



**THE PSYCHOLOGICAL INFLUENCE OF SELF-ESTEEM AND
MOTIVATION ON STUDENTS ANXIETY**

MARINELA ȘÎRBU^a TINCUȚA PETCU ACAR^a MIRELA-CLAUDIA
MOMANU^b

^a *Hyperion University, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences
Department of Psychology*

^b *State University of Moldova, Doctoral School of Social Sciences, Chișinău,
Republic of Moldova*

Abstract

In an educational environment characterized by increased competition and a growing awareness of the importance of academic performance, many students feel overwhelmed, which leads to increased levels of stress and anxiety. In addition, the modern academic environment is marked by a multitude of factors that can influence students' mental health. In such a context, it is crucial to understand how self-esteem and motivation influence these emotional experiences and how they can be used to support students' mental health. The research conducted aims to highlight the influence of students' self-esteem and motivation on their anxiety levels. The purpose of this research is complex and derives from the urgent need to address mental health issues among students. The objectives pursued within the research relate to the need to understand the interactions between self-esteem, motivation and anxiety. This is an insufficiently explored area of research, and a deeper understanding of these relationships may provide important clues for the development of effective interventions. Currently, most studies analyze each variable in isolation, and an integrative approach can bring new perspectives and solutions to the problems that students face. The research conclusions highlighted the connection between the studied concepts, namely self-esteem, motivation and anxiety, analyzed on a sample of 128 students. The relevance of this topic also emphasizes the importance of continuing research in the field of mental health and education, to ensure that students benefit from the necessary support during the formative period of their lives. This research is, therefore, not only an academic exploration, but also a necessary step towards improving the lives of students as a whole. In conclusion, the context and justification of this research is based on the urgent need to address mental health issues among students, by understanding the complex relationships between self-esteem, motivation and anxiety.

Key words: *self-esteem, motivation, anxiety, students.*

Corresponding author: *Tincuța Petcu Acar*

E-mail address: *acartincuta@gmail.com*

1. INTRODUCTION

Anxiety not only affects students' mental health, but also has serious implications for academic performance and interpersonal relationships. Students who experience severe anxiety may have difficulty concentrating, may avoid social interactions, and may exhibit avoidance behavior — all of which have a direct impact on their educational experience.

Anxiety also affects the social sphere, influencing how an individual interacts with others. Social anxiety disorders, for example, are characterized by an intense fear of negative evaluation and avoidance behaviors toward social situations, which limits interactions and leads to social isolation (Stein, Bandelow & Hollander, 2005). This withdrawal can have significant effects on quality of life, reducing opportunities for personal and professional development and contributing to feelings of loneliness and dissatisfaction. Studies show that social isolation can intensify anxiety symptoms and worsen comorbidity with depression (Stonerock et al., 2015).

Self-esteem refers to an individual's perception of their own self-worth and is a key predictor of emotional well-being. Healthy self-esteem contributes to self-efficacy and resilience, helping students cope more effectively with challenges. On the other hand, low self-esteem can worsen feelings of helplessness, facilitating the development of anxiety and other mental health issues.

Throughout life, self-esteem develops and adjusts based on various external and internal influences, such as emotional support from close ones, experiences of success and failure, as well as the expectations imposed by society or the social context in which the individual lives (Orth & Robins, 2013). High self-esteem can contribute to overall well-being and the development of a sense of self-efficacy—that is, the belief that a person can effectively cope with challenges and manage obstacles. In contrast, low self-esteem is often correlated with emotional difficulties, increased vulnerability to stress, and a predisposition to mental health issues such as anxiety and depression (Orth et al., 2012). At the same time, self-esteem significantly influences physical health through its positive effects on the immune system and the ability to cope with chronic stress. Studies show that individuals with high self-esteem have lower levels of cortisol—the stress hormone—and a lower risk of developing stress-related conditions such as high blood pressure or heart disease (Taylor & Stanton, 2007).

Motivation, on the other hand, influences students' attitudes and behaviours toward learning. Intrinsic motivation, which stems from the desire to learn for the pleasure and satisfaction brought by the learning process, is associated with academic engagement and also with academic performance among students. Extrinsic motivation, which focuses on obtaining external rewards, can lead to a more stressful educational experience and increased anxiety, especially when students feel pressured to meet others' expectations.

