

How to Cite:

Ugwuanyi, C. S. (2022). Students' social interaction anxiety levels in Nigerian university: A cross-sectional survey study. *International Journal of Health Sciences*, 6(S7), 6796-6809.
<https://doi.org/10.53730/ijhs.v6nS7.13668>

Students' social interaction anxiety levels in Nigerian university: A cross-sectional survey study

Christian S. Ugwuanyi

Department of Education Foundations, Faculty of Education, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2174-3674>

Email: UgwuanyiCS@ufs.ac.za

Abstract--According to literature, a person's level of social connection greatly influences how brave they will be when speaking in front of others. In the twenty-first century, speaking up in public with confidence is crucial for all undergraduate students. Therefore, after completing their university degree, every undergraduate student needs to have sufficient social interaction. Additionally, a student's level of social anxiety affects how much they engage with others. The amount of social interaction anxiety experienced by undergraduate students at Nigerian universities, however, has received less attention in the literature. This study investigated the undergraduate students at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka's level of social interaction anxiety. A sample of 223 undergraduate students from the University of Nigeria was used in this cross-sectional survey study. Data were gathered using the social interaction anxiety scale ($\alpha = .86$), and frequency, percentage, and bar charts were utilized to analyze the results. The findings showed that most undergraduate students reported very high levels of social interaction anxiety. This means that if this high degree of social interaction anxiety is not addressed, undergraduate students will not be able to properly develop their social interaction. In order to properly manage undergraduate students' social interaction anxiety, the researcher advise setting up an appropriate intervention program.

Keywords--Nigerian university, Social interaction anxiety, Students

Introduction

The foundation of the entire social structure is social contact. Social contact produces social groups. Additionally, there is an interaction between animals and birds. It is the true basis for all social functions, social organizations, and

activities. Interaction is the doorway to knowledge in sociology. In sociology, social interaction refers to a social process that involves two or more people. It always has a reciprocal nature. It can be referred to as an individual stimulus-response condition. Social interaction is a dynamic series of social behaviours that involves people (or groups) who change their behaviour and responses in response to the behaviour of their interaction partner (s). A social transaction between two or more people is referred to as social interaction. These interactions are a primary focus of fundamental social research and analysis because they serve as the foundation for social structure. Dyads, triads, and larger social groups can all be used to study social interaction. Social interaction is mostly influenced by an anxiety disorder also known as a social anxiety disorder. Chronic and distressing anxiety illness known as social phobia is characterized by sporadic fear of being humiliated, criticized, or ashamed that arises in specific situations and causes the patient to avoid the feared stimuli (Gleder et al., 2006).

There have been prevalence estimates between 10 and 56%, which amply explains the enormous morbidity burden attributable to this psychological disorder (Bella & Omigbodun, 2009; Rizwan et al., 2015; Russel & Shaw, 2009). According to Valencia (2018), social anxiety disorder makes people extremely fearful of being in social situations. According to Rostami et al. (2016), Eshaghie Firoozabady et al. (2015), 10% to 20% of youths exhibit one of the diagnostic symptoms of anxiety disorder, interfering with their everyday activities and regular life patterns. Out of a total of 623 students, 232 (37.2%), 304 (48.8%), and 87 (14%) of students reported mild, moderate, or severe anxiety, respectively (Banaeipour et al., 2016). People with this illness have a hard time interacting with others, making new friends, and going to social events. They worry about people criticizing or examining them. They may be aware that their concerns are unfounded or unjustified, but they may still feel helpless to confront them. Social anxiety disorder causes people to withdraw from or avoid social situations as well as generally take fewer risks (Rahm-Knigge, et al., 2018).

A common psychological diagnosis, social anxiety disorder is characterized by intense fears of situations or interactions in which individuals may be judged by others, fear of being criticised for social behaviour or the display of anxiety symptoms, aversion to social situations, intense anxiety during social interactions, and anxiety symptoms that are more severe than would be expected for the social experience (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013). The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition, includes a specifier for performance-only social anxiety (APA, 2013), and research has supported two presentation categories of social anxiety: social interaction anxiety, which relates to apprehension about coming into contact with or speaking with others, and social observation or social performance anxiety, which concerns circumstances in which people are observed by others, presenting, or performing (see Kashdan, 2004). People who have high degrees of social interaction anxiety report losing interest in enjoyable activities, having less energy, being less satisfied in their relationships, and having more behavioural inhibition (Kashdan, 2004; Kashdan et al. 2008; Kashdan et al., 2011a; Kashdan et al., 2011b).

People who struggle with emotion regulation (the process through which people experience and respond to emotions) tend to engage in dangerous conduct.

