



Impact of Parental Characteristics on Academic Anxiety in Indian Students

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Abstract

This study investigated the role of various parental factors in influencing academic anxiety among school-going students across India. Using a sample of 856 students from ten different states, the research employed quantitative methodology, specifically regression analysis, to evaluate the impact of specific parental characteristics on academic anxiety. The study has utilized stratified sampling approach to ensure representative sample from the diverse population across different states. The dependent variable was academic anxiety, while the independent variables included the father's age, mother's age, father's qualification, mother's qualification, father's occupation, mother's occupation, parental guidance, and parental support. Data was collected through structured questionnaires and the results have revealed that mother's age, occupations of both the father and mother, as well as parental guidance, did not significantly influence academic anxiety levels. In contrast, significant predictors included the father's ages, qualifications, and the level of parental support provided to the students. These findings suggest that while certain demographic factors, such as parental occupations and guidance, may not directly affect academic anxiety, other factors, particularly parental age and educational background, play a crucial role, thereby, underscoring importance of a supportive environment and well-educated parents in mitigating academic anxiety.

Keywords: anxiety, education, parental support, students

Introduction

Academic anxiety has emerged as a significant issue impacting academic performance as well as mental health of students in today's competitive educational environment. Characterized by excessive apprehension and worry related to academic tasks, activities, and evaluations, academic anxiety can undermine students' ability to perform optimally and negatively affect their mental well-being (Parker and Asher, 2021; Kumar and Sharma, 2021). While a certain level of anxiety can be beneficial by motivating students to excel, heightened anxiety often leads to adverse effects on mental health and hinders academic performance (Putwain et al.,

2022). Thus, academic anxiety remains a critical area of focus for researchers and educators alike.

In the Indian context, where educational success is highly valued and considered a key determinant of future opportunities, understanding the dynamics of academic anxiety is particularly crucial (Gupta & Sharma, 2021). Various studies have examined the relationship between academic anxiety and students' performance, as well as its broader outcomes, including mental and physical health issues, reduced motivation, and impacts on social relationships (Sahoo et al., 2021). Additionally, research has explored the antecedents of academic anxiety, which include individual factors (such as self-efficacy, previous performance, self-regulation, and personality traits) (Bong & Skaalvik, 2020), familial factors (including socio-economic background, parental attitudes, and characteristics) (Sarsour et al., 2011), and contextual factors (such as the educational environment, peer influences, teacher behaviour, and institutional rules) (Sakurai & Kawashima, 2021).

Despite the extensive research into academic anxiety, the role of parental characteristics in shaping students' anxiety levels remains an underexplored area, especially within the Indian context. Existing literature suggests that parental characteristics, such as educational qualifications, employment status, age, and the guidance and support provided, play a significant role in managing academic anxiety. For instance, higher levels of parental education often correlate with better academic support and reduced anxiety among students (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Jeynes, 2022). Conversely, the impact of parental occupation and specific parenting practices can vary depending on socio-economic and cultural contexts (Lamborn et al., 1991; Becker et al., 2016). However, empirical evidence in the Indian context is sparse and scattered. Some studies have focused on parental age (Saha & Das, 2020), while others have examined parental educational qualifications (Choudhury & Sharma, 2023). Given the diverse socio-economic and cultural landscape of India, the implications of parental attributes on academic anxiety may differ significantly (Mishra & Sinha, 2021). The intense pressure to succeed academically within Indian households (Singh and Verma, 2022) further underscores the need to explore how parental characteristics influence academic anxiety. This endeavour has been aimed to address this gap by exploring impact of various parental characteristics on academic anxiety among students in India. By focusing on this crucial aspect, the study seeks to contribute valuable insights into managing academic anxiety and supporting students more effectively.

Literature Review

Recent research pertaining to anxiety has explored impact of parental attributes highlighting various factors that can influence level of academic anxiety among students. The study by Jeynes (2022); Zhang and Zhang (2022) have revealed parental education as one of the significant predictors of academic anxiety of the students. Higher level of education enables parents to help students in their education, thereby, offering them effective support in their academics (Zhu and Zhang, 2022). This assistance lowers apprehension of the students pertaining to their academic curriculum (Harris and Robinson, 2023). Similarly, Lee and Lim (2021) have stated that the active involvement of the parents in their child's education alleviate the anxiety level of the students and improves their academic outcome.

