

Social Anxiety in Early Adulthood in Developing Social Interactions on Campus: A Case Study of the Islamic Guidance and Counseling Study Program

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the forms of social anxiety, the factors that influence it, and its impact on students' ability to build interpersonal relationships in the Islamic Guidance and Counseling Study Program at the State Islamic University of North Sumatra. The study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design. Participants consisted of eight students aged 19–23 who were selected using purposive sampling. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation, then analyzed using thematic analysis with triangulation techniques to ensure data validity. The results show that social anxiety is manifested in the form of physiological symptoms (heart racing, sweaty hands, and tense body), cognitive and behavioral symptoms such as fear of negative evaluation, overthinking, low self-confidence, and a tendency to avoid social interactions. Social anxiety is influenced by internal factors, including an introverted personality, insecurity, and low self-efficacy, as well as external factors like adapting to campus life, negative social experiences, and cultural or language barriers. Its impact is seen in students' difficulties in starting interactions, participating in academic activities, and building interpersonal relationships, although most are able to adapt as social support and positive experiences on campus increase. The novelty of this study lies in revealing the contextual form of social anxiety, including cross-cultural communication barriers and anxiety in interactions based on perceived social status, and emphasizing that social anxiety affects the quantity of interactions more than the quality of interpersonal relationships that are successfully built. These findings have implications for developing counseling and guidance services at universities that focus on improving students' communication skills, peer support, and social adaptability.

Keywords: *College Students, Early Adulthood, Interpersonal Relationships, Social Anxiety, Social Interaction.*

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INTRODUCTION

Early adulthood is a stage of development marked by increasing demands to build interpersonal relationships, develop self-identity, and adapt to a new social environment. For college students, the university setting becomes an important place to develop communication skills, teamwork, and social networks (Mardiyah, Hariadi, Zega, & Andhira, 2025). However, not all students are able to adjust optimally. Some students experience social anxiety, which is a condition marked by excessive fear, worry, and concern about others' judgment when in social situations (Kainaat, Wajid, Ullah, & Raza, 2024). This condition can hinder students' participation in discussions, presentations, as well as academic and organizational activities.

Social anxiety has become one of the common psychological problems among college students due to increasingly complex academic and social demands. Social anxiety can lower self-confidence, communication skills, and the quality of interpersonal relationships, even affecting psychological well-being and academic performance. Various factors, such as low self-esteem, negative experiences in social interactions, and academic pressure, also contribute to the emergence of social anxiety in early adulthood (Hidayah, Winingsih, & Naqiyah, 2025).

This phenomenon is also found among students in the Islamic Guidance and Counseling Study Program (BPI) at UIN Sumatera Utara. As future counselors and religious educators, students are expected to have interpersonal communication skills, empathy, and the courage to interact with various community groups. However, there are still students who feel nervous when giving presentations, reluctant to share their opinions in class, avoid interacting with lecturers or peers, and worry about receiving negative judgment from their environment. This situation has the potential to hinder the development of both academic and professional competencies, which are the main goals of education in the BPI Study Program.

Even though a lot of research has been done on social anxiety among university students, studies that specifically describe the experiences of students in the Islamic Guidance and Counseling program at UIN Sumatera Utara in forming social interactions on campus are still limited. Therefore, this study is important to understand the types of social anxiety students experience, the factors that influence it, and its impact on social interactions on campus. The results of the research are expected to serve as a basis for developing more effective guidance and counseling services to improve students' social skills and professional readiness.

Previous research (Syihabudin, Muslihah, & Ayubi, 2023; Rizkia, Balqhisa, & Mardiyah, 2025) Research on social anxiety in college students generally focuses on measuring the level of anxiety using a quantitative approach and examining its relationship with variables such as self-confidence, communication skills, social media use, psychological well-being, and academic achievement. Although this provides an overview of the level and causes of social anxiety, the studies still tend to explain the phenomenon in general and have not much explored students' subjective experiences in dealing with social anxiety when interacting in the campus environment. In addition, (Najich, Rahman, Atmoko, Kaserero, & Dewanti, 2024; Gunawan, Lastri, & Aulia, 2025) which is specifically done on students of the Islamic Guidance and Counseling Study Program (BPI) is still very limited, even though they are being prepared as prospective counselors and advisors who are required to have interpersonal communication skills and the ability to build good social relationships.