Distress over their emotional experiences can occur in people with social anxiety (Turk et al., 2005). Positive emotions are expressed less by those with social anxiety than by those who do not have it, and negative emotions are expressed more by people with social anxiety. Additionally, those who struggle with social anxiety report being less aware of their emotions than those who do not and having trouble differentiating and naming them (Turk et al., 2005). Experiential avoidance, in which people criticize and refuse to experience their thoughts, feelings, and perceptions, is a predictor of both social anxiety and emotion dysregulation. They might then exhibit safety measures aimed at emotional avoidance (Kashdan et al., 2006). According to Vassilopoulos and Banerjee (2010), those who struggle with social interaction anxiety tend to misinterpret pleasant social encounters, react to them with more general trepidation, and foresee the future in a more pessimistic manner. Vassilopoulos and Banerjee (2010) further revealed that social interaction anxiety had a positive relationship with low positive affect. Anxiety disorder affects how people operate daily, their capacity to sustain social connections, and their quality of life (Sobhy Mahmoud et al., 2017).

The foregoing has shown that there is a prevalence of social interaction anxiety among youths and this negatively affects the lives of the youths' population. However, it is worrisome to note that literature is silent on the level of social anxiety among university undergraduate students in Nigeria. Thus, this research sought to explore

1. the level of social interaction anxiety of undergraduate students of Nigerian universities.
2. The influence of gender on the level of social interaction anxiety of undergraduate students of Nigerian universities
3. influence of faculty affiliation on the level of social interaction anxiety of undergraduate students of Nigerian universities

Research Question

Consequent to the purpose of this research, the main research question answered in the course of this research was: What is the level of social interaction anxiety of undergraduate students of Nigerian universities?

Sub-research questions

1. What is the influence of gender on the level of social interaction anxiety of undergraduate students of Nigerian universities?
2. What is the influence of faculty affiliation on the level of social interaction anxiety of undergraduate students of Nigerian universities?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 5% probability level

Ho₁: There is no significant influence of gender on the level of social interaction anxiety of undergraduate students of Nigerian universities.

Ho₂: There is no significant difference in the level of social interaction anxiety of undergraduate students of Nigerian universities based on Faculty.

Methods

This research adopted descriptive cross-sectional survey research which is one of the designs within the quantitative research approach. The design enabled the researcher to empirically explore the level of social interaction anxiety of undergraduate students of Nigerian universities since the research was mainly a description of the participants' attributes of interest to the researcher. This research approach has been accepted by Eze et al. (2020), Ezema et al. (2021), Ezeaku et al. (2021), Okeke et al. (2020) Okeke, Okeke et al. (2020), Ugwuanyi et al. (2020), Okenyi et al. (2021). The research participants comprised 223 undergraduate students of University of Nigeria who were randomly sampled for the study.

The participants were sampled from the various faculties in University of Nigeria Nsukka. University of Nigeria has several faculties which include Faculty of Agriculture, Faculty of Arts, Faculty of Biological Sciences, Faculty of Business Administration, Faculty of Education, Faculty of Engineering, Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences, Faculty of Physical Sciences, Faculty of Medical Sciences, Faculty of the Social Sciences, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine. The students who participated in this research were sampled from the following faculties Faculty of Arts (40), Faculty of Biological Sciences (35), Faculty of Education (56), Faculty of Engineering (48) and Faculty of the Social Sciences (44).

Data were collected using the social interaction anxiety scale (SIAS) which was properly face and construct validated. Experts in psychology of education and test development executed the face validation. The validators were requested to check the appropriateness of the items to the research purpose and also to check the wording of the instrument. On the other hand, construct validation was ensured using factor analysis. This was done by first administering the validated scale on 51 undergraduates in the Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The data obtained from such administration were subjected to principal component analysis using varimax rotation. It was revealed that the whole 20 items of the SIAS had factor loadings above 0.63. Thereafter, the internal consistency reliability index of the items of SIAS was estimated ($\alpha = .86$) using the Cronbach alpha method.

Prior to the commencement of the data collection, ethical approval for the conduct of the research was granted by the faculty of education research committee on ethics. Besides, informed consent forms were issued to the participants to fill out and sign before they responded to the items of the questionnaire. Online data collection procedure was used by the researcher since Academic Staff of Nigerian Universities were on strike for several months at the time of this research. In this case, the questionnaire was in form of google form which enabled the students to

respond to the items through their university emails. Each participant was allowed to complete the items of the SIAS online after which the filled copies of the instrument were submitted online as well and processed for analysis. The data were analysed using frequency, percentage and bar chart.

