

PREVALENCE OF ACADEMIC ANXIETY AND ITS IMPACT ON FUTURE ORIENTATION AMONG HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN THAILAND: THE ROLE OF ACADEMIC PROGRAMS AND SCHOOL CLIMATE INFLUENCES

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Abstract

Anxiety related to academic performance and future orientation is a prevalent issue among high school students in the context of competitive university admissions. This study aims to investigate the prevalence of academic anxiety and its impact on future orientation among high school students in Chiang Mai, Thailand. This study is quantitative research. A cross-sectional survey was conducted among 204 high school students aged 15-18 from a local government school in Chiang Mai, Thailand. The purposive sampling method was used to target high school students. A questionnaire was used as the research instrument. Data were collected using an online questionnaire. Statistical analyses including multiple regression analysis were used to examine the relationship between academic anxiety, environmental context, and future orientation with value of (Coefficient of Determination = .566). The findings revealed that the prevalence of academic anxiety and its impact on future orientation among high school students in Chiang Mai, Thailand with the highest score of 3.60 (SD = 0.64). It indicates students are relatively anxious about their academic future as well as the environmental context and academic anxiety impact on future orientation with a score of 3.17 (SD = 0.69) and 2.96 (SD = 0.65) accordingly. Furthermore, the results imply that environmental context has a strongly significant impact on future orientation (Standardized Coefficient = .390, $p < .001$) indicating that a supportive environment can support students' future orientation. Academic anxiety also had a positive significant impact on future orientation (Standardized Coefficient = .244, $p < .001$). In order to alleviate anxiety and support students in achieving their academic and future goals, the solution is to implement teacher training, and counseling services focused on university majors directly related to future careers.

Keywords: prevalence; academic anxiety; environmental context; future orientation

Introduction

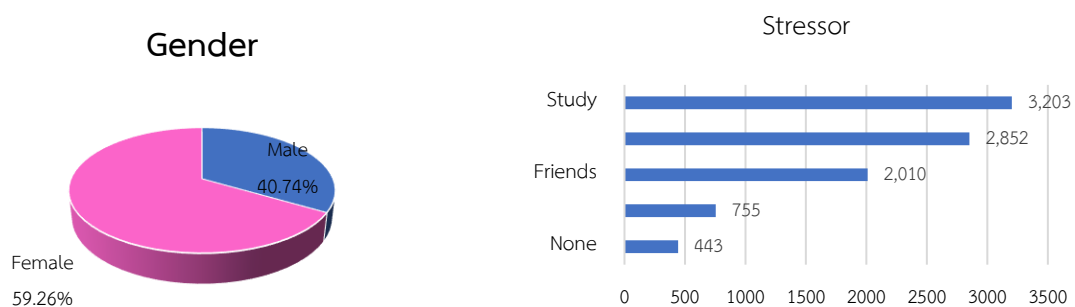
The prevalence of anxiety has emerged as a significant mental health issue affecting individuals across all age groups in society. This is especially evident among adolescents, particularly high school students, who are planning and making decisions regarding their future academics. Anxiety concerning personal futures can severely impact students' learning abilities, future orientation, and daily decision-making processes, highlighting the urgent need for attention to this issue.

Anxiety among adolescents directly affects their academic performance, self-confidence, and future consciousness (Ibbad et al., 2022) Therefore, the anxiety is crucial issue and could lead a poor decision-making regarding their future paths as well as a severe depression disorder afterward.

According to the 2024 report from the Department of Mental Health, Thailand, revealed that among 12,053 adolescent respondents in Chiang Mai, 59.26% of females and 40.74% of males are experiencing stress and anxiety (DMH, 2024). Given that the majority of these individuals are 3,203 students, it is likely that studying contributes to their feelings of anxiety and stress. Therefore, Chiang Mai city, which is a rural area, the educational system still exhibits significant gaps, necessitating multiple protocols that must be complied. Moreover, delays in receiving information may hinder students' opportunities for academic growth, including participation in grand competitions, conferences, scholarship programs or exchange programs etc. Many high school students face challenges in independently seeking out information to enhance their prospects for acceptance into higher education institutions (Chakkaew et al., 2018; Kaewkaewpan, 2021). The variability of educational anxiety may also correlate with environments surrounding individual students.

12,053 Adolescent respondents in Chiang Mai, Thailand

Age ≤ 18-year-old



Source: <https://checkin.dmh.go.th/dashboards/dash07>

There are several requirements and complexity associated with Thai university admission. One of the criteria emphasizes scholarly achievement or Grade Point Average (GPA). However, information and details have changed multiple times, leading to increased stress and anxiety for students each year.

