



Academic Anxiety: The Protective Roles of Emotional Intelligence and Self-Efficacy among Senior Secondary School Students

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OPEN ACCESS

Article Citation:

Dr. Adnan Hamid¹, Iram Sleem Malik²,
"Academic Anxiety: The Protective Roles of
Emotional Intelligence and Self-Efficacy among
Senior Secondary School Students",
International Journal of Recent Trends in
Multidisciplinary Research, July-August 2026,
Vol 6(04), 01-04.



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Abstract: Academic anxiety has become a major psychological concern among senior secondary school students because of increasing pressure from competitive examinations and career-related stresses. Recognising psychological elements that protect students from academic anxiety is therefore crucial for endorsing their academic success and psychological well-being. The current study examined the protective roles of emotional intelligence and self-efficacy in predicting academic anxiety among senior secondary school students. A quantitative descriptive-correlational research design was used. The sample consists of 446 senior secondary school students selected through simple random sampling from schools in the Budaun district, UP. Data was collected using standardised tools for Academic Anxiety, Emotional Intelligence, and Self-Efficacy. Statistical methods such as multiple linear regression analysis were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics to assess the predictive effects of emotional intelligence and self-efficacy on academic anxiety. The findings indicate that students with higher levels of self-efficacy and emotional intelligence experience lower levels of academic anxiety, supporting their roles as protective psychological resources. The study revealed the significance of students' emotional intelligence and self-efficacy in reducing their academic anxiety. These findings have significant implications for teachers, counsellors, parents, and policymakers looking to foster students' mental health and academic achievement.

Key Words: Academic Anxiety, Emotional Intelligence, Self-Efficacy, Secondary School Students

1. Introduction

Education plays a key role in the cognitive, emotional, and social development of individuals. Nowadays, academic success is often considered a key factor in future educational and career opportunities. Therefore, students, mainly those at the senior secondary level, experience increasing academic demands resulting from examinations, vast curricula, highly competitive entrance tests, parental expectations, and uncertainty regarding future career choices. Even though many studies show that optimum academic pressure may improve motivation and performance, excessive pressure frequently results in academic anxiety, which adversely affects students' psychological well-being and academic functioning (Pekrun, 2006; Putwain, 2007; Zeidner, 1998).

Academic anxiety is a situation-specific emotional state characterized by persistent feelings of worry, apprehension, nervousness, and fear associated with academic tasks, classroom activities, examinations, assignments, and academic performance (Spielberger & Vagg, 1995). It is well-thought-out that one of the most common emotional difficulties experienced by youths during their studies is. Students who possess high levels of academic anxiety often come across complications in

Academic Anxiety: The Protective Roles of Emotional Intelligence and Self-Efficacy among Senior Secondary School Students

attentiveness, information processing, memory retention, decision-making, and classroom participation, all of which may adversely influence academic achievement and overall psychological adjustment (Hembree, 1988; Cassady & Johnson, 2002). The senior secondary stage characterizes a critical developmental period because students concurrently experience speedy physical, emotional, intellectual, and social changes while studying for significant academic examinations that impact higher education and career prospects. During this period, academic accountability becomes increasingly challenging, making students more vulnerable to academic anxiety and stress. Research has consistently revealed that extreme academic anxiety leads to low academic achievement, poor self-esteem, emotional exhaustion, reduced motivation, absenteeism, and increased risk of mental health complications among adolescents (Putwain, 2007; OECD, 2017; Wuthrich, Jagiello, & Azzi, 2020).

Current research has shifted from focusing specifically on students' difficulties toward recognising protective psychological strengths that enable individuals to manage effectively with academic challenges. Within the framework of positive psychology, researchers have highlighted that personal resources such as emotional intelligence and self-efficacy assist individuals in regulating emotions, managing stress efficiently, and maintaining psychological well-being despite adverse situations (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Snyder & Lopez, 2007).

In view of these considerations, the current study seeks to examine the relationships among academic anxiety, emotional intelligence, and self-efficacy and to determine the extent to which emotional intelligence and self-efficacy function as protective psychological factors in reducing academic anxiety among senior secondary school students. The findings of the study are expected to contribute to educational psychology by providing evidence that may assist educators, school counsellors, parents, and policymakers in developing interventions that foster emotional competence, strengthen self-belief, and promote students' psychological well-being and academic success.