Results

Demographic profiles of the participants

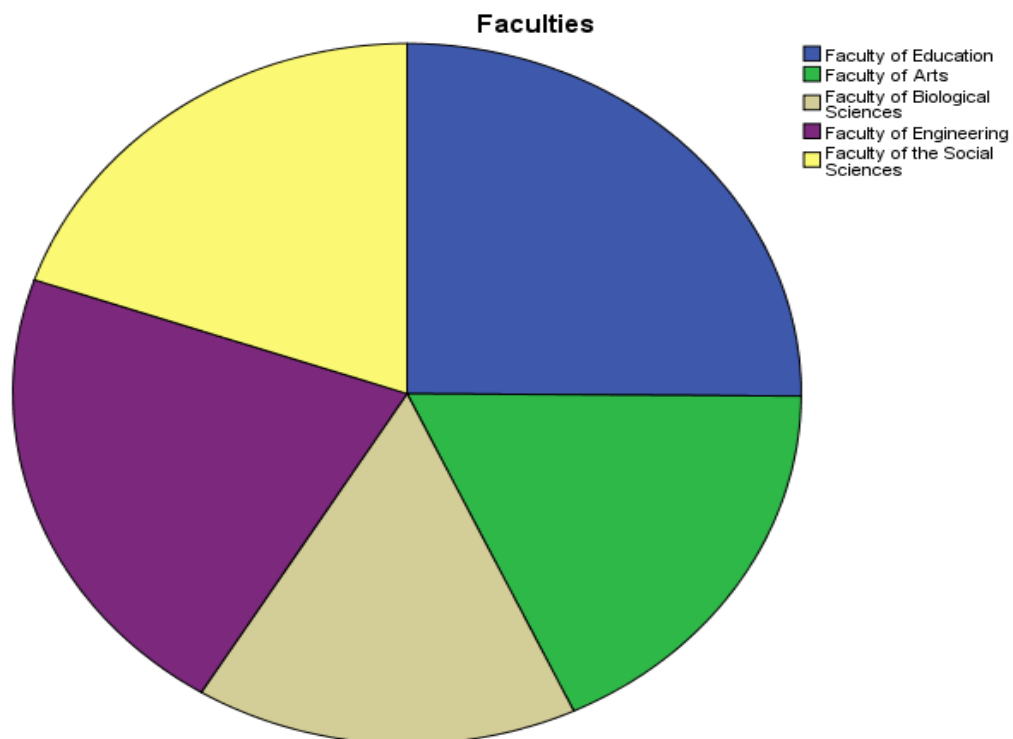


Figure 1: Pie chart representation of the participants' Faculties

Figure 1 showed that 25.1% (56) of the participants are Faculty of Education undergraduate students, 17.9% (40) of the participants are Faculty of Arts undergraduate students, 15.7% (35) of the participants are Faculty of Biological Sciences undergraduate students, 21.5% (48) of the participants are Faculty of Engineering undergraduate students, while 19.7% (44) of the participants are Faculty of the Social Sciences undergraduate students.