Based on these conditions, this study has a novelty in its focus, which deeply examines the social anxiety experiences of early adult students in the context of social interactions on campus through a case study approach in the Islamic Guidance and Counseling Study Program at UIN North Sumatra. This research not only identifies the forms and contributing factors of social

anxiety but also reveals how this anxiety affects students' academic and social interactions, as well as its implications for developing professional competencies as future counselors and Islamic educators. Thus, this study is expected to enrich the field of developmental psychology and Islamic counseling while also serving as a basis for developing more contextual guidance and counseling services for college students.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive qualitative design. A qualitative approach was chosen because the research aims to deeply understand the subjective experiences, perceptions, and meanings built by early adult students regarding social anxiety in interacting within the campus environment. Through this approach, the researcher can explore participants' psychological realities in a comprehensive and contextual manner, including feelings of fear of being judged, discomfort when communicating, tendencies to avoid social situations, and their impact on interpersonal relationships in the academic setting. These aspects cannot always be fully explained through quantitative data alone since they relate to personal experiences and the subjective meanings held by each individual (Creswell, 2018).

A qualitative descriptive design is used to systematically describe the phenomenon of social anxiety based on participants' experiences and perspectives, without manipulating the research variables. In this study, this design is used to describe the forms of social anxiety experienced by early adult students, the factors behind it, how students make sense of these experiences, and its impact on social interaction patterns on campus. Therefore, the research not only focuses on the symptoms of social anxiety but also on the social and academic contexts that shape students' experiences in interacting with peers, lecturers, and the broader campus environment (Aspers & Corte, 2021).

The research subjects consisted of eight active students who were in the early adulthood stage, with ages ranging from 19–23 years old. Participants were chosen using purposive sampling, which is a technique of deliberately selecting informants based on criteria relevant to the research objectives. Participant criteria included students who felt anxious when interacting with others, felt uncomfortable in social situations on campus, tended to withdraw from social circles, or avoided activities that involved direct communication and social interaction. The number of eight participants was considered sufficient because the research focused on data depth and diversity of experiences, rather than statistical generalization. Data collection was stopped when the information obtained showed recurring patterns and no longer produced significantly new themes (Alnemr, et al., 2024).

The characteristics of the participants show that the study involved four female students and four male students. The respondents had varied experiences with social anxiety, ranging from anxiety during the early transition to college, anxiety when giving presentations and expressing opinions, traumatic experiences from having their opinions dismissed in discussions, anxiety when interacting with the opposite sex perceived to have high value or status, experiencing physiological symptoms in social situations, to difficulties in adjusting as transfer students moving from Malaysia to Indonesia. Additionally, some participants felt nervous when doing public speaking, anxious when interacting in class and study groups, as well as anxiety in everyday casual socializing. To maintain confidentiality, all participants are presented using initials or pseudonyms (Sugiyono, 2022).

Table 1. Characteristics of Early Adult Student Respondents

Initials/Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Primary Characteristics/Background
RA	19 years	Female	Experiences anxiety during the transition into university life and while adjusting to the new campus environment.
NK	20 years	Female	Experiences anxiety when delivering presentations and expressing opinions in front of others.
HM	20 years	Male	Previously experienced having his opinions dismissed during discussions, leading him to become more passive in classroom interactions.
FR	21 years	Male	Experiences anxiety when interacting with members of the opposite sex who are perceived to have higher social status or greater personal value.
NA	22 years	Female	Experiences physiological symptoms in social situations and tends to be passive when initiating interactions.
DA	23 years	Female	A transfer student from Malaysia to Indonesia who faces challenges in adapting socially and culturally to the new university environment.
CR	20 years	Male	Experiences nervousness during public speaking and anxiety when interacting in classroom settings and study groups.
FS	23 years	Male	Experiences anxiety in everyday casual social interactions, particularly when initiating or maintaining conversations.

Data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation. In-depth interviews were used to explore participants' experiences, feelings, perceptions, and strategies in dealing with social anxiety on campus. Participatory observation was conducted to get a sense of participants' behavior in social interaction situations, such as attending classes, discussing, communicating with friends, or engaging in campus organization activities. Meanwhile, documentation was used as supporting data that could strengthen the results of interviews and observations, such as field notes, interview recordings, and other documents relevant to the research focus.

