

Differences in Social Loafing Among Guidance and Counseling Students Based on University Cohort

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	ABSTRACT
ARTICLE INFO: Received June 26, 2026 Revised July 17, 2026 Accepted July 24, 2026 KEYWORDS: Counselor, Social Loafing, Collaborative Learning, Cohort Analysis, Higher Education	Social loafing, the tendency of individuals to exert less effort in groups than independently, poses a significant challenge to collaborative learning in higher education. This study aimed to analyze and compare the levels of social loafing among Guidance and Counseling students at Universitas Negeri Padang based on their academic cohort (2024 and 2025). Utilizing a quantitative descriptive-comparative design, data were collected from 135 participants (66 from the 2024 cohort and 69 from the 2025 cohort) using a Social Loafing Scale based on Myers' theory. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and an independent samples t-test. The findings revealed that students' social loafing levels generally fell within the moderate category ($M = 17.727$, $SD = 2.763$). Descriptively, both cohorts exhibited low levels of social loafing; however, the 2024 cohort showed a significantly higher mean score ($M = 107.39$, $SD = 15.055$) than the 2025 cohort ($M = 89.67$, $SD = 16.942$). An independent samples t-test indicated that this difference was statistically significant, $t(df) = 133$, $p < 0.05$ (or $p = .000$). Responsibility diffusion was most prominent in the 2024 cohort, while passive attitudes characterized the 2025 cohort. These results suggest that academic seniority and group-work experience influence social loafing behavior. Consequently, lecturers and counselors should implement agentic guidance models and collaborative strategies to foster individual accountability and minimize social loafing in academic settings.

INTRODUCTION

University students are individuals who pursue higher education and serve as the primary recipients of educational services while also playing a crucial role in the development of academic quality. Students are regarded as agents of change who are expected to think critically, act responsibly, and contribute to future social transformation (Syukur et al., 2023). Developmentally, university students are in the transitional stage from late adolescence to early adulthood, characterized by increasing demands for maturity, independence, and the establishment of life commitments (Hawkins et al., 2009). Furthermore, Knorfmacher (as cited in Sihombing, 2020) argues that university students are prospective scholars who are educated to become intellectuals actively engaged with society. Therefore, students are expected to develop not only academically but also socially, emotionally, and personally in terms of responsibility across various academic activities.

As the main actors within the academic environment, university students bear greater responsibilities than those at previous educational levels. These responsibilities include active participation in all academic activities, including the completion of assignments as an integral part of the learning process (Wahyuningrum, 2024). In higher education settings, assignments are generally categorized into individual and group tasks. Individual assignments require independence, discipline, personal responsibility, time management skills, and the ability to think critically and analytically without relying on others (Fitriani et al., 2020). In contrast, group assignments emphasize cooperation, communication, collaboration, and the distribution of responsibilities among group members (Bandura et al., 1977; Nabavi & Bijandi, 2024).

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Group assignments have become one of the most frequently employed instructional methods in higher education. Group-based activities provide students with opportunities to collaborate within teams, enhance communication skills, and develop competencies in managing group dynamics (Panjaitan, 2019). Hall and Buzwell (2013) noted that most educators require students to complete assignments collaboratively as part of the teaching and learning process. This practice is based on the assumption that teamwork enhances learning quality and promotes deeper understanding compared to individual work. Group learning is also consistent with the principles of cooperative learning, which emphasize collaboration, shared responsibility, improved social relationships, and the development of students' self-esteem (Slavin et al., 2003).

Through group work, students are expected to develop communication skills, social adaptability, and active participation within team dynamics (Johnson et al., 2014). Group activities also provide opportunities for students to learn how to share responsibilities, appreciate differing perspectives, and achieve common goals effectively. Therefore, group assignments function not only as an academic assessment tool but also as a medium for fostering social skills and collective responsibility. However, the effectiveness of group work may not be fully achieved when some group members fail to participate actively.

In practice, group assignments frequently encounter obstacles related to inadequate participation and contribution from certain members. Passive attitudes, reluctance to engage, and tendencies to neglect group responsibilities often reduce the effectiveness of teamwork (Fitriana & Saloom, 2018). Some individuals even rely on other members to complete tasks that should be accomplished collectively (Wahyuni et al., 2022). Such conditions indicate an imbalance in workload distribution and a decline in collective responsibility, thereby limiting the achievement of learning objectives.