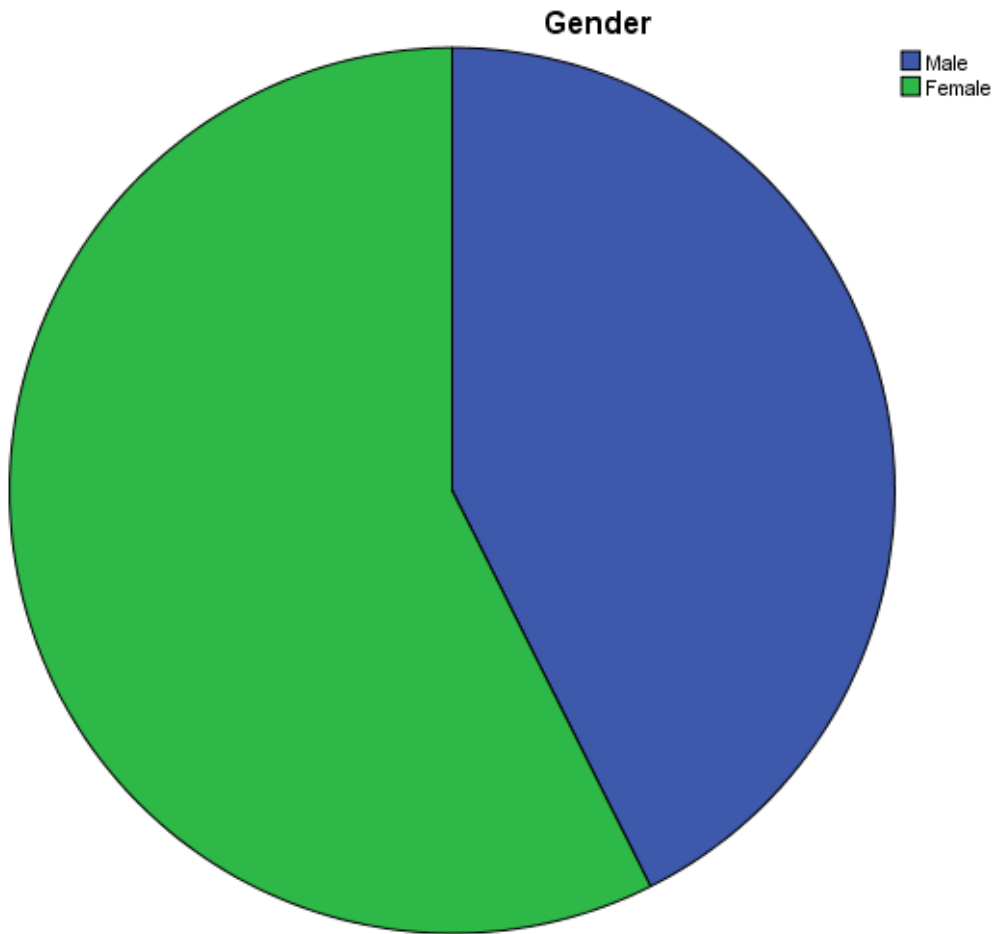


Figure 2: Pie chart representation of the participants' gender

Figure 2 showed that 42.6% (95) of the participants are male undergraduate students while 57.4% (128) of the participants are female undergraduate students.

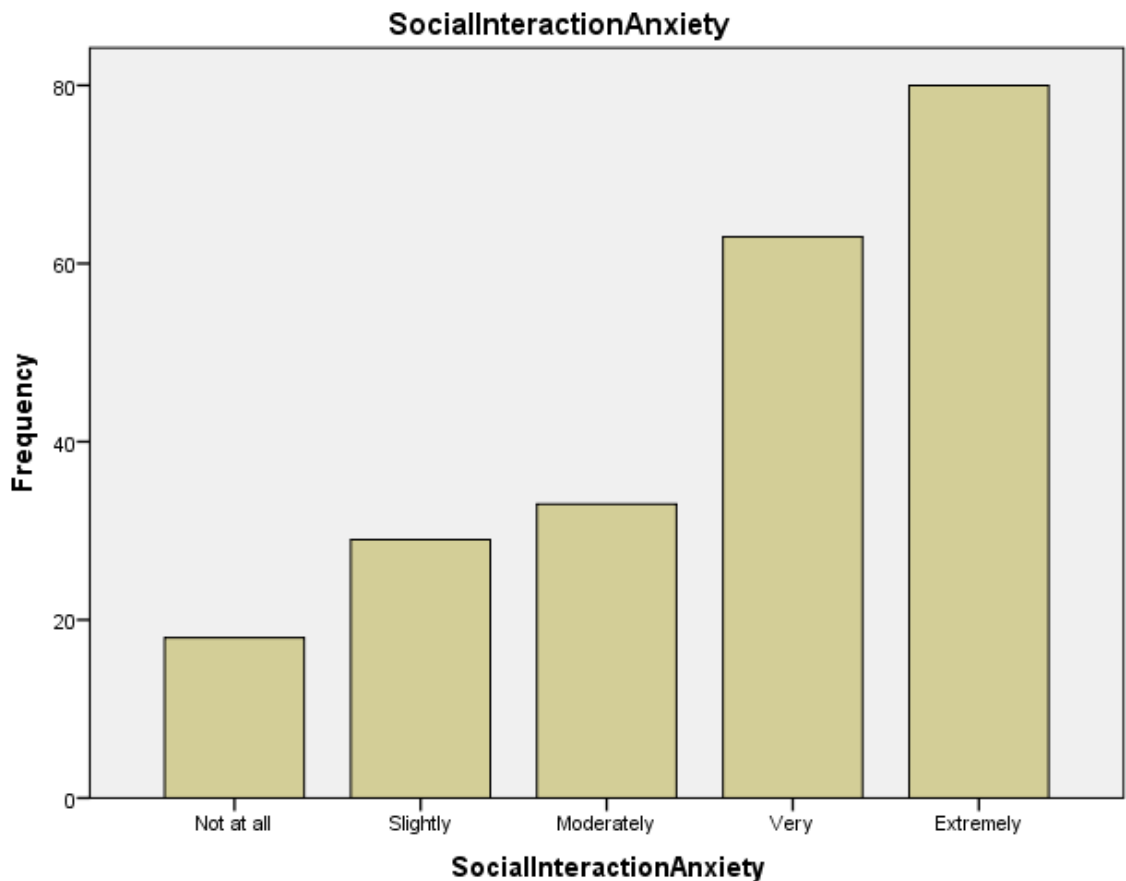


Figure 3: Bar chart representation of participants' level of social interaction anxiety

Figure 3 showed that 8.1% (18) of the participants experienced no social interaction anxiety, 13.0% (29) of the participants experienced slightly social interaction anxiety, 14.8% (33) of the participants experienced moderately social interaction anxiety, 28.3% (63) of the participants experienced very high social interaction anxiety while 35.9% (80) of the participants experienced extremely high social interaction anxiety. This implies that the majority of the participants had extremely high social interaction anxiety.