The data analysis in this study used thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was chosen because it helps researchers identify, analyze, and report patterns of meaning or themes that emerge from qualitative data in a systematic way. The analysis process is carried out in six stages: (1) familiarization with the data, (2) initial coding, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) compiling the analysis report. Data from interviews, observations, and documentation were analyzed repeatedly to find the main themes that explain early adult students' social anxiety experiences in building social interactions on campus (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

The validity of the data is maintained through technique triangulation, which means comparing and confirming data obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation. The researcher also does member checking by confirming the summary of interview results or initial

interpretations with the participants to make sure that the data and meanings interpreted match their experiences. Additionally, the researcher keeps field notes and an audit trail throughout the data collection and analysis process to improve traceability and the credibility of the research findings (Moleong, 2024).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Forms of Social Anxiety Among Students in the Islamic Guidance and Counseling Study Program Environment at UINSU

The observation results indicate that students of the Islamic Guidance and Counseling Study Program at Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara who experience social anxiety exhibit various manifestations across physiological, cognitive, behavioral, academic, and interpersonal domains. Physiologically, most students display bodily responses such as increased heart rate, cold sweating, muscle tension, and heightened alertness when speaking in front of the class, delivering presentations, or interacting with large groups of people. These physical reactions generally occur in situations perceived as involving a high risk of being evaluated by others.

From a cognitive and behavioral perspective, students tend to demonstrate excessive concern about receiving negative evaluations (fear of negative evaluation). This condition is reflected in excessive thinking (overthinking) before speaking, low self-confidence in expressing opinions, and a tendency to remain silent during classroom discussions. Several students preferred confirming their answers with classmates before responding to questions from lecturers or discussion participants because they feared making mistakes. Furthermore, previous experiences of having their opinions criticized or rejected caused some students to become more passive and avoid active participation in group discussions.

The observations also revealed variations in the manifestation of social anxiety depending on the interactional context. Some students experienced greater anxiety in academic settings, particularly when giving presentations, speaking in front of the class, or answering lecturers' questions. In contrast, others experienced greater difficulty in everyday social interactions, such as initiating conversations with unfamiliar people, developing friendships, or adjusting to the social environment on campus. Additionally, some students experienced social anxiety when interacting with members of the opposite sex who were perceived as having higher social status or greater personal value. Consequently, these students tended to become overly concerned with maintaining a favorable self-image, felt inferior, and avoided initiating interactions.

The observations further identified context-specific forms of social anxiety. One example involved students from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds who encountered difficulties communicating fluently in Indonesian within the campus environment. These limitations generated feelings of nervousness, fear of choosing inappropriate words, and concern about being negatively evaluated by their peers. Moreover, some students tended to avoid interacting with individuals perceived as having higher social status because they felt incapable of presenting themselves in a desirable manner. These observational findings were consistent with the interview results, which are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Interview Results on the Manifestations of Social Anxiety in Establishing Social Interactions within the Campus Environment

Informant	Interview Findings
RA (19 years old, Female)	<i>"Since entering university, I have found it difficult to adjust to new classmates. During discussions, I often worry that my opinions are wrong or irrelevant."</i>

Informant	Interview Findings
	<i>As a result, I prefer to remain silent rather than speak and risk being judged negatively by others."</i>
NK (20 years old, Female)	<i>"Even though I prepare thoroughly for presentations, I still feel nervous. When lecturers or classmates ask questions, I often know the answer, but I prefer to confirm it with my group members first because I'm afraid my answer might be wrong and make others think I'm not competent."</i>
HM (20 years old, Male)	<i>"I once shared my opinion during a discussion, but it was immediately dismissed. Since then, I have become less confident. Now, I usually remain silent during discussions because I'm afraid my opinions will be rejected again."</i>
FR (21 years old, Male)	<i>"I'm not particularly anxious when interacting with my regular friends. However, when I have to talk to women whom I perceive as more intelligent or more attractive, I immediately feel inferior. I become overly self-conscious and usually don't dare to initiate a conversation."</i>
NA (22 years old, Female)	<i>"Whenever I have to speak in front of the class or meet many people, my heart beats faster, my hands become sweaty, and my body feels tense. Because of that, I prefer not to speak much and only do so when I'm specifically asked."</i>
DA (23 years old, Female)	<i>"I'm from Malaysia, so when I first started studying here, I still had difficulty using Indonesian appropriately. I was afraid of choosing the wrong words or that my accent would sound unusual. As a result, I often felt nervous during presentations and sometimes mixed Malay with Indonesian to make myself easier to understand."</i>
CR (20 years old, Male)	<i>"The situations that make me most anxious are giving presentations or speaking in front of the class. Before presenting, I often feel nervous, worry that I'll forget the material, and fear that my classmates will judge my performance negatively."</i>
FS (23 years old, Male)	<i>"I can usually follow classroom discussions without much difficulty. What I find challenging is initiating conversations with people I've just met. I often don't know how to start and worry that the conversation will become awkward or that the other person won't be interested in talking to me."</i>