The phenomenon of reduced individual effort when working in groups is commonly known in social psychology as social loafing. Ringelmann (as cited in Augustin, 2022) described social loafing as the tendency of individuals to exert less effort when working collectively than when working alone. Similarly, Karau and Williams (2012) defined social loafing as a reduction in individual motivation and effort within group settings. Myers (2013) further explained that social loafing refers to the tendency of individuals to expend less effort while working in groups than when working independently toward a specific goal. This phenomenon is frequently observed in higher education, particularly in student group work.

A study by Lahopang (2025) revealed that one of the primary obstacles in student group assignments is the lack of contribution and concern among some group members, resulting in only a few students assuming dominant roles. Likewise, Piezon and Ferree (2008) reported that more than one-third of students perceived the presence of social loafers within their groups. Bestari (2022) found that most students exhibited a moderate level of social loafing, indicating that this phenomenon occurs relatively frequently in higher education group dynamics. Other findings suggest that many students have reduced their contributions during group work and relied on peers perceived as more competent to complete assignments (Fitriana, 2022).

Social loafing may hinder the achievement of group goals due to the reduced active contribution of certain members. Individuals who exhibit social loafing behavior often become burdens to the group by depending on others to fulfill collective responsibilities (Wirayudha et al., 2024). Steiner (as cited in Amichai-Hamburger, 2003) argued that group activities may result in process losses when individual potential is not fully utilized, thereby reducing overall group performance. Furthermore, diffusion of responsibility frequently occurs when individuals perceive their contributions as having little influence on group outcomes (Myers, 2013). Although this phenomenon often goes unnoticed, its consequences are reflected in unequal workload distribution and diminished collective responsibility (Maryam, 2019).

Limited participation and engagement among group members also influence motivation within collaborative settings. Active participation is a critical factor in successful teamwork and the achievement of shared objectives (Felder & Brent, 2009). Individuals who believe they can rely on others or perceive their contributions as insignificant are more likely to adopt passive attitudes and reduce their efforts during group work (Tosuntaş, 2020). When such conditions persist, the effectiveness of teamwork as a collaborative mechanism declines, leading to reduced group productivity. Previous studies have identified several factors contributing to social loafing, including the absence of individual performance evaluation, unclear task distribution, low group cohesiveness, and large group size (Harkins & Szymanski, 1989; Kugihara, 2010; Mudrack, 2014; North et al., 2014). These factors may strengthen individuals' tendencies to become passive and reduce their contributions, particularly when responsibilities are perceived as collective and individual accountability is not clearly monitored.

The negative consequences of social loafing affect both groups and individuals. At the group level, social loafing reduces effectiveness, productivity, and cohesiveness while generating dissatisfaction among actively contributing members (Ghaleba, 2024). Reduced motivation and effort in group work may also lead to lower group performance and poorer quality outcomes (Chidambaram & Tung, 2005; Ying et al., 2014). At the individual level, social loafing may result in feelings of guilt, shame, reduced self-esteem, and strained interpersonal relationships with other group members (Pratama & Wulanyani, 2018; Sari et al., 2024). Furthermore, individuals may lose valuable opportunities to develop collaboration, communication, and social responsibility skills (Fitriana, 2022).

Myers (2013) identified several dimensions of social loafing, including reduced individual motivation in groups, passive attitudes, diffusion of responsibility, free-riding behavior, and decreased awareness of evaluation by others. These dimensions indicate that social loafing is closely associated with motivation, engagement, and individuals' perceptions of contribution and responsibility within group settings. If left unaddressed, students may become increasingly dependent on others, demonstrate low initiative, and exhibit diminished responsibility toward group assignments.

Based on the foregoing discussion, social loafing remains a significant concern within student group-work dynamics. This condition is characterized by declining motivation, participation, responsibility, and individual contribution, all of which may undermine group effectiveness. From the perspective of Social Cognitive Theory, Bandura (2012) argued that human behavior is shaped by the reciprocal interaction of personal factors, behavior, and environmental influences. One important personal factor is self-agency, which refers to an individual's capacity to intentionally regulate thoughts, motivation, and actions in pursuit of desired goals (Bandura, 2006). Individuals with strong self-agency tend to be more active, responsible, and self-regulated in collaborative contexts.

