

Social Anxiety and Academic Burnout as Predictors of School Avoidance Behavior

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aimed to examine the predictive roles of social anxiety and academic burnout in explaining school avoidance behavior among high school students.

Methods and Materials: A correlational descriptive research design was employed, involving 392 high school students from various public and private schools in Peru. The participants were selected based on Morgan and Krejcie's sample size determination table. Standardized self-report instruments were used to measure social anxiety, academic burnout, and school avoidance behavior. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 27. Descriptive statistics were computed, followed by Pearson correlation analysis to assess bivariate relationships and multiple linear regression to determine the combined predictive power of the independent variables on school avoidance behavior.

Findings: Results indicated that both social anxiety ($r = .48$, $p < .01$) and academic burnout ($r = .61$, $p < .01$) were positively and significantly correlated with school avoidance behavior. The regression model was significant, $F(2, 389) = 153.72$, $p < .001$, and explained 44% of the variance in school avoidance behavior ($R^2 = .44$). Both social anxiety ($\beta = .31$, $p < .001$) and academic burnout ($\beta = .49$, $p < .001$) emerged as significant predictors, with academic burnout exerting a stronger effect.

Conclusion: The findings highlight the crucial role of emotional and psychological factors in predicting school avoidance among adolescents. Academic burnout, more than social anxiety, was identified as the dominant predictor, underscoring the need for educational policies and interventions that address emotional exhaustion and academic stress to reduce absenteeism and disengagement in schools.

Keywords: Social anxiety, academic burnout, school avoidance behavior, adolescents

1. Introduction

School avoidance behavior, also known as school refusal or truancy when driven by emotional distress, has emerged as a critical educational and psychological concern in adolescent development. It typically manifests in students' reluctance or refusal to attend school due to underlying psychological challenges, including social anxiety and academic burnout. These behavioral patterns have been linked to broader academic maladjustment, lower self-esteem, and increased risk of long-term disengagement from educational trajectories. Given the academic and psychosocial consequences of school avoidance, identifying its predictors—especially social-emotional factors like anxiety and burnout—has become a priority in contemporary educational psychology research (Xue et al., 2025).

Social anxiety, characterized by intense fear of social evaluation and embarrassment, has been repeatedly associated with negative academic outcomes and school-related impairments. Adolescents with elevated social anxiety often experience difficulties in peer interactions, classroom participation, and school engagement, all of which may culminate in school avoidance behavior. Research by (Peng et al., 2025) emphasizes that parental burnout and strained family dynamics significantly affect children's academic performance, partly through increased vulnerability to internalizing symptoms such as anxiety. This anxiety, when situated within the highly evaluative context of the school environment, may inhibit attendance and participation. The work of (Zhang et al., 2024) further supports this, demonstrating that insecure attachment—particularly in paternal relationships—can mediate the association between emotional disturbances and burnout-related school outcomes.

In addition to social anxiety, academic burnout has become a salient construct in explaining school disengagement. Academic burnout encompasses three key dimensions: emotional exhaustion, cynicism toward learning, and a diminished sense of personal accomplishment. It reflects a chronic psychological response to prolonged academic stress and pressure. Numerous studies confirm that burnout not only impairs academic performance but also predicts absenteeism, demotivation, and in severe cases, school dropout (Al-Awad, 2024; Bazaz & Farhadian, 2025). Among high school students, where identity formation and achievement pressures coalesce,

burnout has been identified as a crucial factor in educational withdrawal (Wang et al., 2022).

Research has shown that effort-reward imbalances, such as high academic effort with insufficient recognition, exacerbate feelings of burnout and dissatisfaction in adolescents. (Gao et al., 2024) found that students experiencing such imbalances reported higher levels of school disconnection and emotional fatigue, which are proximal indicators of avoidance behavior. Complementing this, (Zhao et al., 2024) demonstrated that perceived school connectedness served as a protective buffer against burnout, but when absent, contributed to elevated avoidance behavior. This aligns with the multiple serial mediation model presented by Zhao et al., wherein school connectedness influenced burnout via psychological mediators, ultimately affecting academic attendance.

Furthermore, school climate—comprising peer relations, safety, fairness, and teacher support—has emerged as a significant ecological predictor of academic burnout and school engagement. (Xiaoling, 2024) emphasized that psychological capital (e.g., self-efficacy, optimism, and resilience) mediates the impact of school climate on burnout. When students perceive their school environment as unsupportive or overly pressurizing, their capacity to emotionally regulate and remain motivated diminishes, creating a fertile ground for avoidance behavior. (Supriyanto et al., 2024) reinforced this point, identifying the physical, mental, and emotional symptoms of burnout in Indonesian students, which manifested in both academic underperformance and irregular attendance.