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that social anxiety among students of the Islamic Guidance and Counseling Study Program at Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara manifests in various forms, including physiological symptoms (such as rapid heartbeat, sweaty hands, and muscle tension), cognitive and behavioral symptoms characterized by fear of negative evaluation, overthinking, low self-confidence, and a tendency to withdraw from social interactions. These symptoms occur most frequently in situations involving evaluation by others, such as classroom presentations, discussions, and initiating relationships with unfamiliar individuals. Furthermore, contextual forms of social anxiety were identified, including communication barriers resulting from differences in language and cultural background, as well as anxiety when interacting with members of the opposite sex who were perceived as having higher social status. Overall, the findings suggest that students' social anxiety is influenced by previous social experiences, self-perceptions, and the demands of the academic environment, all of which affect the quality of their social interactions and participation in campus life.

Factors That Affect Social Anxiety in Social Interactions on Campus

The observation findings indicate that social anxiety among students of the Islamic Guidance and Counseling Study Program at Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara is influenced by a combination of internal and external factors that interact with one another. These factors do not operate independently; rather, they reinforce each other and shape how students respond to various social situations within the university environment, particularly when interacting with lecturers, peers, and participating in academic activities.

Regarding internal factors, the observations revealed that personality characteristics are among the primary contributors to social anxiety. Several students with introverted personality traits appeared to have greater difficulty adapting to busy social environments, preferred interacting in small groups, and became easily fatigued when engaging in prolonged social activities. In addition, low self-confidence and feelings of insecurity were reflected in students' tendencies to doubt their own abilities, compare themselves with peers whom they perceived as more competent, and feel less worthy of expressing their opinions in academic settings. These conditions were further reinforced by a pattern of overthinking, characterized by excessive concern about the possibility of receiving negative evaluations before, during, and after social interactions. Consequently, students became more cautious, hesitant, and often chose to avoid situations requiring direct communication.

Regarding external factors, the observations showed that the transition to university life was one of the main triggers of social anxiety, particularly among first-year students. Changes in the social environment, the need to establish new relationships, and the reduction of social support from previous environments made it difficult for some students to adjust. Furthermore, unpleasant social experiences such as being criticized, rejected, or having their opinions dismissed during classroom discussions also contributed to developing a fear of participating in future social interactions. These experiences caused students to become more passive, reluctant to express their opinions, and more likely to seek reassurance or validation from friends before speaking in front of others. The observational findings were consistent with the interview results, which are presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Interview Findings on the Factors Influencing Social Anxiety in Social Interactions within the University Environment

Informant	Interview Findings
RA (19 years old, Female)	<i>"When I first entered university, I felt that everyone already had their own groups, while I didn't know anyone. I've always been rather quiet, so it took me a long time to adjust. Because I constantly worried that I wouldn't be accepted or that people would think I was strange, I preferred to stay silent rather than initiate conversations."</i>
NK (20 years old, Female)	<i>"I often feel that my classmates are smarter and more fluent in speaking than I am. Even though I study before giving a presentation, I still doubt my own abilities. Whenever someone asks me a question, I usually confirm my answer with a friend first because I'm afraid of making a mistake and being judged as less capable."</i>
HM (20 years old, Male)	<i>"Once, during a class discussion, I expressed my opinion, but it was immediately dismissed. Since then, I've been afraid to speak again. I feel that if I express my opinion, the outcome will be the same, so it's better to remain silent than to be disappointed."</i>