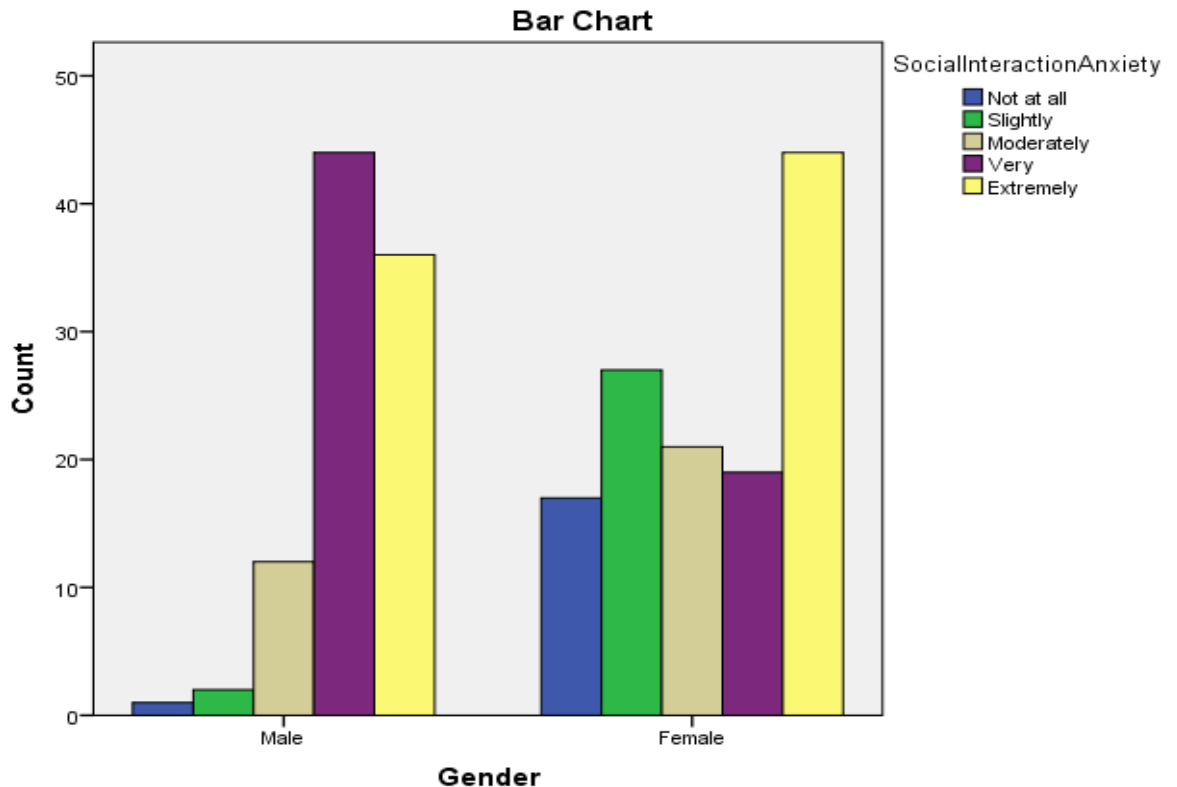


Figure 4: Bar chart representation of male and female participants' level of social interaction anxiety

Figure 4 showed that a higher percentage of female undergraduate students had extremely high social interaction anxiety than the male students while a higher percentage of the male undergraduate students had very high social interaction anxiety than their female counterparts.

Table 1

Chi-Square Tests for the difference in the male and female participants' levels of social interaction anxiety

	Value	df	Asymp. (2-sided)	Sig.
Pearson Chi-Square	45.052 ^a	4	.000	
Likelihood Ratio	51.461	4	.000	
Linear-by-Linear Association	21.855	1	.000	
N of Valid Cases	223			

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 6.45.

Table 1 revealed that female undergraduate students had significantly extremely high social interaction anxiety than their male counterparts, $X^2(4) = 27.280, p < .05$. This implies that female undergraduate students experienced more social interaction anxiety than male undergraduate students.