1.1 Objective of the Study

1. To explore whether emotional intelligence and self-efficacy function as protective psychological resources against academic anxiety among senior secondary school students.

1.2 Hypothesis

H₀₁: Emotional intelligence does not have a significant protective effect against academic anxiety among senior secondary school students.

H₀₂: Self-efficacy does not have a significant protective effect against academic anxiety among senior secondary school students.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The study employed a quantitative, descriptive-correlational research design to examine the predictive role of emotional intelligence and self-efficacy on academic anxiety among senior secondary school students. Multiple linear regression analysis (Enter Method) was used to determine the extent to which emotional intelligence and self-efficacy predict academic anxiety and function as protective psychological resources.

2.2 Sample

The sample consisted of 446 senior secondary school students. Participants were selected from senior secondary schools of Budaun district, U.P., using a simple random sampling technique.

2.3 Research tools

Data was collected by using the following standardised psychological scales:

1. **Academic Anxiety Scale (2020)** Standardised by Nagma
2. **Emotional Intelligence Scale (2017)** Standardised by Dr. Neha Sharma
3. **Self-Efficacy Scale (2014)** Standardised by Dr. Arun Kumar Singh & Dr. Shruti Narian

Higher scores on emotional intelligence and self-efficacy indicated greater psychological resources, whereas higher scores on academic anxiety indicated greater anxiety levels.

2.4 Statistical Analysis

Data was analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics. Descriptive statistics were computed initially, followed by multiple regression analysis using the Enter Method. Academic anxiety was entered as the dependent variable, while emotional intelligence and self-efficacy were entered simultaneously as independent variables. The significance of the regression model was evaluated using the F-test, and the individual contributions of emotional intelligence and self-efficacy were assessed through standardized beta coefficients (β), t-values, and significance levels (p-values).

The coefficient of determination (R^2) was examined to determine the proportion of variance in academic anxiety explained by the predictor variables.

Regression Model

The regression model used in the study was:

$$\text{Academic Anxiety} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 (\text{Self-Efficacy}) + \beta_2 (\text{Emotional Intelligence}) + \varepsilon$$

Academic Anxiety: The Protective Roles of Emotional Intelligence and Self-Efficacy among Senior Secondary School Students

where:

- β_0 = intercept,
- β_1 and β_2 = regression coefficients,
- ε = error term.

3. Results and their Interpretation

1. To explore whether emotional intelligence and self-efficacy function as protective psychological resources against academic anxiety among senior secondary school students.

To achieve the above objective, multiple regression analysis (Enter Method) was applied. The results of multiple regression analysis are presented in Tables 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3.

ANOVA Table for Final Model

	SS	df	MS	F
Regression	12684.128	2	6342.064	17.839**
Residual	157494.393	443	355.518	
Total	170178.521	445		

Table 3.1

**significant at 0.01 level, $p < 0.01$

Model Summary for Regression Analysis

Predictors	R	R ²	R ² _{adj}	Std. error	ΔR^2	F change
SE, EI	.273	.075	.070	18.855	.075	17.839**

Table 3.2

**significant at 0.01 level, $p < 0.01$

Coefficients for Final Model

Independent variables	Unstandardized coefficients		standardized coefficients	t	Simple r	Tolerance
	B	Standard Error of B	Beta β			
Constant	124.585	4.149		30.031		
SE	-.248	.051	-.230	-4.896	-.224	.947
EI	-.042	.019	-.104	-2.207	-.104	.947

Table 3.3

**significant at 0.01 level, $p < 0.01$

It is observed from tables 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3 that self-efficacy and emotional intelligence in combination significantly predicted the academic anxiety [$F(2, 443) = 17.839, p < 0.01$] of senior secondary school students. Using the total score of self-efficacy and emotional intelligence to predict academic anxiety of senior secondary school students results in a multiple R of .273, which accounted for 7.5% variance of academic anxiety scores (ref. Table 4.2).