In line with this perspective, one counseling approach that may contribute to reducing social loafing among university students is the agentic approach. This approach emphasizes the development of self-agency, namely individuals' capacity to act intentionally, take initiative, regulate their behavior, and assume responsibility for their decisions and actions (Bandura, 2006; Hariko, 2021). This perspective is also aligned with the broader objectives of Guidance and Counseling, which seek to facilitate students' optimal personal and social development, enhance their well-being, and strengthen communication and interpersonal competencies that support effective interactions and counseling processes (Hariko, 2016; Hariko, 2017).

The present study focuses on analyzing social loafing among Guidance and Counseling students at Universitas Negeri Padang based on cohort differences between the 2024 and 2025 academic intakes. Although previous studies have examined comparative differences, the current study aims to provide a comprehensive description of students' social loafing tendencies across cohorts. Furthermore, this study offers practical recommendations regarding guidance and counseling

services that counselors may implement to prevent the emergence of social loafing behavior in the future.

METHODS

Design

This study employed a quantitative approach using a descriptive-comparative research design. This design was selected to describe the level of social loafing among undergraduate students and to examine differences in social loafing based on student cohorts. The study specifically compared social loafing tendencies between Guidance and Counseling students at Universitas Negeri Padang from the 2024 and 2025 cohorts.

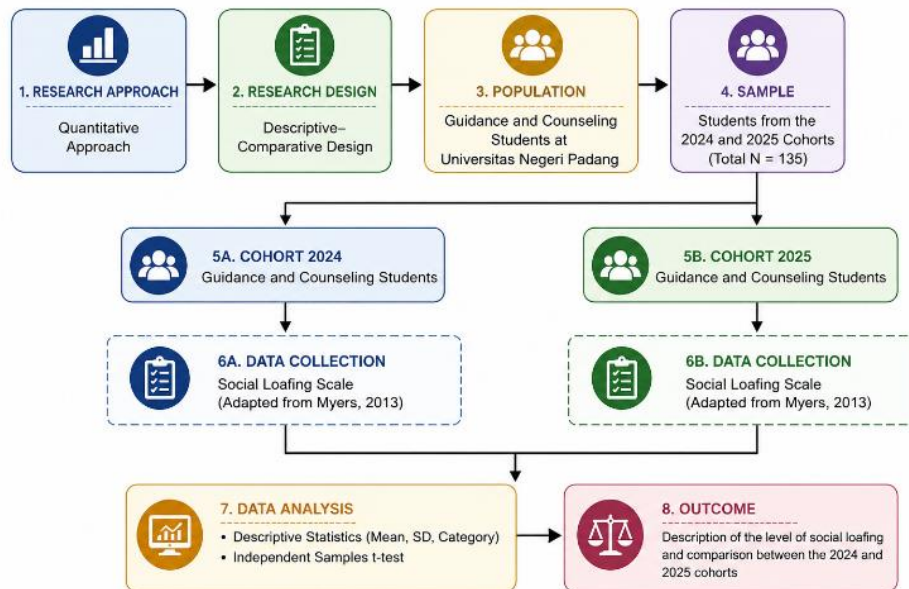


Figure 1. Research Design

Participants and Procedure

The participants of this study were 135 undergraduate students from the Guidance and Counseling Study Program at Universitas Negeri Padang, representing the 2024 and 2025 cohorts. Of the 66 students in the 2024 cohort, 16 were male, and 50 were female. The 2025 cohort consisted of 69 students, including 5 males and 64 females. The inclusion criteria were: (1) being officially enrolled as an active undergraduate student in the Guidance and Counseling Study Program at Universitas Negeri Padang, (2) belonging to the 2024 or 2025 cohort, and (3) providing informed consent to participate in the study.

Instruments

Research data were collected using the Social Loafing Scale developed based on the theory proposed by David G. Myers (Myers, 2013). The scale measures five dimensions of social loafing: (1) decreased individual motivation within a group, (2) passive behavior in group settings, (3) diffusion of responsibility, (4) free-riding on others' efforts, and (5) reduced awareness of evaluation by others. The instrument was constructed using a five-point Likert scale with five response alternatives. The results of the validity test using the Product-Moment Correlation indicated that 34 items were deemed valid and were used in the study. The reliability test using Cronbach's Alpha yielded a value of 0.819; the instrument was deemed reliable and suitable for use as a data collection tool.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to describe the level of social loafing among students by examining measures of central tendency and data dispersion. Furthermore, differences in social loafing levels between students from the 2024 and 2025 cohorts were examined using an independent samples t-test. All statistical analyses were performed using SPSS version 30.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

