 2023). Additionally, resilience was negatively correlated with

social anxiety, suggesting that increasing resilience may reduce levels of social anxiety (Syazwina Muhammad Khir, 2020). Furthermore, active social media use was associated with lower social anxiety, mediated by increased communication capacity, highlighting the importance of communication style in managing social anxiety among college students (Fengxia Lai, 2023). By integrating these findings, interventions targeting communication skills and resilience may effectively support students in overcoming social anxiety and improving their academic and social success.

Methods

Grounded theory is a suitable approach to explore the influence of social anxiety on communication styles in college students because it allows for the development of theories based on the data collected, revealing complex dynamics and patterns (Syazwina Muhammad Khir, 2020). With the qualitative method, grounded theory is a qualitative research design that involves simultaneous data collection and analysis, emphasizing theory development based on emerging findings. Grounded Theory is an inductive methodology that systematically analyzes data to generate theories about human behavior in various disciplines, such as sociology, nursing, health care, and education (Devajit Mohajan, 2023). This process consists of three phases: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, which assist in theory development (Stuart Grieve, 2023).

Results and Discussion

A study involving 100 students from Bandung University, with 55 females and 45 males aged 18 to 22 years, focused on the level of social anxiety assessed through the Social Anxiety Scale and professional diagnosis (Cassie M. Hazell, 2023). Research shows that social anxiety disorder (SAD) is prevalent among young individuals, with higher rates observed in females compared to males. Furthermore, the study emphasized the importance of Cognitive Behavioral

Group Therapy (CBGT) in reducing levels of social anxiety and ruminative thinking in college students with SAD, highlighting the effectiveness of such interventions in addressing anxiety-related problems (Victoria Kolyagina, 2020). Understanding gender differences in the prevalence of anxiety and the impact of therapy on anxiety levels is essential for developing targeted interventions and support strategies for individuals experiencing social anxiety in the university setting.

1) Impact of Social Anxiety on Communication Style

a. Passive Communication Style

Reluctance to actively participate in group discussions and the tendency to remain silent can be influenced by various factors such as anxiety, low self-confidence, and communication style (Kate Maher, 2022). Research shows that individuals with higher levels of anxiety can exhibit a passive communication style, resorting to dependent or submissive behavior in interactions, which is in line with findings from research conducted by (Haleh Tajadini, 2023). In addition, feelings of inadequacy due to limited vocabulary, pronunciation problems, and fear of making mistakes can contribute to a lack of initiative in voicing opinions or engaging in conversation (Maria A. Erofeeva, 2020). This avoidance of confrontation and preference for silence can be associated with fears of negative evaluation by peers, leading to self-doubt about language proficiency and social performance. Understanding these dynamics and addressing underlying issues such as anxiety and communication style are essential in fostering a more inclusive and participatory environment for individuals who are hesitant to engage in oral activities.

b. Use of Avoidance Strategies

Individuals with social anxiety often use avoidance strategies to cope with their condition, as evidenced by various studies. Research has shown that individuals with social phobia tend to use avoidance as a coping mechanism, avoiding situations involving public communication or social interactions that are considered risky, a finding that is in line with research conducted

by (Valentin Ababkov, 2023). In addition, adolescents who experience social conflict can also exhibit avoidance coping strategies, influenced by factors such as parental attitudes and avoidance patterns in parents. Furthermore, in the context of coping with anxiety in speaking English, students have been found to use strategies such as withdrawal, which can be seen as a form of avoidance, to manage their anxiety levels. These findings collectively highlight the prevalence of avoidance behavior as a coping mechanism for individuals facing social anxiety across age groups and situations.

2) Impact on Academic and Social Performance

a. Decreased Academic Participation

Social anxiety has a significant impact on participants' academic participation. They feel anxious about asking questions or participating in class discussions, which in turn affects their understanding of the subject matter and overall academic performance. Social anxiety does play a significant role in academic participation and performance, as evidenced by numerous studies. Other studies have shown that social anxiety can lead to avoidance of asking questions or participating in discussions, which ultimately affects students' understanding of the subject matter and overall academic performance (Ömer Demir, 2023). Students with higher levels of social anxiety tend to closely monitor their behavior, potentially hindering their ability to actively engage in class activities and seek help when needed (Emma Cook, 2022). Additionally, observing negative experiences in performance situations can increase anxiety levels, leading to disengagement during tasks, especially for individuals with low effortful control (Charlotte Eugénie Mills, 2023). However, it is important to note that students with social anxiety may not always be stigmatized by their peers, as shown in a study where students with social anxiety disorder were actually more well-liked by their peers (Ruth Brookman, 2023).