Therefore, this study aims to explore anxiety levels among high school students in Chiang Mai to identify underlying causes and resultant effects within the school. It would be able to support students in developing greater confidence among them and improve their future orientation capabilities as well as their future academic prospects. Moreover, it attempts to make it easier for teachers and students to identify methods that alleviate stress and anxiety in order to enhance opportunities for personal development within the schools.

In summary, addressing academic anxiety is crucial not only for individual student success but also for fostering a healthier academic environment that supports the overall well-being of adolescents as they prepare for their futures.

The Objectives of this study

1. To investigate the prevalence of academic anxiety on future orientation among high school students in Chiang Mai, Thailand
2. To examine the environmental context, school climate and teachers impact on academic anxiety

Literature Review

Prevalence of Anxiety among Adolescents

Anxiety may impact individuals of all ages, leading to loss of energy and physical health, and it can appear in different aspects of daily life, such as family, friendship, work, and studying. Considering the prevalence of anxiety in adolescents in Thailand, it has undergone recently (Thanachoksawang et al., 2024). Consequently, the majority of students in Thailand concentrate on achieving admission to university. Therefore, demographic considerations are critical in research, since they provide essential insights into the population characteristics that influence academic outcomes such as gender, age socioeconomic status (SES), and environmental context (Patadiya et al., 2023; Li et al., 2024). The developmental period of adolescence from 15 – 18 years old, involves significant cognitive, emotional, and social changes. Then, they have to confront the difficulty of preparing for university admission as well as making critical decisions regarding their futures (Mohamad et al., 2021).

Therefore, the intense pressure to gain university admission is a key contributing factor for adolescence and particularly the students between 15-18 years old in Thailand. Its tendency to contribute to the prevalence of anxiety.

Environmental Context: School Climate and Teacher Influence

The school environment is crucial in determining how students experience and cope with anxiety. Factors such as school climate, teacher support, peer relationships, and the physical conditions of the school can either relieve or increase student anxiety. Despite this, teachers can support or help students in order to alleviate their anxiety or stress by creating a relaxed atmosphere in which students feel comfortable expressing their concerns and seeking help when needed. Thus, students who receive consistent and thorough assistance from teachers are less vulnerable to mental conditions, including anxiety, stress, and depression (Wang, 2023). Based on Cognitive Dissonance Theory (Vries et al., 2023), a supportive school environment may reduce the mental health distress that students confront with academic difficulties. On the other hand, when teachers exhibit high levels of stress or negativity, it can create a stressful classroom environment that causes student anxiety. Furthermore, students may experience an increased feeling of inadequacy and anxiety regarding failure as a result of their encounters with teachers who possess unkind conduct or inadequate support. Moreover, a variety of studies indicate that elevated anxiety in a specific academic area correlates with several disruptive achievement results overall and leads to low motivation and negative attitudes toward future learning. As aforementioned, it implies that students' academic performance and anxiety are aligned with environmental context such as supportive teachers and school climate which ultimately determine their future academic opportunities or university admissions. Accordingly, previous study indicated that teachers who are supportive and empathetic will be able to assist students feel more confident and capable in any academic circumstance (Romano et al., 2020).

A supportive school climate can reduce student anxiety by teachers who provide assistance and a pleasant atmosphere. The empathic and supportive teacher can cultivate students' academic success, confidence, and enhance their future opportunities.

Academic Anxiety towards Future orientation

The complexity and changing integrity of university admission have been identified as key contributors to academic anxiety. For instance, changes in eligibility criteria and additional standardized tests have increased stress levels leading to anxiety among students. Academic anxiety is characterized by anxiousness, emotion, and concerned over academic success (Li et al., 2024). Although some anxiety is acceptable, severe anxiety may be dangerous. It might create educational obstacles and become more stressful when a student's performance declines and intends to have leaning avoidance (Hasty et al., 2021). Therefore, the level of anxiety and its primary causes can alter students' educational progress. Based on this study, academic anxiety refers to the feeling of distress, fear, or stress that students experience as a result of school-related pressures, such as assignments, exams, and performance expectations and further academic prospects. Moreover, academic anxiety can be an expression of stress due to the burden of completing works and worrying whether it will be completed effectively (Patadiya et al., 2023). Additionally, the impact of academic anxiety can have consequences on mental health and self-esteem as well as lead to chronic anxiety. This may result in negative self-beliefs and decreased motivation, creating a cycle that perpetuates poor academic outcomes for university admission and further education goals. In this regard, teachers can play a vital role in supporting students not just to improve their academic performance but also need to support them in all aspects that relevant to their academic prospects.