Data Distribution

The frequency distribution of respondents' scores on social loafing is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of Students' Social Loafing Scores (N = 135)

Category	Score Interval	Total f	Total %	2024 f	2024 %	2025 f	2025 %
Very High	144–170	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
High	117–143	23	17.04	16	24.24	7	10.14
Moderate	90–116	55	40.74	32	48.48	23	33.33
Low	63–89	54	40.00	18	27.27	36	52.17
Very Low	36–62	3	2.22	0	0.00	3	4.35
Total		135	100.00	66	100.00	69	100.00

Based on Table 1, the largest proportion of respondents was classified in the moderate category (40.74%), followed closely by the low category (40.00%). A total of 17.04% of respondents were categorized as having high levels of social loafing, whereas only 2.22% were classified in the very low category. No respondents were categorized in the very high category. Across cohorts, students from the 2024 cohort were predominantly classified in the moderate category (48.48%), whereas students from the 2025 cohort were more frequently classified in the low category (52.17%). Furthermore, a comparison of respondents' scores overall and by cohort, as presented in Table 1, is illustrated in Figure 2.

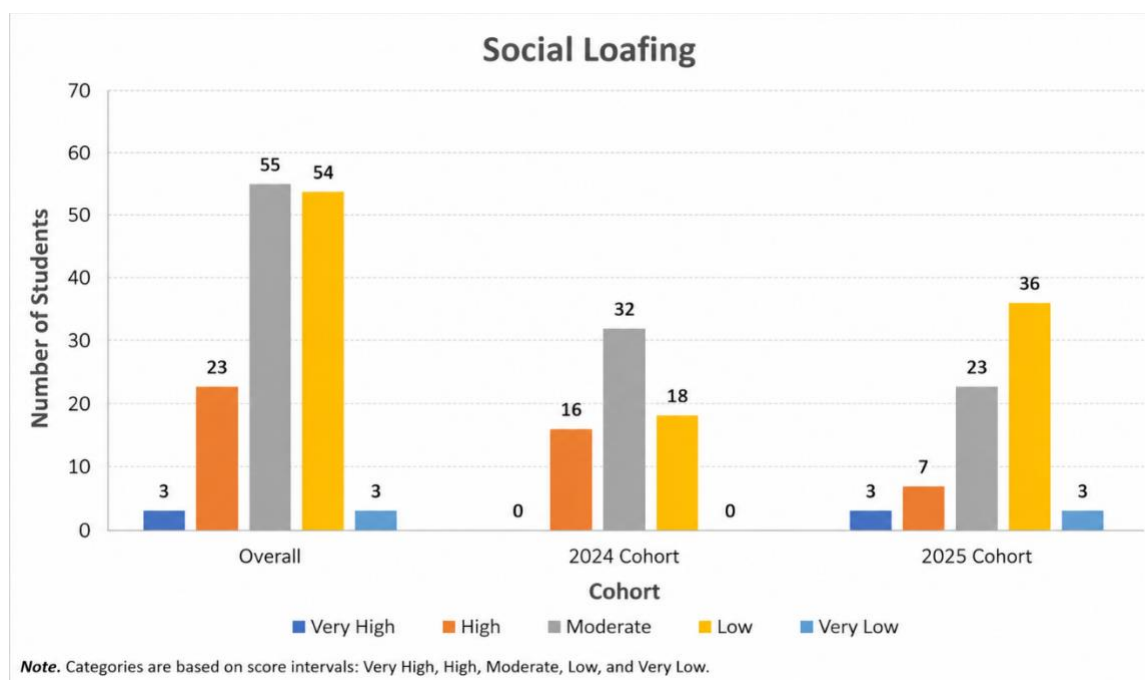


Figure 2. Graph of the Distribution of Social Loafing Levels Among Guidance and Counseling Students Overall and by Cohort (2024 and 2025).

Based on Figure 2, students of the Guidance and Counseling Study Program at Universitas Negeri Padang from the 2024 and 2025 cohorts generally exhibited social loafing levels that tended to fall within the moderate and low categories. Among students from the 2024 cohort, the highest percentage was found in the moderate category (23.70%), followed by the low category (13.33%) and the high category (11.85%). In contrast, students from the 2025 cohort showed the highest percentage in the low category (26.67%), followed by the moderate category (17.04%) and the high category (5.19%), while 2.22% were classified in the very low category.