Further, the demographic characteristics of the parents and their occupational status also found to impact the academic anxiety of the students. Higher- occupational status of the parents are found to reduce academic anxiety of the students (Miller and Roberts, 2022; Chen and Li, 2022). Supporting this, Ali and Malik (2022)

have highlighted that both higher designation in occupation and stability in the occupation reduces academic anxiety levels of their children. However, Kumar and Sharma (2021) unveil that higher parental expectations and lower socio-economic status enhances anxiety level of the students. While, Friedman and Klein (2021) have stated that not only parental involvement, but their guidance also impact academic anxiety of the students. Parental guidance allows students with options to solve their academic challenges which also keeps the anxiety levels lower (Huang and Wu, 2022). The supportive behaviour of parents including clear guidance on assignments, projects, examinations, etc. and emotional support by the parents are substantial to reduce academic anxiety of the students Sakurai and Kawashima (2021) and Watson and Johnson (2021). Besides, Khan and Khan (2021); Li and Yu (2022); and Zeidner (2021) have found that parents in higher age and with greater work experience can handle the academic anxiety levels of their children.

Considering the time element into consideration, Liu and Chen (2021); and Sarsour et al. (2011) have conducted longitudinal research attempt and found that the consistent support and guidance given to students lowers their level of academic anxiety.

Insights into the long-term impact of consistent familial support and socio-economic factors on academic anxiety are provided by longitudinal research conducted by Liu and Chen (2021) and Sarsour et al. (2011). Furthermore, research conducted by Bong and Skaalvik (2020), Desforjes and Abouchaar (2003), Siddiqui and Ahmed (2022), and Thompson and Bell (2022) further emphasize the multifaceted influence of parental characteristics, such as education, occupation, and guidance, on academic experiences. These studies collectively underscore the critical significance of supportive and engaged parents in the management of academic anxiety and the enhancement of student outcomes.

Furthermore, the research reservoir is found to be equipped with various studies like those conducted by Bong and Skaalvik (2020); Desforjes and Abouchaar (2003); Siddiqui and Ahmed (2022); and Thompson and Bell (2022), wherein, various parental characteristics have been considered and the outcomes have substantiated role of parental characteristics, namely, their occupation, age, education and guidance in shaping the academic anxiety levels of students. An analysis of all such research attempts has uncovered a scarcity of such research endeavours in the Indian context, where educational attainment has been considered the benchmark for career success.

Research Methodology

The present study, being empirical in nature, focuses on data pertaining to parental characteristics and academic anxiety of the students. Thus, the present study has considered middle and secondary school students aged between 12 to 16 years as the sampling units. These students are typically enrolled from class 5th to 10th and are relatively in a better position to identify their emotions, feelings, etc. This substantiates the decision of considering such students as the sample.

Further, the present endeavour has employed multi-stage sampling approach across India, segmented based on the literacy rates into four zones, including North, South, West and East zone. From each of the four zones, state with highest literacy rates and lowest literacy rate has been selected. Accordingly, the North zone include Himachal Pradesh (highest literacy) and Uttar Pradesh (lowest literacy); the East Zone include West Bengal (highest literacy) and Jharkhand (lowest literacy); the West Zone include Goa (highest literacy) and Rajasthan

(lowest literacy); and the South Zone include Kerala (highest literacy) and Andhra Pradesh (lowest literacy). From each of the selected state, data have been gathered from the capital of these states. Accordingly, data have been collected from Shimla, Lucknow, Kolkata, Ranchi, Panaji, Jaipur, Thiruvananthapuram, Hyderabad, Bhopal, and Raipur. A total of 100 responses from each city (including four schools from each city) has been gathered. The selection of the students was based on convenience sampling approach. Deliberate attempts have been made to ensure that the data should be filled by students and their respective parents. From the total of 1000 responses, 856 data units have been considered as usable data since the remaining 144 responses have been discarded owing to the issues like half-filled/double filled responses, etc. The collection of the data has utilized a structured questionnaire, including age, educational qualification, occupation of mother and father of the students. It also includes scales assessing academic anxiety of the students, parental guidance and parental support. Parental support has been defined as the ways through which parents assist their children in their academic journey for enhancing their learning and academic performance. Parental guidance has been defined as the advice, suggestions and directions given by parents to their children in their academic journey. Academic anxiety has been defined as the feelings of fear, apprehension, stress, etc. by the students while pursuing their academic journey. The development of the scales was based on the research evidence by Sinha (1984); Schaefer (1965); Marshall and Sutton (1990); Steinberg et al., (1992); and Hess and Handel (1959). Accordingly, a thirty-item inventory has been developed for assessing academic anxiety of the students; and seven-item inventory each for assessing parental support and guidance.