Informant	Interview Findings
FR (21 years old, Male)	<i>"I can communicate well with my regular friends. However, when I meet women whom I perceive as more intelligent or having better qualities, I immediately feel inferior. I often compare myself with them, and as a result, I don't have the confidence to initiate a conversation because I'm afraid of being judged negatively."</i>
NA (22 years old, Female)	<i>"I tend to overthink things. Before speaking, I already imagine making mistakes, being laughed at, or having people dislike what I say. Those thoughts make me nervous, so I usually choose not to speak much."</i>
DA (23 years old, Female)	<i>"Moving from Malaysia to Indonesia required me to adapt to many things, especially the language and communication style. I often worried that my accent or choice of words would sound unusual. Because of that, I became less confident about speaking in front of the class or initiating conversations with new friends."</i>
CR (20 years old, Male)	<i>"What usually makes me nervous is the fear of making mistakes while speaking in front of the class. I often imagine giving a poor presentation or receiving negative evaluations from my classmates. Those thoughts make me even more anxious before presenting."</i>
FS (23 years old, Male)	<i>"I'm not someone who easily becomes familiar with new people. If I don't really know someone, I don't know how to start a conversation. I'm afraid the situation will become awkward or that the other person won't feel comfortable talking to me, so I usually wait for the other person to initiate the conversation."</i>

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that social anxiety among students of the Islamic Guidance and Counseling Study Program at Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara is influenced by the interaction of internal and external factors. Internal factors include introverted personality traits, low self-confidence, feelings of insecurity, and a tendency to overthink, all of which make students more sensitive to the possibility of negative evaluation by others. External factors include the process of adapting to the university environment, negative social experiences such as criticism or rejection, and cultural and linguistic challenges that hinder social interaction. The combination of these factors leads students to avoid social situations, participate less actively in academic activities, and experience difficulties in establishing interpersonal relationships within the university environment.

Social Anxiety Affects Students' Ability to Build Interpersonal Relationships

The observation findings indicate that social anxiety affects the ability of students in the Islamic Guidance and Counseling Study Program at Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara to develop interpersonal relationships, particularly during the initial stage of adapting to university life. Students experiencing social anxiety tended to have difficulty initiating conversations, introducing themselves, and establishing friendships with new peers. As a result, their social interactions became more limited, causing the formation of friendship networks to develop more slowly. In addition, several students were often perceived as quiet, unfriendly, distant, or uninterested in socializing, even though these behaviors were actually forms of avoidance resulting from anxiety in social situations.

The observations also revealed that social anxiety does not necessarily hinder students' overall ability to establish interpersonal relationships. Some students were still able to develop meaningful relationships once they found peers who shared similar interests, values, or provided a sense of comfort and acceptance. Under these circumstances, students became more open in communication, more confident in expressing their opinions, and more capable of developing close and meaningful friendships. These findings suggest that social anxiety has a greater impact on the quantity of social interactions than on the quality of the relationships that students are able to build.

Furthermore, the observations demonstrated that students' interpersonal relationship skills improved as they gradually adapted to the university environment. After spending some time attending classes, many students showed increased self-confidence, greater ability to regulate their anxiety, and more willingness to interact with both peers and lecturers. Supportive friendships, increased familiarity with the campus environment, and the ability to engage in self-reflection and emotional regulation were identified as important factors that facilitated students' adjustment, enabling social anxiety to become less of a barrier to social interaction.

On the other hand, the observations also indicated that the impact of social anxiety is context-specific and does not necessarily affect every aspect of interpersonal relationships. One student from a different cultural and linguistic background experienced anxiety when speaking in formal academic settings, such as delivering classroom presentations, because of limited proficiency in the Indonesian language. However, this condition did not interfere with the student's ability to establish friendships outside the classroom. This finding suggests that social anxiety among university students may emerge only in specific situations, and its influence on interpersonal relationships depends on the social context as well as the individual's capacity to adapt. The observational findings were consistent with the interview data, which are presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Interview Findings on the Influence of Social Anxiety on the Ability to Build Interpersonal Relationships within the University Environment

Informant	Interview Findings
RA (19 years old, Female)	<i>"When I first started university, it was very difficult for me to make friends because I was shy and afraid that other people would not feel comfortable around me. As a result, I often remained silent. After a few months, as I got to know my classmates better, I gradually felt more comfortable and became more confident in interacting with them."</i>
NK (20 years old, Female)	<i>"I'm able to talk a lot and have discussions with friends I'm already close to. However, when meeting someone new, I still feel awkward and worry about saying the wrong thing, so I usually wait for them to start the conversation."</i>
HM (20 years old, Male)	<i>"Ever since my opinion was dismissed during a discussion, I've preferred to stay quiet. My classmates sometimes think I'm indifferent or unwilling to socialize, but in reality, I'm afraid that my opinions won't be appreciated again."</i>
FR (21 years old, Male)	<i>"My anxiety causes me to miss opportunities to get to know new people, especially women whom I perceive as more intelligent or having better qualities. I want to introduce myself, but my feelings of inferiority make me change my mind."</i>