To facilitate a descriptive interpretation of students' social loafing, Table 2 presents measures of central tendency (mean) and dispersion (standard deviation) for the overall variable and each social loafing dimension.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Social Loafing among Guidance and Counseling Students from the 2024 Cohort at Universitas Negeri Padang (n = 66)

No.	Dimension	Ideal Score	Max	Min	Mean	Achievement (%)	SD	Category
1	Declining individual motivation within the group	35	27	14	21	60.09	4	Moderate
2	Passive attitudes among group members	45	35	13	25	55.36	5	Moderate
3	Diffusion of responsibility	35	29	11	21	60.74	5	Moderate
4	Free-riding	30	28	13	20	66.77	3	Moderate
5	Decreased awareness of others' evaluations	25	25	10	15	59.64	4	Moderate
Overall		170	144	61	102	60.00	21	Moderate

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for the overall level of social loafing and its five dimensions among Guidance and Counseling students from the 2024 cohort. Overall, students demonstrated a moderate level of social loafing ($M = 102$, $SD = 21$), corresponding to an achievement level of 60.00% of the ideal score. Among the five dimensions, free-riding recorded the highest achievement level ($M = 20$, 66.77%, $SD = 3$), indicating that relying on other group members' efforts was the most prominent aspect of social loafing. This was followed by diffusion of responsibility ($M = 21$, 60.74%, $SD = 5$), declining individual motivation within the group ($M = 21$, 60.09%, $SD = 4$), decreased awareness of others' evaluations ($M = 15$, 59.64%, $SD = 4$), and passive attitudes among group members ($M = 25$, 55.36%, $SD = 5$), which showed the lowest achievement level among the five dimensions.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Social Loafing among Guidance and Counseling Students from the 2025 Cohort at Universitas Negeri Padang (n = 69)

No.	Dimension	Ideal Score	Max	Min	Mean	Achievement (%)	SD	Category
1	Declining individual motivation within the group	35	27	12	19	54.29	3	Moderate
2	Passive attitudes among group members	45	37	11	21	46.67	5	Moderate
3	Diffusion of responsibility	35	33	9	18	51.43	5	Moderate
4	Free-riding	30	30	10	19	63.33	5	Moderate
5	Decreased awareness of others' evaluations	25	19	5	12	48.00	3	Moderate
Overall		170	131	62	89	52.35	21	Low

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics of social loafing among Guidance and Counseling students from the 2025 cohort. Overall, students exhibited a low level of social loafing ($M = 89$, $SD = 21$), corresponding to 52.35% of the ideal score. Among the five dimensions, free-riding showed the highest achievement level ($M = 19$, 63.33%, $SD = 5$), indicating that relying on the efforts of other group members was the most pronounced aspect of social loafing. This was followed by declining

individual motivation within the group ($M = 19, 54.29\%, SD = 3$), diffusion of responsibility ($M = 18, 51.43\%, SD = 5$), decreased awareness of others' evaluations ($M = 12, 48.00\%, SD = 3$), and passive attitudes among group members ($M = 21, 46.67\%, SD = 5$), which recorded the lowest achievement level among the five dimensions.

A comparison of social loafing between Guidance and Counseling students from the 2024 and 2025 cohorts is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Comparison of Social Loafing Scores between Student Cohorts

Cohort	N	Mean	SD	SE
2024	66	107.39	15.055	1.853
2025	69	89.67	16.942	2.040

Table 4 presents the descriptive comparison of social loafing scores between Guidance and Counseling students from the 2024 and 2025 cohorts. The results indicate that students from the 2024 cohort obtained a higher mean social loafing score ($M = 107.39, SD = 15.06$) than those from the 2025 cohort ($M = 89.67, SD = 16.94$). This descriptive pattern suggests that social loafing tended to be more prevalent among students in the 2024 cohort. However, whether this observed difference is statistically significant should be determined through an inferential statistical analysis.