Statistical Validation of Data

All these scales have been examined for the statistical aptness through the tests of normality, reliability, dimensionality and factor structure based on the recommendation given by Hair et al. (2021; 2019). The normality of the scales has been confirmed from the values of standard deviation (close to 1); skewness and kurtosis (between +2 and -2). Further, the Cronbach alpha values come out to be 0.86, 0.87 and 0.82 in case of scales assessing academic anxiety, parental support and parental guidance, respectively. The dimensionality of these scales has been examined by employing exploratory factor analysis approach with principal component analysis, varimax rotation and latent root criterion. Accordingly, the KMO and Bartlett's test of sphericity have indicated data suitability for employing the exploratory factor analysis approach. The values of communalities and factor loadings are found to meet the minimum prescribed limit suggested by Hair et al. (2019), that is 0.50. Also, single factor solution has been generated by the latent root criterion in all the three cases with percentage of variance equals to 74 per cent, 70 per cent and 79 per cent for academic anxiety, parental guidance and parental support, respectively. The structural validity of the scale has been examined through the confirmatory factor analysis approach with maximum likelihood approach. The values of parameter estimates are noticed to fall above the minimum limit of 0.50 for all the items and the values of model fit indices are found to meet the prescribed criterion value of < 5 for CMIN;

< 0.05 for RMSEA; > 0.950 for CFI; > 0.90 for GFI; > 0.95 for AGFI; and < 0.08 for SRMR.

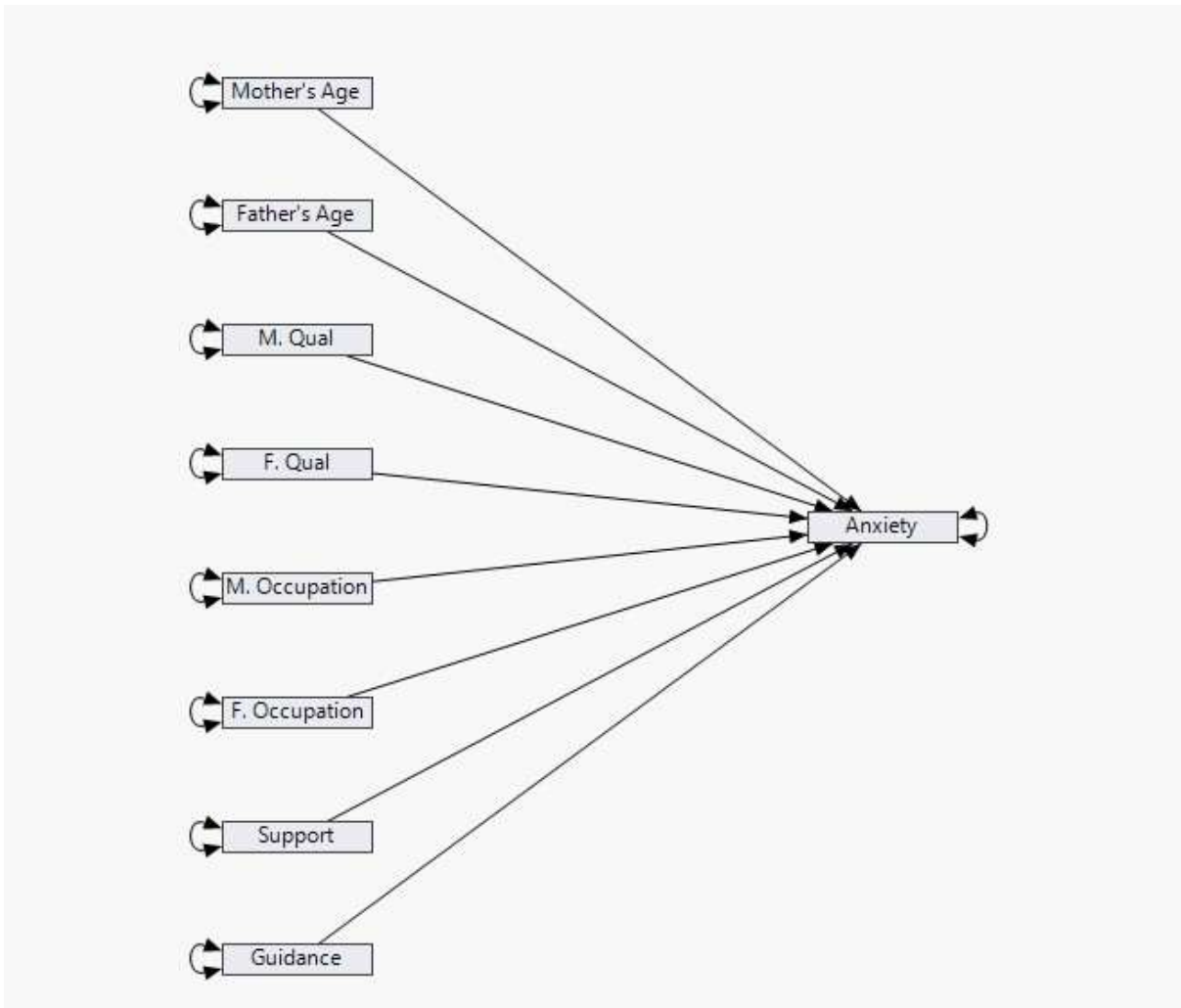
This substantiates statistical appropriateness of the scales.