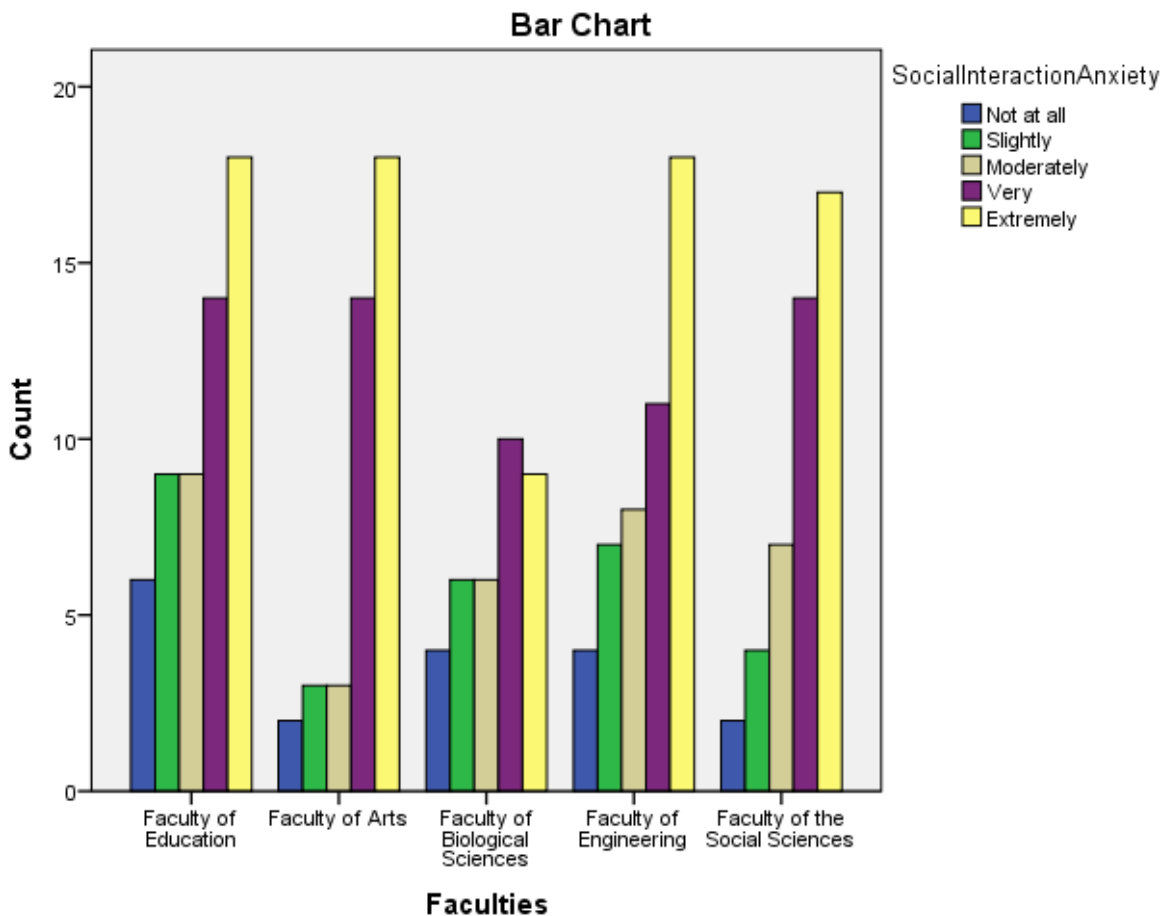


Figure 5: Bar chart representation of participants' level of social interaction anxiety based on faculty

Figure 5 showed that more undergraduate students of Faculty of Education, Faculty of Arts, Faculty of Engineering have extremely social interaction anxiety than those of Faculty of the Social Sciences and Faculty of Engineering.

Table 2

Chi-Square Tests for the difference in the participants' levels of social interaction anxiety based on Faculty

	Value	df	Asymp. (2-sided)	Sig.
Pearson Chi-Square	10.131 ^a	16	.860	
Likelihood Ratio	10.730	16	.826	
Linear-by-Linear Association	.611	1	.434	
N of Valid Cases	223			

a. 6 cells (24.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.83.

Table 2 revealed that there is not significant difference in the level of social interaction anxiety of the undergraduate students based on faculty, $X^2(16) = 10.131, p > .05$. This implies that the faculty of the students does not significantly influence their social interaction anxiety.

Discussion

Owing to the dearth of literature on the level of social interaction anxiety of undergraduate students of Nigerian universities, this research explored the level of social interaction anxiety of undergraduate students of University of Nigeria, Nsukka using descriptive survey research was adopted for this research. The results indicated that the majority of undergraduate students had an extremely high level of social interaction anxiety. Furthermore, it was found that female undergraduate students experienced more social interaction anxiety than male undergraduate students. However, faculty of the undergraduate students does not influence their level of social interaction anxiety. This finding did not beat the imagination of the researcher as university lecturers who have taught the students for many years now. The experiences of the researcher with the undergraduates over the years have shown that such students have elements of social interaction anxiety as most of them experience difficulties in teaching students during their normal teaching practice exercise.