To test the research hypothesis, an Independent Samples *t*-test was conducted to examine differences in social loafing between students from the 2024 and 2025 cohorts. The results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Independent Samples *t*-Test Results for Social Loafing Based on Student Cohort

Cohort	n	Mean	SD	<i>t</i>	df	<i>p</i>	Mean Difference	95% CI
2024	66	107.39	15.06					
2025	69	89.67	16.94	6.416	133	< .001	17.727	[12.262, 23.192]

As presented in Table 5, Levene's test indicated that the assumption of homogeneity of variances was satisfied ($F = 0.394, p = .531$). Therefore, the equal variances assumed results were interpreted. The independent-samples *t*-test showed a statistically significant difference in social loafing between the 2024 and 2025 cohorts, $t(133) = 6.416, p < .001$. Students from the 2024 cohort ($M = 107.39, SD = 15.06$) reported significantly higher social loafing than those from the 2025 cohort ($M = 89.67, SD = 16.94$), with a mean difference of 17.73 points (95% CI [12.26, 23.19]).

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that the overall level of social loafing among Guidance and Counseling students is categorized as moderate. This finding indicates that effort-reduction behavior in group work is still observed among some students, although it has not yet reached a high level. This condition is reflected in the tendency of students to reduce motivation, exhibit passive attitudes within groups, diffuse responsibility, free-ride on the efforts of other members, and decrease awareness of individual evaluation. According to Myers (2013), social loafing is the tendency of individuals to exert less effort when working in groups compared to working individually. These findings suggest that group work in higher education still faces challenges in terms of suboptimal member engagement, so that the goals of collaborative learning have not been fully achieved.

This is consistent with research by Bestari et al. (2022), who found that the majority of students demonstrated moderate levels of social loafing in completing group assignments, with responsibility diffusion emerging as the highest category of social loafing among students. Similarly, the present findings indicate that responsibility diffusion is the highest aspect indicative of student social loafing. Karau and Williams (1993), through the Collective Effort Model, explain that individuals tend to reduce their effort when they perceive that their personal contribution is difficult to identify or does

not have a significant impact on the group's outcome. The presence of social loafing among students can be understood as a consequence of the perception that group success can still be achieved even if not all members contribute equally.

Based on the results of the difference test, the findings indicate a significant difference in the level of social loafing between students from the 2024 cohort and those from the 2025 cohort. Students from the 2024 cohort had a higher mean score of social loafing compared to those from the 2025 cohort. This finding suggests that the length of academic experience and involvement in various group assignments potentially influences the emergence of social loafing behavior among students. The longer students remain in an academic environment that demands group work, the greater the likelihood of behavioral patterns associated with reduced effort within groups. This is consistent with Bandura's (1986) social learning theory, in which individual behavior is influenced by experiences gained through interaction with the environment. Repeated experience in group work allows students to develop certain perceptions regarding individual contribution within a group. Through the process of observation and learning from previous experiences, students may conclude that group success does not always depend on the active contribution of every member.

When they repeatedly observe members who contribute minimally yet still receive the same outcomes and recognition as other members, the tendency to reduce personal effort in group tasks may progressively develop. The social impact theory proposed by Bibb Latané (1981) explains that when individuals continuously work in groups, personal responsibility tends to be distributed among other members (diffusion of responsibility), so that motivation to exert maximum effort may decline. This condition becomes increasingly likely when students have repeatedly been involved in group tasks and observe that group outcomes can still be achieved even when each member's contribution is unequal. If students repeatedly find that group assignments are completed without the active involvement of all members, passive behavior may be learned and maintained over time. According to the Theory of Reinforcement (Operant Conditioning) proposed by B. F. Skinner (1965), behavior that does not produce negative consequences or even yields benefits for the individual tends to be repeated and maintained. In the context of group assignments, students who continue to receive the same grades or recognition despite minimal contribution will be motivated to repeat such behavior in subsequent opportunities. Accordingly, the difference in social loafing levels between cohorts can be explained as the result of different accumulations of social and academic experiences.

Students from the 2024 cohort demonstrated higher levels of social loafing compared to those from the 2025 cohort. This condition can be explained through their longer academic experience in facing various group assignments throughout their studies. The more frequently individuals are involved in group work, the greater the likelihood that the perception emerges that group success does not entirely depend on personal contribution (Yasegnal & Tolla, 2025). As a result, motivation to exert maximum effort may decrease. Brickner, Harkins, and Szymanski (1986) argued that social loafing emerges when individual contributions cannot be clearly evaluated. Students who have spent more time in their academic studies likely have repeated exposure to a group work system that places insufficient emphasis on individual accountability. This condition may lead to the emergence of diffusion of responsibility, the tendency for individuals to perceive that responsibility has been distributed to other members, thereby reducing their personal effort (Demetre, 2024). Myers (2013) explains that responsibility diffusion is one of the primary characteristics of social loafing that frequently emerges in academic groups.