Results and Discussion

The prime rationale of the present endeavor is to explore impact of parental characteristics on the academic

anxiety of the students. Accordingly, a theoretical model has been framed (refer Figure 1).

Figure 1. Theoretical Model



Source: Author’s Work

In the present endeavour, multiple regression analysis has been employed to explore impact of age, educational qualification and occupation of the parents along with their support and guidance on the academic anxiety of the students. Accordingly, the regression equation includes Academic Anxiety = f (mother’s age, father’s age, mother’s qualification, father’s qualification, mother’s occupation, father’s occupation, parental guidance, parental support)

Primarily, heteroscedasticity and multicollinearity of the data has been examined. The assessment of heteroscedasticity has been analysed through the values of correlation coefficient.

Table 1. Results of Correlation Analysis

Variables	Guidance	Support
Anxiety	.367**	.414**
Guidance		.445**

Source: Author’s Calculation

Note: ** statistically significant at 1 per cent level of significance

The correlation coefficient values (refer Table 1) are noticed to be less than the maximum prescribed value of 0.85 as recommended by Hair et al. (2019). This indicates no problem of heteroscedasticity. Further, the values of variance inflating factor (VIF) is found to be less than the threshold value of 10 and the corresponding tolerance value is noticed to be above the minimum prescribed value of 0.10 (refer Table 2). This indicates no substantial problem of multicollinearity.

Table 2. Results of Multiple Regression Analysis

Variables	Coefficient Value (β)	t-value	Tolerance	VIF
Constant	0.260	1.168		
Mother's Age	-0.007	-1.459	0.421	2.377
Father's Age	0.031	8.755**	0.294	3.400
Mother's Qualification	0.149	3.750**	0.813	1.230
Father's Qualification	0.225	3.764**	0.772	1.295
Mother's Occupation	-0.096	-1.472	0.771	1.296
Father's Occupation	0.072	1.362	0.658	1.519
Parental Guidance	0.088	1.935	0.598	1.671
Parental Support	0.193	3.649**	0.523	1.913
F Ratio	58.155**			
R Square	0.695			
Adjusted R Square	0.690			

Source: Author's Calculation

Note: **statistically significant at 1 per cent level of significance

Items assessing Academic Anxiety have been reversely coded in a way that higher values represent lower anxiety levels and vice versa.

The statistically significant R ratio (58.155; $p < 0.01$) signifies model fitness in the present case. Further, the value of adjusted R square is noticed to be above the minimum threshold limit of 0.50 as prescribed by Hair et al. (2021). The value of 0.690 indicates that the independent variables account for 69 per cent variation in the academic anxiety. A look at the t-values has shown statistically insignificant results in case of constant (1.168); mother's age (-1.459), occupation of mother (-1.472) & father (1.362) and parental guidance (1.935). This signifies statistically insignificant impact of these variables on the academic anxiety levels of the sampled students. The t values comes out to be statistically significant in case of father's age (8.755; $p < 0.01$); mother's qualification (3.750; $p < 0.01$); father's qualification (1.362; $p < 0.01$); and parental support (3.649; $p < 0.01$). This signifies statistically significant impact of these variables in shaping academic anxiety levels of the sampled students.

The relatively higher coefficient value, in case of father's Qualification (0.225) followed by parental support (0.193); mother's qualification (0.149); and father's age (0.031) has indicated father's qualification as the most

imperative predictor of the academic anxiety of the students. While that age of father is found to be least but imperative antecedent of the academic anxiety among the students. Besides, all the coefficient values (β) are noticed to be positive indicating that these variables exhibit negative impact on the academic anxiety of the student. To elucidate, it has been found that the academic anxiety level of the students is lower in cases where parents are highly qualified; age of father is relatively higher and continuous support has been provided to them in their academics by the parents. Older aged father might provide stability and resourceful environment to the students which can keep their anxiety levels lower (Miller and Davis, 2022). Further, the higher qualification levels enable the parents to understand the contemporary educational requirements of the students which will also lower

their anxiety levels (Chena and Li, 2023). Also, the support of parents in completing the academic tasks, assignments, examinations, etc. also keeps the apprehension levels of the students low (Gonzalez and McCoy, 2023). This explanation can be held plausible for the significant relationship of academic anxiety with father's age, parental qualification and parental support apparent in the present case also.