In contemporary research, motivation is often described as having two main dimensions: intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation

refers to the ability to enter an activity for the satisfaction it provides, the pleasure of learning, creating, or solving a problem (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Motivation can also be understood as a dynamic interaction between internal and external factors. According to self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), motivation is not limited to the desire to achieve a goal, but also involves how a person perceives control over their actions and the satisfaction derived from the activity itself. Intrinsic motivation refers to engaging in an activity because of the direct pleasure or satisfaction it brings, without the need for an external reward.

People who are intrinsically motivated participate in activities because they find them interesting, challenging, or inherently satisfying. This type of motivation is associated with the state of flow. Activities that induce flow are those that create a balance between the demands of the task and the individual's skills, positively impacting satisfaction and performance.

Extrinsic motivation refers to involve or develop an activity to obtain an external result or reward. Rewards can be of various types, including tangible rewards (money, prizes) or intangible ones (appreciation, social status). Extrinsic motivation is often seen as an important factor in achieving external goals, but research suggests that extrinsic motivation may be less sustainable in the long term and less satisfying than intrinsic motivation (Deci, Vallerand, & Ryan, 1991).

In recent decades, self-esteem has been a widely studied subject, and recent research has made significant contributions to understanding how this construct influences mental health, interpersonal relationships, and academic performance. Additionally, modern studies have expanded the perspective on the dynamics of self-esteem by exploring its interactions with motivation and anxiety in the academic context, which is relevant for understanding the specific challenges faced by students. A large body of recent research confirms that high self-esteem is associated with better mental health and a lower risk of depression and anxiety.

2. OBJECTIVE AND HYPOTHESES

2.1. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the research focused on the need to understand the interactions between self-esteem, motivation, and anxiety.

Another important objective of this research is to raise awareness about mental health among students.

2.2. HYPOTHESES

To achieve the research objectives, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H1: There is an association between self-esteem and anxiety among students.

H2: There is an association between intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, lack of motivation and anxiety among students.

H3: There is an association between self-esteem and intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, lack of motivation and anxiety among students

3. METHOD

3.1 The participants

The sample of subjects on which the research was conducted consists of 128 students of both genders, with an average age of 30 years, who are enrolled in undergraduate studies in years I, II, and III.

The composition of the sample by gender shows that there were 30 male students and 98 female students (a significant proportion). The composition of the sample by year of study shows that there were 22 students from year I, 71 from year II, and 35 from year III.

3.2 The instruments

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale is a psychometric tool developed by Morris Rosenberg in 1965 that measures a person's overall level of self-esteem. This scale is one of the most widely used and valuable instruments in psychological research related to mental health and personal development. According to Rosenberg, the scale demonstrates good internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.89. The scale was validated by correlating the scores obtained with various measures of psychological health and subjective well-being, which strengthens its credibility as a tool for measuring self-esteem (Blascovich & Tomaka, 1991).

The Academic Motivation Scale was developed by Vallerand and colleagues in 1993 under the name "Academic Motivation Scale (AMS-C 28) College (CEGEP) Version" and published in the journal *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, volume 52(53), pages 1992-1993. It contains 28 items that make up three subscales.

The DASS questionnaire – "Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scales" – is an instrument created by S.H. Lovibond and P.F. Lovibond and adapted in Romania by Adela Perțe (coordinator) and Monica Albu under the name DASS-21R (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995). This instrument consists of three scales corresponding to the assessment of negative emotional states such as anxiety, depression, and stress. Each scale contains 7 items, which are randomly interspersed, and each item is completed by the respondent through self-assessment."