Self-efficacy emerged as a significant negative predictor of academic anxiety. The negative beta coefficient indicates that as self-efficacy increases, academic anxiety decreases. The standardized beta value ($\beta = -.230; p < 0.01$) suggests that for every one standard deviation increase in self-efficacy, academic anxiety decreases by approximately 0.23 standard deviations, controlling for emotional intelligence. The semi-partial (part) correlation of -0.224 indicates that self-efficacy uniquely explains: $(-0.224)^2 = 0.050$, approximately **5.0% of the variance** in academic anxiety.

This finding suggests that self-efficacy acts as a significant protective psychological resource against academic anxiety among senior secondary school students. Students who have high self-efficacy have a low level of academic anxiety. So, the researcher failed to accept the null hypothesis H_{02} .

Emotional intelligence also emerged as a significant negative predictor of academic anxiety. The negative beta coefficient indicates that students with higher emotional intelligence tend to experience lower academic anxiety. The standardized beta coefficient ($\beta = -.104; p < 0.05$) shows that a one standard deviation increase in emotional intelligence is associated with a decrease of approximately 0.10 standard deviations in academic anxiety after controlling for self-efficacy. The semi-partial correlation of -0.101 indicates that emotional intelligence uniquely explains: $(-0.101)^2 = 0.010$, approximately **1.0% of the variance** in academic anxiety. Although its contribution is smaller than that of self-efficacy, emotional intelligence nevertheless functions as a statistically significant protective factor against academic anxiety. So, the researcher failed to accept the null hypothesis H_{01} .

4. Discussion

Among these protective resources, **Emotional Intelligence (EI)** has appeared as one of the most powerful psychological constructs in educational research. Mayer and Salovey (1997) conceptualized emotional intelligence as the ability to perceive, understand, use, and regulate emotions effectively. Goleman (1995) further popularized the concept by suggesting that emotional competencies contribute significantly to personal, social, and academic success. Students with higher emotional intelligence demonstrate greater emotional regulation, empathy, adaptability, interpersonal competence, and resilience when facing academic challenges. Various experimental studies have revealed that emotionally intelligent students experience lower levels of academic stress and anxiety while exhibiting higher academic achievement, better classroom adjustment, and improved psychological well-being (Brackett & Mayer, 2003; MacCann et al., 2020; Perera & DiGiacomo, 2013).

Another significant protective psychological element is **Self-Efficacy**, a concept derived from Bandura's (1977, 1997) Social Cognitive Theory. Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in his or her capability to organize and execute the actions necessary to achieve desired outcomes. Adolescent with high academic self-efficacy perceive hard academic tasks as challenges rather than threats, remain persistent despite setbacks, employ effective learning strategies, and demonstrate greater confidence in their academic abilities. Conversely, students with low self-efficacy are more likely to experience self-doubt, avoidance behaviour, and heightened academic anxiety (Bandura, 1997; Pajares, 1996; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020).

Significant empirical evidence holds the negative association between emotional intelligence, self-efficacy, and academic anxiety. Emotional intelligence allows students to identify and regulate emotional responses before they interfere with learning, whereas self-efficacy strengthens confidence in handling academic demands and overcoming challenges. Together, these psychological resources promote resilience, adaptive coping, emotional stability, and academic engagement (Parker et al., 2004; Wuthrich et al., 2020). Students possessing both high emotional intelligence and strong self-efficacy are therefore more likely to maintain positive emotional health and demonstrate effective coping during stressful academic situations.

5. Conclusion

The results of the multiple regression analysis (Enter Method) revealed that emotional intelligence and self-efficacy jointly and significantly predict academic anxiety among senior secondary school students, $F(2, 443) = 17.839, p < .001$, **explaining 7.5% of the variance in academic anxiety ($R^2 = .075$)**. Both variables were significant negative predictors, indicating their protective role against academic anxiety. Self-efficacy ($\beta = -0.230, p < .001$) was found to be a stronger predictor than emotional intelligence ($\beta = -0.104, p = .028$). The findings suggest that students possessing higher levels of self-efficacy and emotional intelligence are less likely to experience academic anxiety. Therefore, emotional intelligence and self-efficacy may be regarded as important psychological resources that help protect senior secondary school students from academic anxiety.

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