NA (22 years old, Female)	<i>"At first, I found it very difficult to start conversations because I was always nervous. However, after becoming more comfortable with my classmates and the classroom environment, I gradually became more confident in speaking, even though I still sometimes feel anxious."</i>
DA (23 years old, Female)	<i>"I still feel nervous when giving presentations because my Indonesian is not yet fluent. However, outside the classroom, I don't have difficulty making friends. I can still chat, study together, and build good relationships with my classmates."</i>
CR (20 years old, Male)	<i>"Feeling nervous during presentations sometimes makes me less confident. However, after participating in more classroom activities, I gradually became accustomed to them, making it easier for me to communicate and collaborate with my group members."</i>
FS (23 years old, Male)	<i>"I don't have many friends because I find it difficult to initiate conversations. However, once I feel comfortable with someone, I can become very open. I'd rather have a few close friends than many acquaintances with only superficial relationships."</i>

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that social anxiety influences the ability of students in the Islamic Guidance and Counseling Study Program at Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara to establish interpersonal relationships, particularly during the early stages of university life. Students tend to experience difficulties initiating interactions, introducing themselves, and forming friendships, resulting in more limited social interactions. However, as students adapt to the university environment, receive support from their peers, and develop greater self-confidence, most are able to reduce their social anxiety and build stronger interpersonal relationships. The findings also indicate that social anxiety affects the quantity of social interactions more than the quality of the relationships that are formed. In some cases, social anxiety is confined to specific academic situations and does not interfere with students' ability to establish meaningful social relationships in their everyday lives.

Discussion

Forms of Social Anxiety Among College Students

The research results show that social anxiety in students of the Islamic Guidance and Counseling Study Program at UIN North Sumatra is manifested through physiological, cognitive, and behavioral aspects, as well as in academic and interpersonal contexts. Physiological manifestations such as a racing heart, sweaty hands, tense body, and increased alertness when speaking in public indicate an anxiety response triggered by evaluative situations. These findings are consistent with the results (Suryaningrum, 2021) which explains that students with social anxiety generally experience high physiological activation when in situations that put them in the spotlight, such as presentations, class discussions, or speaking in front of a group. Likewise, (Iskandar, Mesiono, & Sit, 2025) found that public speaking anxiety is one of the most common forms of social anxiety experienced by students because it relates to the fear of judgment and social evaluation. This was seen in informants NK, CR, and NA who experienced physical symptoms before giving a presentation or speaking in front of the class.

In terms of cognitive and behavioral aspects, the research results show that fear of negative evaluation is the most dominant form of anxiety. Students tend to overthink, doubt their abilities, avoid speaking, and engage in safety behaviors, such as asking friends for confirmation before

answering questions. These findings reinforce the research (Khoiriyah, Mu'is, & Mukaffan, 2024) which explains that fear of negative evaluation is a major predictor of the emergence of social anxiety symptoms in college students. Individuals who have a high fear of negative evaluation will more often avoid social interactions and choose to stay silent as a strategy to reduce the chances of receiving criticism. Research (Dhulfiqaar, 2025) It also explains that the tendency for post-event processing and rumination makes individuals keep thinking about mistakes that might happen before or after interacting, so social anxiety continues to persist. This condition can be seen in informants RA, NK, and HM, who always feel afraid of speaking wrongly and choose to avoid discussions because they are worried about getting negative judgments from friends or lecturers.

This study also found that social anxiety among students varies depending on the interaction context. Some students mainly feel anxious in academic situations, like giving presentations or answering questions from professors, while others struggle when trying to start social relationships with new people or when interacting with the opposite sex perceived to have a higher social status. These findings support previous research results (Achour, Souici, Bensaid, Zaki, & Alnahari, 2021) which states that social anxiety doesn't always show up in every social situation, but can be specific depending on individual experiences, perception of social threats, and the characteristics of the environment faced. In this study, the informant FR showed that anxiety increases when having to interact with the opposite sex who are considered to have higher qualities. This condition indicates a tendency to compare oneself (social comparison) and worry about the image of oneself presented to others, so students choose to avoid interaction as a form of self-protection.