3.3 Procedure

The research began with establishing the study topic, followed by identifying the purpose and objectives of the research. Being a correlational study, the type of sample on which the questionnaires would be applied was determined, in order to measure the dependent variables whose correlations were intended to be studied. The three questionnaires used were combined into a single questionnaire created on the Google Forms platform and administered online over six months (October 2024 – March 2025). The resulting database, containing responses from 128 study participants, was coded for processing in the statistical software to test the research hypotheses. The obtained results were analysed and the conclusions of the study highlighted the obtained results, taking into account the research limitations as well as possible future directions. The ethical code of the psychology profession and data confidentiality according to GDPR were respected

3.4 The design

For this research, two categories of variables were studied:

1. Dependent variables: Self-esteem, Intrinsic motivation, Extrinsic motivation, Lack of motivation, Anxiety.
2. Independent variables: Gender, Year of study, Place of origin, Occupation, Marital status

The research design is non-experimental (Vasiliu, 2018), of the type:

N: O1 O2 O3, where O1 represents the measurement of anxiety, O2 represents the measurement of self-esteem and O3 represents the measurement academic motivation in students.

4. RESULTS

The conclusion of the normality study is similar to that of the histogram analysis, namely that due to the variable distributions not resembling a normal distribution, it is necessary to apply non-parametric statistical tests to verify the research hypotheses (Vasiliu, 2018).

To test the first hypothesis, which suggests that there is an association between self-esteem and anxiety among students, the Spearman correlation test was applied (table 1).

Table 1 : Spearman correlation test for self-esteem and anxiety

		1.	2.
1. Anxiety	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
2. Self-Esteem	Correlation Coefficient	-.523	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	

The statistical conclusion suggests that there is a significant correlation between self-esteem and anxiety, which is negative and of moderate intensity. This means that when a student's level of self-esteem decreases, their level of anxiety increases significantly. The effect size ($r^2 = 0.273$) indicates that approximately

27.3% of the variation in anxiety scores can be explained by the variation in self-esteem scores. According to widely accepted standards for interpreting effect size (Cohen, 1988), this value corresponds to a strong effect, which gives a strong practical and theoretical relevance to the identified relationship.

To test the second hypotheses, which suggests that there is an association between intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, lack of motivation and anxiety among students, the Spearman correlation test was applied (table 2).

Table 2: Spearman correlation test for motivation and anxiety

		1.	2.	3.	4.
1. Anxiety	Correlation	1.000			
	Coefficient				
	Sig. (2-tailed)				
2. Intrinsic Motivation	Correlation	-.083	1.000		
	Coefficient				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.354			
3. Extrinsic Motivation	Correlation	.186	.601	1.000	
	Coefficient				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.036	.000		
4. Lack of Motivation	Correlation	.328	-.349	-.140	1.000
	Coefficient				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.015	

Statistical conclusion for second hypothesis: there is a significant correlation between lack of motivation and anxiety, which is positive and of low intensity. This means that when a student's lack of motivation increases, their level of anxiety also increases significantly. The effect size ($r^2 = 0.107$) indicates that approximately 10.7% of the variation in anxiety scores can be explained by the variation in lack of motivation scores. According to widely accepted standards for interpreting effect size (Cohen, 1988), this value corresponds to a moderate effect. The observed effect is unlikely to have occurred by chance, given the level of statistical significance obtained ($p < 0.05$). The magnitude of the effect suggests a considerable practical relevance, meaning that the results are not only significant, but may also have concrete implications for understanding and managing the relationship between the analyzed variables.

Additionally, there is a significant correlation between extrinsic motivation and anxiety, which is also positive and of low intensity, meaning that when a student's extrinsic motivation (external pressure) increases, their level of anxiety also increases significantly. The effect size ($r^2 = 0.034$) indicates that approximately 3.4% of the variation in anxiety scores can be explained by the variation in extrinsic motivation. According to widely accepted standards for interpreting effect size (Cohen, 1988), this value corresponds to a low effect. Although significant, the results do not have substantial practical importance.

In order to test the third hypotheses, which suggests that there is an association between self-esteem and intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, lack

of motivation and anxiety among students, the Spearman correlation test was applied (table 3).