As aforementioned, the students' motivation and academic decisions are driven by expectation, which contribute high academic anxiety. According to expectancy-value theory (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002), it can explain that some students attribute failure to a lack of ability rather than to a lack of effort, this can lead to increased anxiety about future academic. Conversely, students who manage their emotions effectively and employ self-regulation strategies are more likely to cope with academic anxiety effectively.

In addition, the Thai university admission system is extremely competitive, mandating students to meet high standardized test scores and maintain strong academic performance throughout their high school years. Thai students must often rely on multiple rounds of exams and fluctuating admission criteria, which contributes to anxiety (Thanachoksawang et al., 2024) Furthermore, delays in receiving official admission criteria each year increase stress and anxiety.

Hence, university admission complexity may contribute to academic anxiety among Thai students, as well as hinder learning, leading to mental health damage, lessened self-esteem and poor academic performance.

Methods

This study employed a quantitative approach, applying a cross-sectional design that was conducted from August to December 2024. During this period, Thai high school students were preparing for university enrollment. For this reason, a cross-section study was selected as an appropriate assessment, timely and efficient, and also a survey methodology with a population of 400 high school students from local government Schools under the Office of the Basic Education Commission in Chiang Mai, particularly within the city (Amphur Muang). The Krejcie & Morgan formula were employed to select 204 participants from Mathayom 6 at Yupparaj Wittayalai School. The questionnaire was used as an instrument. The survey was conducted online using Google Form, which was accessible. This study used purposive sampling method which focused on high school students aged 15 to 18. The purposive sampling was used to ensure that the respondents were actively engaged in the university admission process and experiencing academic anxiety. In this regard, the questionnaire was distributed to students in Grades 10 to 12 who are genuinely concerned about their university admissions especially regarding reputable universities and high-quality standards. However, this study was ethically approved by the Director of Yupparaj Wittayalai School, located in Chiang Mai, ensuring that the consent of participants was obtained and that research ethics were adhered to. The data were analyzed by using SPSS with 204 population, including Male 65 (31.9%), Female 134 (65.7%), and prefer not to say 5 (2.5%). According to the questionnaire, it comprises two sections which are demographics and items on academic anxiety among high school students with 15 items. The assessment used a five-point Likert scale and the Item Objective Congruence (IOC) was verified by three experts with a score of 0.80. It indicated that the questionnaire is appropriate for utilize. Subsequently, the pilot test was conducted with 30 respondents the Cronbach's alpha reliability was 0.87, indicating an acceptable level.

Result and Discussion

Regarding the 204 respondents, the demographic details shows that the majority of respondents are female (65.7 %), male (31.9%), and prefer not to say (2.5%). Most of them

are grade 10 (called Matthayom 4) with 42.2%, grade 11 (called Matthayom 5) with 41.2%, and grade 12 (called Matthayom 6) with 16.7%, accordingly. A high percentage of respondents are studying in the Science-Math program (75%), and other programs (25%), and they have extra tutorial classes (or private classes) in one subject (9.3%), two subjects (11.8%), three or more subjects (21.6%) and not having private tutorial (57.4%).

The data analysis in Table 1 shows that environment context has a total mean score of 3.17, SD = 0.69 including a high score with insufficient academic support from teachers (3.59, SD = 1.07), anxiety about grades (3.55, SD = 1.24) and ignorance students' inquiries (2.92, SD = 1.27), indicating a significant role in shaping student anxiety. For academic anxiety, the total score was (2.96, SD = 0.65) include anxiety after receiving admission information (3.20, SD = 1.20), worrying about finding accurate admission information (3.00, SD = 1.17), and assistance systematic guidance for further study (2.74, SD = 1.17). Future orientation has a total score of 3.60, SD = 0.64 which is the highest score that means students are relatively anxious about their academic future, however regarding university admission is highly competitive (3.93, SD = 1.11), worrying about academic achievement to meet the university requirements (3.80, SD = 1.15) and anxious about financial situation (3.58, SD = 1.22) that mean university fee is more expensive than high school. The finding implies that students experience significant anxiety about future academics. Addressing these anxieties through better academic support by teachers, clear admission guidance, and financial planning assistance.