Implications

Theoretical Implications

The present endeavour enhance theoretical understanding by emphasizing how parental characteristics—specifically educational qualifications and support—impact academic anxiety. This supports existing theories which suggest that well-educated parents who provide active support tend to have children with lower levels of academic anxiety. The results reinforce theoretical frameworks such as those proposed by Bong and Skaalvik (2020) and Desforges & Abouchaar (2003), which link parental involvement and education to better student outcomes and reduced anxiety. Additionally, the study provides empirical support for the assumption that parental characteristics can mitigate academic stress, contributing valuable insights into the dynamics of family influence on student mental health.

Practical Implications

The findings of the present study highlight several practical implications for educational institutions and policymakers aiming to reduce academic anxiety among students. One key recommendation is to enhance parental engagement through targeted programs that equip parents with effective strategies for supporting their children academically. Schools could organize workshops to educate parents on managing academic stress, understanding their children's educational needs, and providing emotional support. By improving parental knowledge and skills, these programs can help create a more supportive home environment that alleviates academic anxiety.

Additionally, there is a strong case for supporting parental education and professional development as a means of improving student outcomes. Initiatives that promote higher educational attainment among parents can lead to more effective support at home, thereby reducing students' anxiety levels. Educational policies should therefore consider integrating adult education opportunities and resources to boost parental qualifications.

Effective communication between schools and parents is also crucial. Schools should establish and maintain robust channels for regular feedback to keep parents informed about the academic progress of their children and challenges faced by them. This ongoing dialogue ensures that parental support is well-aligned with educational goals and needs.

Creating opportunities for parental involvement in school activities, such as homework help centres or volunteer roles, can further strengthen the support network around students. When parents are actively engaged in their children's academic journey, it can lead to a more collaborative and less stressful learning environment. Finally, providing counselling services that address both student and parental needs can be beneficial. Schools could offer workshops or counselling sessions focused on managing academic stress, helping families develop effective coping mechanisms. Such support can foster a more resilient and less anxious student body, contributing to overall improved academic performance and well-being. By implementing these practical strategies, schools and policymakers can create environments that better support students and mitigate the adverse effects of academic anxiety.

Conclusions

The study underscores significant role of parental characteristics in students' academic anxiety. The findings have revealed that parental attributes including father's age, educational qualifications of parents, and the nature of parental support play crucial role in shaping the academic anxiety of the students. Specifically, the data indicates that higher parental educational attainment and active parental support are associated with lower levels of academic anxiety among students. The substantial impact of parental qualifications on academic anxiety highlights the importance of educational attainment in shaping a supportive home environment. Parents with higher education levels are often better equipped to understand and assist with academic challenges, thereby reducing their children's anxiety. Similarly, the positive influence of parental support underscores the need for continuous engagement and guidance from parents to help students manage academic stress effectively. The study's results align with previous research that emphasizes the beneficial effects of supportive and involved parenting on student outcomes. The study also highlights a gap in the existing literature concerning the Indian context, where educational and familial pressures are particularly intense. The implications of this research are particularly relevant for educational policymakers and practitioners in India, where understanding and addressing academic anxiety is essential for improving student well-being and performance.

Limitations and Future Research Avenues

Despite the valuable insights provided, the study has some limitations and the same can be addressed in future research. The use of convenience sampling limits the generalizability of the findings, suggesting a need for more randomized sampling approaches to enhance representativeness. Additionally, while the study covers multiple states and cities in India, it does not include the North-East zone, potentially overlooking important regional variations. Future research could also explore the impact of parental occupation and different forms of guidance in greater depth, as these factors were less significant in this study. Longitudinal studies would provide a more comprehensive understanding by tracking changes over time, and incorporating additional variables such as peer influence, teacher behaviour, and institutional support could offer a more holistic view

of academic anxiety. Finally, examining how parental characteristics affect academic anxiety across different educational levels could reveal important differences in the impact of these variables. Addressing these limitations and expanding the scope of research will contribute to more effective interventions and support strategies for managing academic anxiety.

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