Other empirical works have delved into the socio-demographic and institutional factors that predispose adolescents to academic burnout. For instance, (Putri & Magistarina, 2024) explored differences in burnout levels across various types of high schools, revealing that students in vocational schools faced distinct burnout trajectories due to their curriculum intensity. Similarly, (Masruroh et al., 2022) linked high levels of academic burnout to reduced performance in science and management subjects, supporting the hypothesis that cognitive overload leads to behavioral withdrawal from school.

The family and parenting context also plays a significant role in both social anxiety and burnout. (Park, 2025) investigated how parental achievement pressure and quality of parent-adolescent communication impact burnout, finding that authoritarian parenting styles significantly elevate stress and disengagement. In line with this, (Jiang & Wang, 2025) argued that adolescents pursuing dual

careers—such as academics alongside sports—are particularly vulnerable to burnout when familial identity pressures and career expectations conflict. Likewise, (Novianty et al., 2023) confirmed the negative impact of low self-esteem and poor school engagement on burnout levels in nursing students, implying that similar mechanisms may operate among younger adolescents.

A growing body of research also focuses on individual protective factors that mitigate burnout and reduce school avoidance. One such factor is **grit**, defined as perseverance and passion for long-term goals. (Liu & Xue, 2022) and (Kim, 2022) found that grit moderates the relationship between academic stress and burnout. Students high in grit are more likely to persist through academic challenges and maintain school attendance, even when experiencing elevated anxiety or workload. This personal resource thus serves as a buffer against the development of school-avoidant behavior.

Efforts to model the antecedents and correlates of academic burnout have also highlighted the importance of psychological and emotional resilience. (Dehghani et al., 2024) compared early maladaptive schemas and emotional regulation difficulties between adolescent boys and girls, suggesting that maladaptive cognitive patterns contribute to both emotional distress and academic disengagement. Similarly, (Rahman & Djamhoer, 2023) demonstrated a negative association between academic self-efficacy and burnout, indicating that students who believe in their ability to succeed are less likely to avoid school when facing academic challenges.

Environmental stressors specific to school life also shape adolescents' stress responses. (Oktia, 2022) reported that both academic burnout and academic engagement predict students' overall school well-being, with burnout negatively correlated with emotional satisfaction in school. This suggests that when burnout increases, students' subjective valuation of school declines, which may explain their subsequent avoidance behavior. Importantly, this avoidance is not solely the result of inability but also of motivational depletion and emotional exhaustion (Yongmei & Dan, 2022).

Recent advances in psychometric research have further enabled scholars to detect nuanced subgroups of students who may be at risk for school avoidance based on their burnout profiles. For example, (Xue et al., 2025) employed latent profile analysis and network modeling to identify typologies of burnout in high school populations. The study found that students with low achievement goal orientation

and poor school climate perception exhibited the highest levels of burnout and were more likely to disengage from school altogether. These findings underscore the need for interventions that address both the internal emotional states of students (e.g., social anxiety and burnout) and the external environmental factors (e.g., school climate and parental expectations).

Taken together, the empirical literature suggests that both social anxiety and academic burnout play critical roles in shaping adolescents' school avoidance behavior. While anxiety interferes with interpersonal functioning and classroom presence, burnout erodes emotional resilience and intrinsic motivation. This study seeks to extend the existing body of knowledge by examining the predictive roles of these two variables—social anxiety and academic burnout—on school avoidance behavior in a sample of Peruvian adolescents.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study employed a correlational descriptive design to investigate the predictive roles of social anxiety and academic burnout on school avoidance behavior among adolescents. A total of 392 high school students from public and private schools in Peru participated in the study. The sample size was determined based on the Morgan and Krejcie sample size table (1970), which suggests a minimum sample of 384 for populations over 10,000, ensuring statistical power and generalizability. Participants were selected using stratified random sampling to ensure proportional representation of gender and school type. Informed consent was obtained from both the students and their legal guardians before participation, and ethical guidelines were followed throughout the study.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. School Avoidance

To measure school avoidance behavior, the School Refusal Assessment Scale–Revised (SRAS-R) developed by Kearney (2002) is used. This standardized instrument consists of 24 items that assess four functional conditions associated with school refusal: (1) avoidance of school-based stimuli that provoke negative affectivity, (2) escape from aversive social or evaluative situations, (3) pursuit of attention from significant others, and (4) pursuit of tangible reinforcement outside of school. Responses are rated on a 7-

point Likert scale ranging from 0 (never) to 6 (always). The SRAS-R has demonstrated strong internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the subscales typically ranging from .70 to .90. Numerous studies have supported its validity in identifying motivational profiles of school-avoidant youth across different age groups and cultural contexts.