Another interesting finding is the emergence of social anxiety influenced by cultural and language factors. Students from Malaysia have difficulty using Indonesian smoothly, so they worry that their accent and choice of words will be judged negatively by the campus environment. These results are in line with previous research (Syafii & Azhari, 2025) This explains that students with different language backgrounds tend to experience communication anxiety because of low confidence in using a second language. Language barriers not only affect public speaking skills but also increase worries about social acceptance in a new environment. Therefore, social anxiety in this study is influenced not just by psychological factors but also by the cultural adjustment process that students go through.

Overall, the results of this study reinforce previous findings that social anxiety in college students is a multidimensional phenomenon involving physiological, cognitive, behavioral, and social aspects. However, this study provides a more specific empirical contribution by showing that the manifestations of social anxiety in students of the Islamic Guidance and Counseling Study Program at UIN North Sumatra are influenced not only by fear of negative evaluation, but also by experiences of rejection in discussions, cultural and language differences, as well as perceptions of social status in interpersonal relationships. These findings expand on previous research that generally only focused on presentation anxiety or academic communication. Thus, this study emphasizes that social anxiety in students training to be counselors and advisors needs to be understood more contextually so that guidance and counseling services at universities can be designed to meet students' needs, whether in developing communication skills, boosting confidence, or strengthening social adaptability in the academic environment.

Factors That Affect Social Anxiety in Social Interactions on Campus

Research results show that social anxiety among students in the Islamic Guidance and Counseling Study Program at UIN North Sumatra is influenced by the interaction between internal and external factors that reinforce each other. Internal factors include personality traits, low self-confidence, feelings of insecurity, and a tendency to overthink, while external factors cover adaptation to the campus environment, negative social experiences, as well as cultural and language differences. These findings are in line with the results (Liu, Guo, & Xu, 2023) which states that social anxiety in college students is a multidimensional phenomenon influenced by biological, psychological, and social environmental factors all at once. Thus, social anxiety doesn't just appear because of individual characteristics, but also develops through social experiences encountered during the college education process.

On the internal factors, this study found that students with introverted personality tendencies are more prone to social anxiety because they feel uncomfortable in crowded social situations and prefer interacting in small groups. Additionally, low self-confidence and feelings of insecurity make students often compare their abilities with others, leading to hesitation in participating in academic activities. These findings support the research (Alnemr, et al., 2024) which explains that individuals with a negative self-perception tend to rate their social abilities lower than they actually are, making them more likely to feel anxious in evaluative situations. This condition is seen in informants NK and FR, who feel their friends are more competent, so they choose to avoid interactions or delay expressing their opinions. Research (Guo, Asmawi, & Fan, 2024) It also shows that low self-confidence is closely related to an increased fear of negative evaluation, which in turn strengthens a person's tendency to avoid social situations.

Research results also show that overthinking is one of the internal factors that strengthens students' social anxiety. Some informants admitted to constantly imagining the possibility of receiving criticism, making mistakes, or getting negative judgments before or after interacting. This finding aligns with research (Fatimah, Ahman, Suherman, & Ilfiandra, 2025) which explains that individuals with social anxiety tend to experience rumination or post-event processing, which is the tendency to excessively evaluate every social interaction they've had. This repetitive thinking process makes it harder for students to build self-confidence and maintains social anxiety in the long run. Therefore, in this study, overthinking is not just a symptom, but also serves as a mechanism that sustains social anxiety.

Besides internal factors, this study found that external factors also contribute greatly to the emergence of social anxiety. The process of transitioning from the school environment to college life becomes its own challenge for students, especially in building new relationships and adjusting to a more complex academic environment. These findings are in line with research (Elballah & Alsayed, 2025) stating that low social support during the transition to college increases the risk of social anxiety and difficulties in building interpersonal relationships. For example, RA mentioned that the adaptation process at the beginning of college made them feel isolated because they didn't have a friend group yet. This situation shows that changes in the social environment can trigger the early development of social anxiety in young adult students.

Another external factor found in this study is negative social experiences, such as criticism, rejection, or having opinions ignored in discussions. These experiences make students lose confidence and choose to avoid similar situations next time. This finding supports previous research results (Nejad, Mikaeili, & Niri, 2024) which explains that negative social evaluation experiences will shape the belief that social situations are a threat, so individuals tend to develop avoidance behavior. This can be seen in informant HM, who became more passive after his

opinion was rejected in a discussion forum. In addition, research (Jais, Mohaiyuddin, Bistamam, Arip, & Othman, 2024) It also mentions that unpleasant social experiences are one of the main risk factors for developing social anxiety in students because they affect how a person views themselves in future social interactions.