b. Social Isolation

Respondents reported feeling socially isolated due to their anxiety. They found it difficult to make new friends or maintain existing social relationships. This exacerbated feelings of loneliness and increased their anxiety levels. Loneliness and social anxiety are interrelated problems that can be exacerbated by difficulties in forming and maintaining social relationships. Research on Rural Left Behind Children (RLBC) in China highlighted the significant impact of social anxiety, self-esteem, and self-concept on loneliness (Robert Eres ,2023). Additionally, studies on adolescents with Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD) emphasized the role of adverse childhood experiences and attachment styles in predicting a diagnosis of SAD (Songul Derin ,2022). Furthermore, investigations during the COVID-19 pandemic revealed that social distancing measures led to increased levels of anxiety and loneliness among older individuals in residential care facilities and home care services (Rose-Marie Johansson-Pajala ,2022). These findings collectively underscore the importance of social connections in reducing loneliness and anxiety, emphasizing the need for interventions that promote social interaction to improve mental well-being (Emily Hards ,2021).

3) Social Anxiety Coping Strategies

a. Seeking Social Support

Some participants attempted to cope with their social anxiety by seeking support from close friends or family. This emotional support helped them feel more comfortable and secure in social situations. Emotional support plays a vital role in helping individuals feel more comfortable and secure in social situations (Hossein Ebrahimi,2016). Research has shown that emotional support, provided by experienced nurses to newly graduated nurses, can significantly reduce stress and anxiety, increase self-confidence, and foster positive relationships (Yoshiko Nishiyama ,2015). Furthermore, in the context of social anxiety, receiving emotional support has been associated with increased activity in the left dorsolateral prefrontal cortex, indicating a positive response to supportive messages (Aline Schütz Balistieri ,2013). This support is essential not only for healthcare professionals but also for individuals with chronic illnesses,

especially adolescents and young adults, as it helps them cope better with their condition and engage more effectively in their care plans (Aline Schütz Balistieri,2022). Overall, providing emotional support is essential for improving well-being, reducing stress, and promoting positive social interactions.

4) Theory Development

Based on the findings above, this study develops a theory regarding the relationship between social anxiety and communication styles in college students.

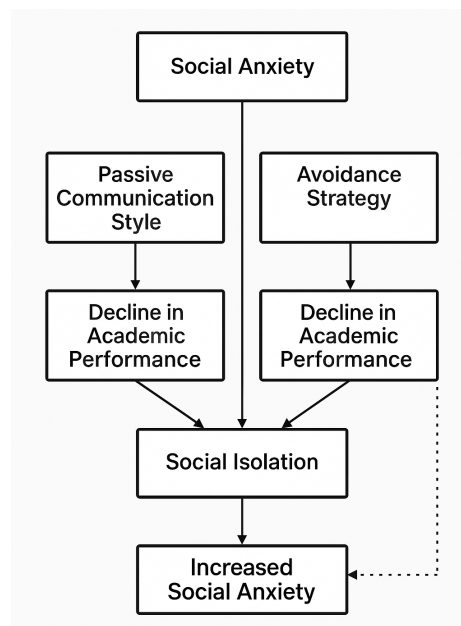


Figure 1. Social Anxiety Influence Model

Source: Data Processed (2025)

Model Explanation

- Direct Effect Model, Social anxiety causes students to be more likely to adopt a passive communication style and avoidance strategies in social and academic interactions.
- Secondary Effect Model, Passive communication style and avoidance strategies lead to decreased academic participation. Students who avoid social and academic interactions tend to become more socially isolated. Social isolation resulting from lack of academic participation and social interactions further exacerbates social anxiety, creating a vicious cycle that is difficult to break.

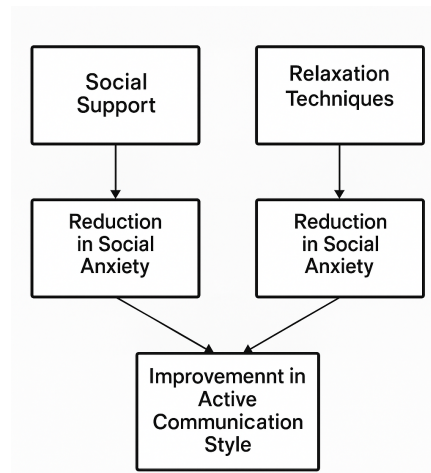


Figure 2. Intervention Effect Model

Source: Data Processed

Intervention Model Explanation Interventions such as social support (from friends, family, or counselors) and relaxation techniques (such as meditation, breathing exercises, or cognitive therapy) can help reduce social anxiety. The decrease in social anxiety as a result of these interventions can increase the adoption of more active and positive communication styles, which in turn can increase academic participation and reduce social isolation.

Conclusion

The results of this study have several practical implication. Development of Support Programs, Student Affairs in universities need to develop support programs specifically for students with social anxiety, including counseling, support groups, and social skills workshops. Student Affairs is considered necessary to provide communication skills training that can help students develop more assertive and effective communication styles.

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