2.2.2. Social Anxiety

Social anxiety in students is measured using the Social Anxiety Scale for Adolescents (SAS-A) developed by La Greca and Lopez (1998). This widely validated instrument includes 22 items divided into three subscales: (1) Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE), (2) Social Avoidance and Distress in New Situations (SAD-New), and (3) Social Avoidance and Distress in General (SAD-General). Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (all the time). Higher scores indicate greater levels of social anxiety. The SAS-A has demonstrated excellent psychometric properties, including high internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha values generally above .85) and strong construct and criterion-related validity in both clinical and non-clinical adolescent populations.

2.2.3. Academic Burnout

Academic burnout is assessed using the School Burnout Inventory (SBI) developed by Salmela-Aro, Kiuru, Leskinen, and Nurmi (2009). The SBI is a 9-item scale with three subscales: (1) Exhaustion at school, (2) Cynicism toward the meaning of school, and (3) Sense of inadequacy at school. Each item is rated on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 6 (completely agree), with higher scores reflecting higher levels of academic burnout.

The tool has demonstrated strong internal consistency with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from .76 to .88 across subscales. Its reliability and construct validity have been confirmed in several cross-cultural studies involving adolescent student populations.

2.3. Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using SPSS version 27. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, frequency, and percentage) were calculated to summarize participants' demographic characteristics and study variables. Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the bivariate relationships between school avoidance behavior (dependent variable) and the two independent variables: social anxiety and academic burnout. To evaluate the predictive power of the independent variables on school avoidance behavior, a standard multiple linear regression analysis was performed. Prior to conducting the regression analysis, assumptions of normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, multicollinearity, and independence of residuals were examined and confirmed.

3. Findings and Results

Of the 392 participants, 209 (53.3%) were female and 183 (46.7%) were male. In terms of school type, 248 students (63.3%) were enrolled in public schools, while 144 students (36.7%) attended private institutions. The participants' age ranged from 14 to 18 years ($M = 16.24$, $SD = 1.12$), with the majority (41.1%) aged 16. Regarding grade level, 112 students (28.6%) were in 10th grade, 139 students (35.5%) in 11th grade, and 141 students (36.0%) in 12th grade. These demographic variables were considered in the interpretation of results to ensure the representativeness of the sample.

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations for Main Study Variables (N = 392)

Variable	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Social Anxiety	65.42	11.36
Academic Burnout	38.17	8.29
School Avoidance Behavior	78.61	10.72

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the three main variables. The mean score for social anxiety was 65.42 ($SD = 11.36$), indicating a moderate-to-high level of social anxiety among participants. Academic burnout had a mean of 38.17 ($SD = 8.29$), reflecting moderate burnout levels. The mean score for school avoidance behavior was 78.61

($SD = 10.72$), suggesting that a substantial portion of the sample exhibited elevated tendencies toward school avoidance.

Prior to conducting the linear regression analysis, assumptions were tested and met. The normality of residuals was assessed through the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test ($p =$

.122) and visual inspection of the normal Q-Q plot, which showed approximate linearity. Linearity was confirmed by scatterplot analysis, and homoscedasticity was verified through the Breusch-Pagan test ($\chi^2 = 1.37$, $p = .242$), indicating equal variance of residuals. Multicollinearity was not a concern, as the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values

for social anxiety (VIF = 1.32) and academic burnout (VIF = 1.29) were well below the cutoff of 5. Durbin-Watson statistic was 1.89, suggesting no significant autocorrelation in the residuals. These results support the appropriateness of the regression model for analyzing the data.

Table 2

Pearson Correlation Coefficients Between Study Variables (N = 392)

Variables	1	2	3
1. School Avoidance	—		
2. Social Anxiety	.48**	—	
3. Academic Burnout	.61**	.39**	—

As shown in Table 2, school avoidance behavior was significantly and positively correlated with both social anxiety ($r = .48$, $p < .01$) and academic burnout ($r = .61$, $p < .01$). Additionally, social anxiety and academic burnout were

also significantly correlated with each other ($r = .39$, $p < .01$), indicating a moderate degree of association. These results suggest that both independent variables are relevant predictors of the dependent variable.