Buttressing the findings of this study, Turk et al. (2005) found that those who struggle with social anxiety report being less aware of their emotions than those who do not and having trouble differentiating and naming them. According to Vassilopoulos and Banerjee (2010), those who struggle with social interaction anxiety tend to misinterpret pleasant social encounters, react to them with more general trepidation, and foresee the future in a more pessimistic manner. Anxiety disorder affects how people operate on a daily basis, their capacity to sustain social connections, and their quality of life (Mahmoud et al., 2017). Women are substantially more likely than men to experience an anxiety illness during their lifetime, according to one of the most well-researched findings in mental epidemiology (Bruce et al., 2005). Significant variations in anxious thoughts (health anxiety, social anxiety, and meta-worry) were found between boys and

girls (Bahrami & Yousefi., 2011). Girls are more likely than boys to experience anxious thoughts, and they also hold stronger metacognitive views about the uncontrollability of worry and that worry should be avoided.

This research has practical implications in that the existing social interaction anxiety among the students can be handled properly from the findings of this research. Based on the findings of this research, a necessary intervention program can be taken to enable undergraduate students to manage their social interaction anxiety in such a way that their ability to speak in public will be improved maximally.

Conclusion and recommendation

The researcher concluded that undergraduate students of University of Nigeria experience extremely high social interaction anxiety. Moreover, female students had higher social interaction anxiety than their male counterparts. This current status of social interaction anxiety of the students is inimical to their social interaction development. Based on the aforementioned conclusion, the researcher recommend that an adequate intervention program should be put in place by the relevant university authority to manage the social interaction anxiety among undergraduate students in Nigerian universities.

References

- American Psychiatric Association (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed.). Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Publishing.
- Bahrami, F., & Yousefi, N. (2011). Females are more anxious than males: a metacognitive perspective. *Iranian journal of psychiatry and behavioral sciences*, 5(2), 83.
- Banaeipour, Z., Rostami, Sh., Zarea, K., & Cheraqian, B. (2016). The prevalence of anxiety and its related factors among school-age children in South West of Iran. *Int J Pediatr*, 4(6), 2019-25.
- Bella, T. T., & Omigbodun, O. O. (2009). Social phobia in Nigerian university students: prevalence, correlates and co-morbidity. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, 44(6), 458-463
- Bruce, S.E., Yonkers, K.A., Otto, M.W., Eisen, J.L., Weisberg, R.B., Pagano, M., Shea, M.T., & Keller, M.B. (2005). Influence of psychiatric comorbidity on recovery and recurrence in generalized anxiety disorder, social phobia, and panic disorder: A 12-year prospective study. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 162,1179–1187.
- Eshaghie Firoozabady, E., Kamali Zarch, M., Afshani, S.A., & Halvani, A. (2015). The prevalence of sleep disorders and their relationship with anxiety and behavioral problems in second primary school female students in Yazd. *International Journal of Pediatrics*, 3(1), 625–31.
- Eze, K.O., Ugwuanyi, C.S., & Okeke, C.I.O. (2020). Extent of the Upper Basic Education French Language Curriculum Content-Delivery with Technologies in Nigerian Secondary Schools. *International Journal of Mechanical and Production Engineering Research and Development (IJMPERD)*, 10(4), 311-318. <https://doi.org/10.24247/ijmperdaug202027>

