

Review

Not peer-reviewed version

Eliminating Anxiety in Tertiary Education: A Review

[Taylor Smith Heathen](#) *

Posted Date: 19 June 2024

doi: 10.20944/preprints202406.1230.v1

Keywords: Anxiety; Higher Education; Problems in Speaking; Speech Anxiety; Tertiary Education



Preprints.org is a free multidiscipline platform providing preprint service that is dedicated to making early versions of research outputs permanently available and citable. Preprints posted at Preprints.org appear in Web of Science, Crossref, Google Scholar, Scilit, Europe PMC.

Copyright: This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Review

Eliminating Anxiety in Tertiary Education: A Review

Taylor Smith Heathen

University of Divinity

Abstract: Eliminating anxiety in higher education is essential to creating a positive learning atmosphere and improving students' general well-being. University students frequently struggle with anxiety, which is frequently made worse by social expectations, academic demands, and the adjustment to living on one's own. This article review aims to give collective ideas from relevant research articles to solidify such solutions in eradicating anxiety among students at the tertiary level. Eliminating anxiety in higher education necessitates a multifaceted strategy that includes identifying the problem, offering extensive support networks, encouraging a balanced lifestyle, fostering inclusivity, reducing financial stress, fostering a sense of community, fostering open communication, routinely evaluating tactics, and working with outside organizations. By implementing these measures, universities and colleges may foster a more positive, healthy environment where students can succeed academically and personally.

Keywords: Anxiety; Higher Education; Problems in Speaking; Speech Anxiety; Tertiary Education

Introduction

In higher education, anxiety among students has become a significant problem as it impacts their general well-being and academic performance. Anxiety is one of the most prevalent mental health conditions among college students, according to the American College Health Association. It is frequently made worse by pressure to perform well academically, financial strain, and the adjustment to independence. Studies show that between 20% and 30% of college students suffer from anxiety disorders, underscoring the need for efficient support networks and interventions on campuses.

Academic pressure is one of the leading causes of anxiety among students. Chronic stress can result from the competitive nature of postsecondary education and high expectations from both internal and external sources. According to research by Beiter et al. (2015), anxiety among students is significantly predicted by their worry about failing their classes. Moreover, maintaining scholarships and meeting requirements for advanced degrees can put additional strain on already high levels of stress, creating a vicious cycle of anxiety and difficulties in the classroom. Genelza (2022) also stated that recognizing that the issues plaguing our educational system have their origins in the structure of our society is the first step toward education reform.

A further important aspect impacting students' anxiety is financial hardship. Many students are burdened by the escalating cost of higher education, which includes living expenses, tuition, and possible student loan debt. According to Eisenberg, Golberstein, and Hunt (2009), there is a direct link between college students' elevated anxiety levels and their financial burden. This financial hardship may impact students' capacity to concentrate on their studies and fully engage in the academic and social parts of university life.

Anxiety among students is also greatly influenced by the adjustment to a new social and living environment. Moving away from home, making new friends, and adjusting to a new way of life can be daunting for many students. First-year students are more susceptible to anxiety as they adjust to these significant changes, per a study by Stallman (2010). Anxiety may be exacerbated during this period of transition by emotions of isolation and loneliness.

A diversified strategy is needed to address student anxiety in postsecondary education. Universities are adopting various tactics, including peer support groups, stress management classes, and counseling services, as they become more aware of the value of mental health care. The

consequences of anxiety can be lessened with the aid of efficient intervention programs that support coping mechanisms and resilience. Conley, Durlak, and Kirsch (2015) believe that including mental health education in the curriculum can give students the skills to manage their stress and anxiety better.

Tertiary institutions can improve their student's academic performance and general well-being by identifying the causes of student concern and implementing extensive support networks. More research and funding for mental health resources are required to build a supportive learning environment that meets all students' needs. Generally, this article review aims to give collective ideas from relevant research articles to solidify such solutions in eradicating anxiety among students at the tertiary level.

The Speaking Problems of the Tertiary Students

Students in higher education who struggle with speech face many obstacles affecting their social and academic lives. Thornbury (2005) states that students frequently have difficulty speaking in a second language because of low self-esteem, a fear of making mistakes, and a restricted vocabulary. Non-native English speakers may experience additional difficulties due to their lack of knowledge of cultural nuances and dialects, making these problems more noticeable. Improving pupils' academic performance and communicative competency requires addressing these speech issues.