Table 3

Summary of ANOVA for Regression Model (N = 392)

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	R	R ²	R ² adj	F	p
Regression	8123.48	2	4061.74	0.66	0.44	0.44	153.72	<.001
Residual	10229.53	389	26.29					
Total	18353.01	391						

The regression model presented in Table 3 was statistically significant, $F(2, 389) = 153.72$, $p < .001$, indicating that social anxiety and academic burnout together significantly predicted school avoidance behavior. The

multiple correlation coefficient was $R = .66$, with an R^2 of .44, suggesting that approximately 44% of the variance in school avoidance behavior can be explained by the two predictors combined.

Table 4

Multiple Linear Regression Results Predicting School Avoidance Behavior (N = 392)

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
Constant	28.67	2.49	—	11.52	<.001
Social Anxiety	0.42	0.06	.31	7.12	<.001
Academic Burnout	0.83	0.07	.49	11.78	<.001

As seen in Table 4, both social anxiety ($B = 0.42$, $\beta = .31$, $t = 7.12$, $p < .001$) and academic burnout ($B = 0.83$, $\beta = .49$, $t = 11.78$, $p < .001$) were significant predictors of school avoidance behavior. Academic burnout had a higher standardized coefficient ($\beta = .49$) compared to social anxiety, indicating that it was a stronger predictor in the model. The constant term was also significant ($B = 28.67$, $t = 11.52$, $p < .001$), representing the predicted level of school avoidance when both predictors are held at zero.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to investigate the predictive roles of social anxiety and academic burnout in school avoidance behavior among high school students in Peru. The results of Pearson correlation analysis revealed that both social anxiety and academic burnout had significant positive correlations with school avoidance behavior. Additionally, the findings from multiple linear regression indicated that both variables significantly predicted school avoidance

behavior, with academic burnout demonstrating a stronger predictive weight than social anxiety.

The significant positive correlation between social anxiety and school avoidance behavior is consistent with existing literature emphasizing the disruptive effect of social evaluative fear on students' participation and school attendance. Adolescents with heightened social anxiety are more likely to perceive school as a threatening environment where they may be negatively evaluated by peers or teachers. As a result, they may resort to avoidance as a maladaptive coping strategy. This finding aligns with the work of (Peng et al., 2025), which suggests that social distress within the family and educational settings elevates anxiety symptoms that can, in turn, impact academic behaviors. The present study adds to this evidence by demonstrating that social anxiety is not only associated with internal distress but also contributes to observable behavioral withdrawal, such as school absenteeism.

Moreover, academic burnout emerged as a stronger and more robust predictor of school avoidance behavior. This finding is in line with the conceptualization of academic burnout as a chronic response to prolonged academic stress, which includes emotional exhaustion, detachment from school tasks, and feelings of incompetence. Students experiencing these symptoms may lack the motivation, psychological energy, and emotional resilience to maintain consistent school attendance. The result is supported by prior research, including (Bazaz & Farhadian, 2025), who found that students with low school belongingness and weak academic resilience were more prone to burnout and subsequent academic disengagement. Furthermore, (Gao et al., 2024) noted that students facing an imbalance between academic effort and perceived rewards are at high risk for emotional fatigue and school disconnection, both of which are antecedents of school avoidance.

The role of academic burnout in predicting school avoidance is also reinforced by research focusing on school connectedness. (Zhao et al., 2024) and (Xiaoling, 2024) emphasized that low levels of school connectedness and psychological capital mediate the relationship between burnout and school withdrawal behaviors. The present study supports this model by providing empirical evidence that students experiencing burnout, potentially due to lack of support or unmanageable workloads, are more likely to disengage from the school environment entirely. These findings underscore the importance of considering both psychological and contextual factors in understanding and addressing school avoidance.

The stronger predictive power of academic burnout over social anxiety may be explained by its more comprehensive impact on the academic experience. While social anxiety primarily affects interpersonal functioning, academic burnout impairs multiple facets of the student experience—cognitive, emotional, and motivational. (Supriyanto et al., 2024) found that burnout symptoms in Indonesian students led to significant physical and mental exhaustion, resulting in both academic underachievement and reduced attendance. Similarly, (Putri & Magistarina, 2024) showed that burnout levels varied by school type, suggesting that curriculum intensity and environmental demands influence students' emotional thresholds and coping capacity.