These findings indicate that some students tend to benefit from group work outcomes without providing proportional contributions. This condition is consistent with the free rider effect proposed by Bibb Latané (1979), namely the tendency of individuals to reduce their effort when they are confident that other members will still complete the group's work. Free-riding behavior among 2024 cohort students may be influenced by their longer experience in attending lectures and completing various group assignments compared to younger cohort students. Longer experience with various

group assignments enables them to recognize certain group work patterns for instance, the existence of members who consistently take dominant roles and bear responsibility for the majority of the work. This situation may generate the perception that the group can still achieve its goals even if personal contributions are reduced. Free-riding behavior emerges when individuals feel that the outcomes obtained do not directly depend on the effort they invest, so they choose to exploit the efforts of other members to achieve shared goals (Myers, 2013). Students from the 2024 cohort have generally studied together for a longer period, so group members are already familiar with each other's character, capabilities, and work habits. This finding is consistent with research by Maguire and Keceli (2023), who found that networks of recurring friends and colleagues may produce work that reflects only established group work routines, rather than a deep collective understanding of the task at hand.

Further analysis reveals that the tendency toward social loafing behavior among 2024 cohort students is also marked by increased responsibility diffusion, decreased individual motivation, reduced awareness of social evaluation, and the emergence of passive attitudes within groups. These findings indicate that social loafing behavior among students is not merely related to individual laziness, but rather represents a consequence of psychological dynamics that develop within group work. With respect to the aspect of responsibility diffusion, this is consistent with Social Impact Theory as proposed by Latané (1981), which explains that the larger the group, the more distributed the sense of responsibility felt by each individual, so that the personal burden to complete tasks is reduced. Myers (2013) affirms that diffusion of responsibility is a triggering mechanism for social loafing, and it is further emphasized that ambiguity in task distribution exacerbates responsibility diffusion, while group size and composition have been demonstrated to be significant antecedents of social loafing in higher education (Luo et al., 2021; Tosuntaş, 2020).

The decline in individual motivation is consistent with Karau and Williams' (1993) Collective Effort Model, which states that motivation decreases when individual contributions cannot be differentiated from those of other members; their meta-analysis confirms that social loafing is significantly reduced when tasks are meaningful and individual contributions are clearly identifiable a phenomenon that occurs across age, gender, and culture (Kugihara, 2010; Liu et al., 2024). The decline in awareness of evaluation is consistent with the Evaluation Potential Model (Karau & Williams, 1993), which holds that collective situations reduce the likelihood of individual effort being transparently assessed, so that individuals cannot be appreciated for good performance or corrected for poor performance a condition exacerbated when instructors focus more on the final group outcome than on each member's contribution, as confirmed in a study of 492 students that found individual identification and shared sense of responsibility significantly influenced cooperation within classroom groups (Wagner, in Piezon & Ferree, 2008). The passive attitude aspect, which is the lowest, indicates that students are still physically present but do not necessarily contribute proportionally; through the lens of Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, passive behavior may be learned and replicated when students repeatedly observe inactive members receiving equivalent outcomes. Puccini and Newell (2024), in the *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice*, reinforce that student social loafing is a complex phenomenon influenced by group dynamics and instructor assessment systems.

Students from the 2025 cohort demonstrated lower levels of social loafing compared to the 2024 cohort. This condition may be influenced by the characteristics of new students who are still in the process of adjusting to the university environment and possess relatively high academic motivation. This is consistent with a study involving 710 first-year students in Hong Kong, which found that socio-emotional and academic challenges were negatively associated with their ability to adjust to the university environment, making it a period of considerable challenge and pressure for new students (J. Li & Lee, 2025). The most critical transition occurs when students move from high school to university. During this transitional period, students need to adapt in response to various demands

and pressures from their new environment (Aini et al., 2024). First-year students tend to demonstrate greater enthusiasm in following learning activities and strive to build a positive academic image in the eyes of both instructors and peers. First-year students not only develop attitudes toward courses that are likely to shape their future engagement, but they also develop perceptions of themselves as students (Ribeiro et al., 2019). According to McClelland's (1987) achievement motivation theory, individuals with high achievement needs will demonstrate greater effort to attain success. Among new students, the need to obtain academic recognition and social acceptance remains relatively strong, so they tend to participate more actively in group assignments. Furthermore, the low level of social loafing in the 2025 cohort can also be explained through heightened awareness of social evaluation. Harkins (1987) explains that individuals will increase their effort when they feel their contribution can be observed and assessed by others.