Anxiety is a significant influence on speaking difficulties. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) point to "communication apprehension" as a significant problem, which is the state in which students experience anxiety or fear when speaking in front of others. This anxiety may be brought on by a lack of experience, unpleasant past encounters, or the pressure to do well in school. Students may refrain from contributing to class debates or making presentations of their views, for example, which can impede their language development and general speaking confidence.

The absence of sufficient practice opportunities is another critical problem. Speaking is a skill that needs to be regularly practiced in real-world communicative situations, according to Bailey (2005). Nonetheless, many university students do not have enough chances to discuss the target language intensely. Large class sizes, little opportunity for interaction with native speakers, or a curriculum emphasizing written language over spoken language could all contribute to this. Students may struggle to acquire fluency and the capacity for spontaneous thought and response without much practice.

Speaking problems among university students can also be attributed to cultural differences and communication styles. The expectations and practices around communication vary among cultures, impacting how pupils express themselves. For instance, students from countries where indirect communication is valued may find it difficult to adjust to the more direct and interactive manner typically required in Western educational environments. Cheng (2000) has drawn attention to the possibility of miscommunication and decreased engagement in class discussions resulting from this mismatch.

Universities can use a variety of student support initiatives to overcome these speaking issues. Students can have more practice chances if speaking-focused activities like group discussions, debates, and presentations are incorporated into the curriculum. Furthermore, providing students with language support services like language laboratories and conversation groups can help them become more confident and fluent speakers. Nation and Newton (2009) assert that encouraging and stress-free speaking practice environments are essential for assisting students in overcoming their phobias and developing their public speaking abilities.

Overall, by acknowledging and resolving the speech difficulties encountered by postsecondary learners, academic establishments can cultivate a more comprehensive and productive classroom atmosphere. Students' speaking skills and general academic performance can be significantly improved by promoting frequent practice, appreciating cultural variations, and lowering fear.

Findings and Discussion on Eradicating Anxiety in Tertiary Education

With research showing a marked rise in anxiety disorders over the last ten years, anxiety is a common problem among students in higher education. The American College Health Association (2019) revealed in their extensive survey that about sixty-three percent of American college students had severe anxiety at least once in the previous year. Similar findings by Andrews and Wilding (2004) indicate that anxiety is a worldwide issue, with 41% of UK students reporting some level of moderate to severe worry.

Students in higher education experience significant levels of anxiety for a variety of reasons. The transition from youth to adulthood, financial hardship, and the pressure to succeed academically are all crucial factors (Bayram & Bilgel, 2008). Furthermore, social factors that worsen anxiety levels include interpersonal problems and peer pressure (Regehr et al., 2013). Comprehending these variables is essential for formulating efficacious techniques to alleviate worry.

Students who experience anxiety perform worse academically. According to research by Eisenberg, Golberstein, and Hunt (2009), anxious kids are likelier to drop out of school and receive worse marks. Richardson and King (1991), who observed that anxiety reduces focus, memory, and general cognitive function and results in worse academic outcomes, corroborate this finding. Therefore, addressing anxiety is crucial for both academic retention and success. Because they are using the English language in the classroom, the students need to actively participate in the communicative activities created to improve their speaking performance. In other academic areas, they are encouraged to use English. (Genelza, 2021).

Students in higher education have found that psychological therapies are successful in lowering anxiety. Studies have demonstrated that cognitive-behavioral treatment (CBT) significantly reduces anxiety symptoms after sessions (Hofmann et al., 2012). Positive results are also shown by group therapy and mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) programs, which give students coping mechanisms to control their anxiety (Barnes et al., 2007).

When it comes to helping anxious students, academic institutions are vital. Research by Gallagher (2012) found that students report lower levels of anxiety at universities that offer comprehensive mental health services. To assist students in managing their anxiety, educational institutions might offer peer support groups, stress management classes, and counseling services. Another key to reducing campus anxiety is establishing a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere.

Technology-based solutions are becoming more and more popular. Examples include online counseling services and mobile health applications. According to Farrer et al. (2013), students' symptoms of anxiety can be effectively reduced by digital treatments. These therapies are a good choice for students who might be reluctant to seek out traditional face-to-face therapy because they have the advantages of accessibility and confidentiality.