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of the factors

Items	Mean	SD
Environment Context		
1. I feel that my school or teachers provide insufficient academic support	3.59	1.07
2. I am worried about my grades in every semester.	3.55	1.24
3. I feel anxious and pressured about assignments and homework.	2.90	1.19
4. I feel worried and stressed about learning system in my school.	2.91	1.15
5. Compared to different schools, I sense that some teachers are unable to promote or support educational activity equitably based on student interests and abilities.	3.18	1.17
6. I am stressed when some teachers appear to ignore my inquiries that I am unable to resolve.	2.92	1.27
Total	3.17	0.69

Items	Mean	SD
Academic anxiety		
1. I am concerned about the assistance and support provided by the school, including the systematic guidance for further study.	2.74	1.17
2. I am worried about finding accurate information from both educational institutions and organizations that involve university admission.	3.00	1.17
3. I am concerned that I cannot handle the workload.	2.28	1.11
4. I am very anxious after receiving about the information regarding further education.	3.20	1.20
Total	2.96	0.65
Future orientation		
1. I am worried about my academic achievement to meet the university requirements.	3.80	1.15
2. I am anxious about my financial situation and the academic system in which I will be attending university.	3.58	1.22
3. I am anxious regarding the expectations of my family and school regarding my university studies.	3.34	1.35
4. I am anxious regarding university admission, which is a highly competitive process every year due to the uncertain university's admissions system.	3.93	1.11
5. I am anxious and lack of directions and goals regarding my field of study and future career aspirations.	3.36	1.38
Total	3.60	0.64

As shown in Table 2, the R^2 (.566), representing the variation in future orientation among high school students in Chiang Mai, Thailand, are influenced by environmental context and academic anxiety. Accordingly, the environment context factor has a strongly significant impact on future orientation ($\beta = .390$, $F = 7.421$, $p = .000^{***}$). This means that changing the environment will be able to shape individuals' thinking about their future academics. Accordingly, academic anxiety has a significant impact on future orientation ($\beta = .244$, $F = 2.528$, $p = .000^{***}$), indicating a most likely impact on individuals' resilience or self-efficacy. Some students manage their academics by overstudying, which consequently leads to anxiety.

Table 2: Analytical Data correlation

Factors	R^2	β	df	MS	F	Sig.
		.566				
Environment Context → Future orientation		.390	24	2.857	7.421	.000***
Academic Anxiety → Future orientation		.244	34	1.408	2.582	.000***

*** $p < 0.001$

Based on the results, this study highlights significant factors impact on academic anxiety and future orientation among high school student in Chiang Mai, Thailand. The findings align with previous research (Rabby et al., 2023; Patadiya et al., 2023), demonstrating that anxiety among adolescents is a multifaceted issue shaped by demographics, environment context, and academic expectations. Regard to this, the paper confirmed that female students reported higher levels of academic anxiety compared to their male counterparts (Burani & Nelson, 2020). Besides, students in grade 10 and 11 experience higher levels of anxiety compare to grade 12 students, who were less represented due to their preparation for university admission outside the school in semester 2 based on Thai education system. Nonetheless, student in grade 12 are less influenced by the school environment since they are largely self-directed in their preparation during this time. Based on data and associated with previous study (Wang, 2023), anxiety can be increased in local Thai government schools by unsupportive teacher behavior and inadequate responses to student inquiries in the context of the environment.

Consequently, this paper also reveals that academic anxiety has a significant impact on students' their future education regarding university admissions particularly among students in grade 10 and 11. These findings emphasize the necessity of comprehensive guidance and counseling services that address both academic and emotional needs especially in local Thai government schools. Moreover, students may experience less tension and confusion when they are provided with a clear understanding of the criteria and requirements for university admission.

Conclusion

This study investigated the prevalence of academic anxiety and its impact on future orientation among high school students in Chiang Mai, Thailand. The data emphasize the role of demographics, environmental context, and academic pressure in shaping students' anxiety

levels and future orientation. The results highlight the critical role of school environments and teacher support or mentorship in reducing academic anxiety among high school students. Moreover, these findings align with Wang (2023), who found that school climate significantly influences students' confidence in their academic future. Additionally, the findings are also related to the study conducted by Rabby et al. (2023), which revealed that the majority of students, particularly those studying in science programs, experience a high level of anxiety regarding university admission. It implies that high school students who study in science programs are likely to experience high levels of academic anxiety connected to their future orientation concerning university admission. Preventing anxiety should prioritize enhancing teacher-student relationships, creating supportive school climates, and providing clear and consistent up-to-date information about university admission. This study emphasizes the need for educational stakeholders to address the mental health challenges facing adolescents, ultimately fostering a more supportive academic environment and improving students' readiness for their future academic and career endeavors.

Implication

This study highlights the significant impact of academic anxiety on high school students towards future orientation, particularly in government schools in Thailand. The implication is to drive teacher training in order to support students in an academic environment such as reviewing the curriculum and assessment practices to ensure that they might not contribute to students' excessive academic pressure as well as train students to manage stress and give up-to-date university admission guidelines. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education should consider reforming the admission system and providing centralized information ahead of the year, enabling students to prepare themselves better. Additionally, the Ministry of Education also need to collaborate with universities to establish a more standardized and transparent admission framework to ensure that student will receive clearly information and timely regarding selection criteria. That will alleviate students' anxiety.

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