Further analysis of 2025 cohort students reveals that passive attitudes within groups constitute the most significant trigger of individual social loafing in group settings. Passive attitudes in this finding do not merely indicate physical absence, but also encompass minimal initiative, low verbal engagement in discussions, and a tendency to wait for direction from other members without providing active contributions. Ringlemann's findings (in Forsyth, 2006) state that when a task allows group members to be anonymous that is, to remain in the background of group interactions and contribute in ways that are not conspicuous this condition produces social loafing and decreased productivity in group tasks. Research on postgraduate students in course assignment groups found that apathy and disruptive behavior were the primary antecedents that significantly affected the quality of group work, where apathy as a manifestation of passive attitudes was shown to undermine the quality of group outcomes both in groups formed by students themselves and those formed by instructors (Stouten & Liden, 2020).

This phenomenon can be explained through the concept of social disconnectedness proposed by Jassawalla et al. (2009), a condition in which individuals feel no emotional attachment or shared identity with their group members, thereby driving withdrawal from active participation. Luo et al. (2021), through a mixed-methods approach, identified apathy as one of six primary causal factors of social loafing among students, where members who lack interest in the task tend to significantly reduce their effort, a condition exacerbated by weak emotional relationships and an underdeveloped collective identity within the group. Among 2025 cohort students who have just entered the university environment, social bonds and collective identity among group members have not yet been fully established, so the tendency toward passive behavior becomes more likely to emerge even when individual academic motivation remains relatively high.

Implication

The findings of this study have important implications for collaborative learning in higher education, particularly in Guidance and Counseling programs. Since social loafing is influenced by both individual and group-related factors, instructors should strengthen individual accountability through contribution-based assessment, such as peer evaluation, individual reflection, and contribution tracking, to ensure that each member's effort is identifiable (Karau & Williams, 1993). In addition, smaller group sizes, rotating group membership, and clearly assigned roles may reduce diffusion of responsibility and free-riding (Latané, 1981; Luo et al., 2021; Tosuntaş, 2020). For first-year students, structured collaborative learning accompanied by regular feedback and self- and peer assessment can foster active participation and prevent passive group norms from developing (McKay & Sridharan, 2023). At the institutional level, the differing social loafing profiles across cohorts indicate that group-work policies should be adapted to students' developmental and academic experiences rather than applying uniform approaches. This implication is consistent with the fundamental purpose of Guidance and Counseling, which is to facilitate students' optimal personal and social development and promote their well-being, while also emphasizing the development of

communication and interpersonal competencies that underpin effective counseling practice (Hariko, 2016, 2017).

Limitation

This study has several limitations. First, the sample was drawn from a single Guidance and Counseling program at one university, limiting the generalizability of the findings to other disciplines and institutional contexts. Second, the cross-sectional design does not permit conclusions about causal relationships or changes in social loafing over time. Third, reliance on self-report measures may have introduced social desirability bias. Finally, the study did not examine contextual factors (e.g., group composition, task characteristics, and assessment practices) or individual factors (e.g., personality, intrinsic motivation, and prior group-work experience), all of which have been identified as important predictors of social loafing (Luo et al., 2021; Tosuntaş, 2020). Future studies should employ longitudinal designs, include more diverse samples, use multiple assessment methods, and incorporate both contextual and individual variables to provide a more comprehensive understanding of social loafing in higher education.

CONCLUSION

The findings indicate that the overall level of social loafing among Guidance and Counseling students at Universitas Negeri Padang falls within the moderate category. Although both the 2024 and 2025 cohorts are descriptively categorized as having low levels of social loafing, students from the 2024 cohort exhibit significantly higher social loafing than those from the 2025 cohort. Responsibility diffusion emerged as the most prominent dimension among the 2024 cohort, whereas passive attitudes within group work were more dominant among the 2025 cohort. The significant difference between cohorts suggests that academic experience and engagement in collaborative learning may influence the development of social loafing. Future research should investigate additional factors, such as self-efficacy, group cohesiveness, achievement motivation, and individual accountability, while employing mixed methods approaches and broader samples across study programs or universities to improve the generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, lecturers and university counselors are encouraged to design collaborative learning strategies and guidance interventions that strengthen individual accountability, active participation, and meaningful contribution within group work to minimize social loafing among students.

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