Peer support networks have also demonstrated promise in reducing student anxiety. Wright and Rains (2013) conducted a study that emphasized the advantages of peer-led support groups. These groups give students a forum to discuss their experiences and coping mechanisms. In addition to lessening emotions of loneliness, peer support also promotes a sense of belonging and community, both of which are essential for lowering anxiety.

Additionally, training teachers and staff to spot and handle kid anxiety symptoms can make a significant impact. According to Brown and Schofield (2013), staff members with mental health awareness training can assist students more effectively by directing them to the right resources and creating a more compassionate and encouraging learning environment. By being proactive, anxiety can be kept from getting worse.

Reducing anxiety can also be aided by setting up a comfortable learning atmosphere. This entails creating study areas and classrooms that encourage calm and concentration and implementing flexible learning timetables to lessen the burden of academics (Pascoe et al., 2020). These adjustments can assist children in controlling their anxiety and enhance their academic achievement.

Finally, eliminating anxiety in postsecondary students requires a comprehensive strategy that incorporates academic, social, and psychological support. The incorporation of mental health services into the broader educational structure guarantees that pupils have all-encompassing assistance.

According to Hunt and Eisenberg (2010), holistically attending to students' mental health issues can improve their general well-being and academic performance.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Eradicating anxiety in higher education is essential to creating a positive learning atmosphere and improving students' general well-being. University students frequently struggle with anxiety, which is frequently made worse by social expectations, academic demands, and the adjustment to living on one's own. Institutions may greatly enhance student outcomes, retention rates, and the general standard of higher education by taking a comprehensive approach to resolving this issue.

Recognizing the existence and significance of anxiety is the first step toward its elimination in postsecondary education. Universities need to understand that anxiety is a severe mental health problem that can impair one's ability to learn, grow personally, and pursue future employment opportunities. Doing this may foster a welcoming environment where students feel free to ask for assistance without worrying about being judged or stigmatized.

Establishing strong mental health support networks is crucial. This entails offering stress management courses, mental health classes, and readily available counseling services. Universities should spend money on employing licensed mental health specialists and ensure that all students have easy access to these services and are well promoted. Establishing a supportive community can also be significantly aided by peer support programs.

Another essential thing to do is to encourage a balanced lifestyle. Anxiety can be reduced by advising students to balance their personal and academic obligations well. Universities can help with this by providing tools and initiatives on campus that encourage physical activity, a healthy diet, and enough sleep. Stress can also be reduced by providing flexible schedules and lowering unreasonable academic expectations.

It is essential to establish a welcoming and encouraging academic environment. Instructors and administrative personnel must receive training in identifying anxiety symptoms and provide suitable assistance. Different learning styles can be accommodated, and anxiety connected to performance can be decreased using flexible teaching approaches, such as online resources and various evaluation forms.

Moreover, anxiety among students is significantly influenced by financial stress. To lessen students' financial burdens, universities should provide financial help, scholarships, and job possibilities. Students can also benefit from budgeting classes and open discussions about financial resources to handle their money more skillfully.

Creating a feeling of belonging and community can significantly lower anxiety. Academic institutions should foster social cohesion using clubs, associations, and functions that stimulate student engagement and cultivate a nurturing community. Students with a strong sense of community may find the emotional support they need to overcome the obstacles of postsecondary education.

It is critical to promote candid conversation regarding mental health. Universities ought to provide forums where students can freely talk about their mental health issues without worrying about being judged. This can involve collaborations with mental health organizations, student-led projects, and mental health awareness campaigns.

Also, mental health initiatives must be regularly assessed and improved. Academic institutions must consistently assess the efficacy of their mental health initiatives and implement any requisite modifications in response to input from faculty and staff. This proactive strategy guarantees the continued relevance and efficacy of mental health support.

University initiatives can be strengthened through cooperation with outside mental health organizations. Collaborating with regional and national mental health groups can yield more resources, knowledge, and assistance for students. These partnerships may also make it easier to implement cutting-edge methods and best practices for mental health treatment.

There is much more to higher education than training the workforce of tomorrow and disseminating scientific knowledge to boost the community's economy. Along with learning new

material and abilities, students must also be prepared to be mature citizens and responsible members of society. Only in this way will upcoming graduates possess the abilities and know-how to support the development of society by launching new ventures, establishing new professions, coming up with novel solutions to problems, working in multicultural environments, and so forth (Genelza, 2022).