The interplay between internal personal traits and external environmental factors in shaping school avoidance behavior is further evidenced by (Park, 2025), who demonstrated how parental achievement pressure and poor communication contribute to students' psychological distress and detachment from school life. These patterns were echoed in the current study, in which students with high burnout also reported higher levels of avoidance, perhaps as a form of escape from unsupportive academic and familial expectations. Additionally, (Rahman & Djamhoer, 2023) found that low academic self-efficacy was closely related to academic burnout, which may reduce students' confidence in overcoming academic challenges, prompting avoidance as a means of coping.

While social anxiety played a less dominant role compared to burnout, its contribution was still statistically significant, indicating that interpersonal distress should not be overlooked when addressing school attendance problems. (Kim, 2022) and (Liu & Xue, 2022) noted that students with greater psychological resilience or "grit" were better able to withstand the effects of academic stress and anxiety. Thus, students lacking these protective traits may be doubly vulnerable to school avoidance when experiencing both burnout and social anxiety. These findings highlight the importance of designing interventions that bolster emotional regulation and resilience, especially in high-stress academic environments.

In the broader context of educational well-being, (Masruroh et al., 2022) demonstrated that academic burnout significantly reduced students' performance in core subjects, while (Oktia, 2022) found that burnout was a significant predictor of reduced school well-being. These outcomes echo the results of the current study, wherein avoidance behavior may represent a behavioral manifestation of diminished well-being. Further, (Yongmei & Dan, 2022)

emphasized that academic stress is a potent precursor of burnout, and when unaddressed, it leads to negative coping strategies like absenteeism. The results of this study therefore contribute to a growing consensus on the importance of timely identification and support for students experiencing academic distress.

Another important consideration involves how students interpret and internalize the pressures of academic life. (Dehghani et al., 2024) highlighted that adolescents with maladaptive schemas and emotional regulation difficulties are more prone to developing burnout symptoms. These cognitive vulnerabilities may exacerbate the effects of social anxiety, suggesting that the interaction between personal traits and external stressors could jointly influence school avoidance. This underscores the necessity of adopting a holistic approach to intervention, incorporating both emotional and cognitive dimensions of student support.

From a methodological standpoint, the findings of this study complement those of (Xue et al., 2025), who used latent profile and network analysis to map the burnout profiles of students and their outcomes. While the present study used a more traditional correlational and regression approach, the convergence of findings suggests that burnout remains a consistent and significant factor across analytical methods and cultural contexts. Moreover, the present study enriches this line of inquiry by focusing on Peruvian adolescents, offering a culturally specific perspective that adds diversity to the largely East-Asian-focused literature.

Finally, while (Jiang & Wang, 2025) examined burnout in young athletes balancing dual careers, their findings resonate with this study's implications. Students managing multiple roles—whether academic, familial, or extracurricular—face elevated burnout risk, and their coping mechanisms (such as avoidance) may reflect adaptive attempts to manage these competing demands. Recognizing school avoidance not as defiance but as a symptom of deeper psychological distress may therefore inform more empathetic and effective school policies.

5. Limitations & Suggestions

Despite the valuable insights offered by this study, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the use of self-report questionnaires may introduce bias due to social desirability or inaccurate self-perceptions, especially concerning sensitive constructs like anxiety and avoidance. Second, the cross-sectional design restricts the ability to infer causality between variables. While the regression

model suggests predictive relationships, longitudinal studies are needed to confirm directional effects over time. Third, although the sample was drawn from multiple schools in Peru, the generalizability of findings to students from different educational systems or cultural contexts may be limited. Finally, other relevant factors such as peer relationships, parental support, and socioeconomic background were not controlled for, which may have influenced the observed relationships.

Future studies should adopt longitudinal or mixed-method designs to capture the dynamic development of burnout and social anxiety and their influence on school avoidance over time. Investigating these relationships in diverse cultural contexts can also enhance the external validity of findings and help identify universal versus culture-specific predictors. Moreover, exploring potential moderating and mediating variables—such as resilience, school connectedness, or family functioning—can deepen understanding of the pathways through which emotional and academic factors lead to avoidance. It would also be beneficial to incorporate teacher and parent reports alongside student self-reports to triangulate data and reduce bias.

The results underscore the need for schools to implement preventive mental health programs targeting both social anxiety and academic burnout. Regular screening for emotional distress and burnout symptoms can help identify students at risk of school avoidance. Interventions such as cognitive-behavioral workshops, mindfulness training, and resilience-building programs may be particularly effective. Educators should also receive training to recognize signs of burnout and anxiety in students and respond with supportive rather than punitive measures. Additionally, fostering a positive and inclusive school climate, promoting student autonomy, and maintaining balanced academic expectations can reduce emotional strain and enhance students' capacity to remain engaged with their schooling.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this article.

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