- Ezeaku, F.N., Onu, E.A., Agu, P.U., Edikpa, E.C., Nwafor, B.N., Ozioko, A.N., & Ugwuanyi, C.S. (2021). Appraisal of quality assurance measures in the management of secondary schools and its implication on science, technology, engineering and mathematics education. *International Journal of Mechanical and Production Engineering Research and Development*, 10 (1), 159-170. <http://www.tjprc.org/publishpapers/2-67-1612434030-IJMPERDFEB202115.pdf>
- Ezema, V.S., Okenyi, E.C., & Ugwuanyi, C.S. (2021). Assessment of the extent of community involvement in the funding of primary schools in Enugu state, Nigeria: Implications for further research. *International Journal of Mechanical and Production Engineering Research and Development*, 10 (1), 91-98. <http://www.tjprc.org/publishpapers/2-67-1611554947-8IJMPERDFEB20218.pdf>
- Kashdan, T. B., & Hofmann, S. G. (2008). The high-novelty-seeking, impulsive subtype of generalized social anxiety disorder. *Depression and Anxiety*, 25(6), 535-541.
- Kashdan, T. B., & McKnight, P. E. (2010). The darker side of social anxiety when aggressive impulsivity prevails over shy inhibition. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 19(1), 47-5.
- Kashdan, T. B., Adams, L., Savostyanova, A., Ferssidis, P., McKnight, P. E., & Nezelek, J. B. (2011a). Effects of social anxiety and depressive symptoms on the frequency and quality of sexual activity: A daily process approach. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 49(5), 352-360.
- Kashdan, T. B., Barrios, V., Forsyth, J. P., & Steger, M. F. (2006). Experiential avoidance as a generalized psychological vulnerability: Comparisons with coping and emotion regulation strategies. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 44(9), 1301-1320.
- Kashdan, T. B., Weeks, J. W., & Savostyanova, A. A. (2011b). Whether, how, and when social anxiety shapes positive experiences and events: A self-regulatory framework and treatment implications. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 31(5), 786-799.
- Mahmoud, A. S., Berma, A. E., & Gabal, S. A. A. S. (2017). Relationship between social support and the quality of life among psychiatric patients. *Journal of psychiatry and psychiatric disorders*, 1(2), 57-75.
- Okeke, C.I.O., Okeke, C.C. & Ugwuanyi, C.S. (2020). Intervention strategies that can support young adults' transition into positive fatherhood: implications for Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Education. *International Journal of Mechanical and Production Engineering Research and Development (IJMPERD)*, 10(3): 8585-8596. <https://doi.org/10.24247/ijmperdjun2020816>
- Okeke, C.I.O., Ugwuanyi, C.S & Mufutau, M.A (2020). Stakeholders' Views on Engaging Fathers in Early Childhood Care and Education. *Journal of Human Ecology*, 71(1-3): 177-186. <https://doi.org/10.31901/24566608.2020/71.1-3.3233>
- Okenyi, E.C., Ngwoke, A.N., Ezema, V.S., Aneke, A.O., Asogwa, H.E., & Ugwuanyi, C.S. (2021). Assessment of the perceived impact of home information and communication technology on pupils' social skills development. *International Journal of Mechanical and Production Engineering Research and Development*, 10 (1), 67-78. <http://www.tjprc.org/publishpapers/2-67-1611120431-6IJMPERDFEB20216.pdf>

- Rahm-Knigge, Ryan L., Prince, Mark A., & Conner, Bradley T. (2018). Social Interaction Anxiety and Personality Traits Predicting Engagement in Health Risk Sexual Behaviors. *Journal of Anxiety Disorders* <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.janxdis.2018.05.002>
- Rizwan, W., Inam, A., & Abiodullah, M. (2015). Social phobia and academic achievement of girls at postgraduate level. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 20, 73-78.
- Rostami, S., Naseri, M., Dashtbozorgi, B., Zarea, K., Riaahi Qahfarrokhi, K., & Haghhighizadeh, M.H. (2016). Effects of group training on depression and anxiety among patients with type I diabetes: A Randomized Clinical Trial. *International Journal of Pediatrics*, 4(5),1777–86.
- Russel, G., & Shaw, S. (2009). A study to investigate the prevalence of social anxiety in a sample of higher education students in the UK. *Journal of Mental Health*, 18(3), 198-206.
- Mahmoud, A. S., Berma, A. E., & Gabal, S. A. A. S. (2017). Relationship between social support and the quality of life among psychiatric patients. *Journal of psychiatry and psychiatric disorders*, 1(2), 57-75.
- Turk, C. L., Heimberg, R. G., Luterek, J. A., Mennin, D. S., & Fresco, D. M. (2005). Emotion dysregulation in generalized anxiety disorder: A comparison with social anxiety disorder. *Cognitive Therapy and Research*, 29(1), 89-106.
- Ugwuanyi, C.C., Nwachukwu, W.C., Ugwuanyi, C.S., Okeke, C.I.O., Nworgu, B.G., Nwoye, M.N., Odo, I.O., Okeke, A.M., Inweregbugh, O.C., Osakwe, I.J. & Idoko, J.U. (2020). Perceived Impact of the Use of Internet Resources on Undergraduate Students' Academic Achievement in Mathematics: Implication for Physics and Engineering Teaching. *International Journal of Mechanical and Production Engineering Research and Development (IJMPERD)*, 10(4), 359-368. <http://dx.doi.org/10.24247/ijmperdaug202031>
- Valencia, H. (2018). Social anxiety disorder. <https://www.healthline.com/health/anxiety/social-phobia>
- Vassilopoulos, S.P. & Banerjee, R. (2010). Social interaction anxiety and the discounting of positive interpersonal events. *Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapy*, 38, 597-609 doi:10.1017/S1352465810000433