Therefore, eliminating anxiety in higher education necessitates a multifaceted strategy that includes identifying the problem, offering extensive support networks, encouraging a balanced lifestyle, fostering inclusivity, reducing financial stress, fostering a sense of community, fostering open communication, routinely evaluating tactics, and working with outside organizations. By implementing these measures, universities may foster a more positive, healthy environment where students can succeed both academically and personally.

References

1. American College Health Association. (2020). *National College Health Assessment*.
2. American College Health Association. (2019). American College Health Association-National College Health Assessment II: Reference Group Executive Summary Spring 2019.
3. Andrews, B., & Wilding, J. M. (2004). The relation of depression and anxiety to life-stress and achievement in students. *British Journal of Psychology*, 95(4), 509-521.
4. Bailey, K. M. (2005). *Practical English Language Teaching: Speaking*. McGraw-Hill.
5. Barnes, S., Treiber, F., & Davis, H. (2007). Impact of stress reduction on negative school behavior in adolescents. *Health Education & Behavior*, 34(4), 620-629.
6. Bayram, N., & Bilgel, N. (2008). The prevalence and socio-demographic correlations of depression, anxiety, and stress among a group of university students. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, 43(8), 667-672.
7. Blanco, C., Okuda, M., Wright, C., Hasin, D. S., Grant, B. F., Liu, S. M., & Olfson, M. (2008). *Mental health of college students and their non-college-attending peers*.
8. Beiter, R., Nash, R., McCrady, M., Rhoades, D., Linscomb, M., Clarahan, M., & Sammut, S. (2015). *The prevalence and correlates of depression, anxiety, and stress in a sample of college students*.
9. Brown, J. S. L., & Schofield, P. (2013). The impact of mental health awareness training on university teaching staff. *Journal of Mental Health*, 22(6), 538-547.
10. Cheng, X. (2000). Asian students' reticence revisited. *System*, 28(3), 435-446.
11. Conley, C. S., Durlak, J. A., & Kirsch, A. C. (2015). A meta-analysis of universal mental health prevention programs for higher education students.
12. Eisenberg, D., Golberstein, E., & Hunt, J. B. (2009). Mental health and academic success in college. *The B.E. Journal of Economic Analysis & Policy*, 9(1).
13. Farrer, L., Gulliver, A., Chan, J. K., Batterham, P. J., Reynolds, J., Calear, A., & Griffiths, K. M. (2013). Technology-based interventions for mental health in tertiary students: A systematic review. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 15(5), e101.
14. Gallagher, R. P. (2012). National Survey of Counseling Center Directors 2012.
15. Genelza, G. G. (2022). Higher education's outcomes-based education: Bane or boon?. *West African Journal of Educational Sciences and Practice*, 1(1), 34-41.
16. Genelza, G. G. (2022). TRANSFORMATION—more about revolution than evolution: A brief review of literature about educational reform. *Jozac Academic Voice*, 12-14.
17. Hofmann, S. G., Asnaani, A., Vonk, I. J., Sawyer, A. T., & Fang, A. (2012). The efficacy of cognitive behavioral therapy: A review of meta-analyses. *Cognitive Therapy and Research*, 36(5), 427-440.
18. Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., & Cope, J. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal*, 70(2), 125-132.
19. Hunt, J., & Eisenberg, D. (2010). Mental health problems and help-seeking behavior among college students. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 46(1), 3-10.
20. Nation, I. S. P., & Newton, J. (2009). *Teaching ESL/EFL Listening and Speaking*. Routledge.
21. Regehr, C., Glancy, D., & Pitts, A. (2013). Interventions to reduce stress in university students: A review and meta-analysis. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 148(1), 1-11.
22. Richardson, T., & King, S. (1991). The impact of anxiety on cognitive performance. *Journal of Anxiety Disorders*, 5(1), 27-35.
23. Genelza, G. G. (2021). Speech apprehension of first year engineering students in the pandemic era: basis for an intervention program. *ACADEMICIA: An International Multidisciplinary Research Journal*, 11(12), 353-371.
24. Stallman, H. M. (2010). Psychological distress in university students: A comparison with general population data.
25. Thornbury, S. (2005). *How to Teach Speaking*. Pearson Longman.

26. Pascoe, M. C., Hetrick, S. E., & Parker, A. G. (2020). The impact of stress on students in secondary school and higher education. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, 25(1), 104-112.
27. Wright, K. B., & Rains, S. A. (2013). Weak-tie support network preference, health-related stigma, and health outcomes in computer-mediated support groups. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 41(3), 309-324.

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.