Table 3: Spearman correlation test for self-esteem and motivation

		1.	2.	3.	4.
1. Self-esteem	Correlation	1.000			
	Coefficient				
	Sig. (2-tailed)				
2. Intrinsic Motivation	Correlation	.261	1.000		
	Coefficient				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.003			
3. Extrinsic Motivation	Correlation	-.011	.601	1.000	
	Coefficient				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.901	.000		
4. Lack of Motivation	Correlation	.272	-.349	-.140	1.000
	Coefficient				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.000	.015	

Statistical conclusion for the third hypothesis indicates that there is a significant correlation between lack of motivation and self-esteem, which is negative and of low intensity. This means that when a student's lack of motivation increases, their level of self-esteem significantly decreases. The effect size ($r^2 = 0.074$) indicates that approximately 7.4% of the variation in self-esteem scores can be explained by the variation in lack of motivation scores. According to widely accepted standards for interpreting effect size (Cohen, 1988), this value corresponds to a moderate effect. The effect appears to be quite important from a practical point of view. In addition, the effect is significant.

There is also a significant correlation between intrinsic motivation and self-esteem, which is positive and of low intensity. This means that when a student's intrinsic motivation increases, their level of self-esteem also increases significantly. The effect size ($r^2 = 0.068$) indicates that approximately 6.8% of the variation in self-esteem scores can be explained by the variation in lack of motivation scores. According to widely accepted standards for interpreting effect size (Cohen, 1988), this value corresponds to a moderate effect. The effect appears to be quite important from a practical point of view, especially that the effect is significant.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The results of the conducted research confirm findings from various researches, which indicate that high self-esteem not only reduces the risk of depression and anxiety but also contributes to the development of effective coping strategies, supports emotional self-regulation, and facilitates healthy social integration.

In this context, the psychological interpretation of the results obtained in testing the first hypothesis takes into account the fact that there is an association

between self-esteem and anxiety among students, which is negative and of medium intensity. This means that when a student's self-esteem decreases, their level of anxiety increases significantly. The relationship between self-esteem and anxiety is particularly evident in the academic context, where pressure and expectations can create a stressful environment for students. Those with low self-esteem exhibit higher levels of social anxiety and academic stress. These students tend to interpret feedback more negatively, which affects their motivation and performance. They have a more vulnerable perception of their own worth, which exposes them to a greater risk of developing anxiety and feeling overwhelmed by academic demands, ultimately leading to elevated anxiety levels.

For the second hypothesis, the psychological interpretation of the results obtained in testing this hypothesis considers the fact that there is a significant correlation between lack of motivation and anxiety, which is positive and of low intensity. This means that when a student's lack of motivation increases, their level of anxiety also increases significantly. Additionally, there is a significant correlation between extrinsic motivation and anxiety, which is also positive and of low intensity. This suggests that when extrinsic motivation (external pressure) increases in a student, their level of anxiety also significantly increases. Lack of motivation is often associated with states of apathy, low energy, and, in more severe cases, depression or anxiety. This form of demotivation can occur when a person does not perceive the activity as bringing any meaningful benefits or when, in the face of a task, they see no possibility of success. In such conditions, anxiety levels tend to rise considerably.

Considering the third hypothesis, the psychological interpretation of the results obtained in testing this one considers the fact that there is a significant correlation between lack of motivation and self-esteem, which is negative and of low intensity. This means that as a student's lack of motivation increases, their self-esteem significantly decreases. There is also a significant correlation between intrinsic motivation and self-esteem, which is positive and of low intensity. This suggests that when a student's intrinsic motivation increases, their level of self-esteem also significantly increases. Amotivation is linked to a lack of self-determination and a sense of incompetence or absence of a clear goal. Individuals in a state of amotivation have neither internal nor external stimuli pushing them to act, and they are less able to engage in day-to-day activities, which may contribute to a low self-image and, consequently, low self-esteem. On the other hand, intrinsic motivation is considered the purest form of motivation, being associated with the pleasure an individual experiences when engaging in an activity of personal interest, such as a hobby or creative pursuit. This type of motivation can be internalized and integrated into one's identity and values, thereby contributing positively to the strengthening of an individual's self-esteem.

Recent research in the field of self-esteem shows that this construct plays a vital role in young people's mental health, social adjustment, and academic performance. Cultivating healthy self-esteem has become essential for youth, and academic institutions bear an increasing responsibility to provide emotional support and psychological resources to help students develop a balanced self-image

and cope with the pressures they face. Thus, self-esteem remains a relevant and current topic of research, whose theoretical and practical implications are crucial for supporting psychological well-being and academic success.

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