The findings of this study also show that cultural and language factors play a role in shaping social anxiety. Students from Malaysia have difficulty adapting to the use of Indonesian, so they feel less confident when they have to speak in front of the class or start a conversation with new friends. These findings are consistent with research (Azwar, 2024) which shows that students with different language backgrounds are more likely to experience communication anxiety due to worries about pronunciation mistakes, word choices, and social acceptance in a new environment. This indicates that the process of cross-cultural adjustment is one factor that needs to be considered in understanding social anxiety among college students.

Which shows that students with different language backgrounds are more likely to experience communication anxiety due to worries about pronunciation mistakes, word choices, and social acceptance in a new environment. This indicates that the process of cross-cultural adjustment is one factor that needs to be considered in understanding social anxiety among college students. These findings suggest that handling social anxiety in college settings isn't just about strengthening individual skills. It's also important to create a supportive academic environment, provide safe spaces for communication, and develop guidance and counseling services that can help students boost their confidence, social skills, and ability to adapt to campus life.

Social Anxiety Affects Students' Ability to Build Interpersonal Relationships

The research results show that social anxiety has a significant impact on the ability of students in the Islamic Guidance and Counseling Study Program at UIN North Sumatra to build interpersonal relationships, especially when they first enter the college environment. Students who experience social anxiety tend to have difficulty starting conversations, introducing themselves, and forming connections with new friends. As a result, social interactions become limited and the process of forming friend groups takes longer. These findings are in line with previous research (Hasyim, Setyowibowo, & Purba, 2024) which explains that social anxiety is negatively correlated with interpersonal functioning because individuals more often avoid social interactions due to worries about negative evaluation from others. Research (Berutu & Mutiawati, 2023) It also shows that students with high levels of social anxiety tend to have lower social adjustment quality and face challenges in building friendships on campus. This can be seen in informants RA, HM, and NA, who chose to stay quiet, avoid communication, and had trouble making new friends at the beginning of their college years.

The findings of this study also show that social anxiety causes students to limit initiating interpersonal relationships as a form of self-protection (avoidance behavior). Students prefer to wait for others to start a conversation rather than taking the initiative because they worry about being rejected or judged negatively. These results support previous research (Sarairah & Aldahadha, 2025) which explains that fear of negative evaluation is a main factor that causes individuals to reduce involvement in social interactions. When students believe that they might make mistakes or receive negative judgments, they tend to develop avoidant behavior as a way to reduce anxiety. This is seen in informants NK, HM, and FR, who prefer to stay silent, avoid communication, or cancel their desire to make new acquaintances because they feel less confident. This condition shows that social anxiety not only affects emotional aspects but also impacts students' ability to build social networks in an academic environment.

Nonetheless, the results of this study show that social anxiety doesn't always hinder students' ability to build interpersonal relationships overall. Most of the informants were still able to form close connections after finding friends who were considered to have similar interests, provided a sense of security, and could accept them as they are. These findings align with previous research (Fitriana, Savitri, Ahmad, Ali, & Lathifah, 2025) which states that social support (social connectedness) acts as a protective factor that can reduce levels of social anxiety while also increasing an individual's ability to build interpersonal relationships. Likewise, research (Takdir, Darusman, & Devi, 2025) finding that students who get emotional support from their peers have better social adaptation skills compared to students who feel isolated. The study shows that even if students have relatively few friends, the relationships they do build tend to be closer, more trusting, and give a sense of security. This was seen in informants NK and FS, who said they feel more comfortable building relationships with individuals they consider 'on the same wavelength' rather than having many shallow connections.

This study also found that the ability to build interpersonal relationships develops as students adapt more to the campus environment. After a few months of attending classes, most students start to show increased self-confidence, are better at managing anxiety, and become more active in interacting with friends and lecturers. These findings support the research (Sholihah, Pradana, & Fatikh, 2025) which explains that social anxiety in students can decrease through the process of adaptation, positive social experiences, and increased self-efficacy in interacting. In addition, (Wajid, Kainaat, & Ullah, 2024) explaining that individuals who are able to reduce the tendency to ruminate or overthink after interacting will find it easier to build self-confidence and improve the quality of interpersonal relationships. This can be seen in informants RA, NA, and CR, who showed positive changes after having better social experiences and feeling accepted by their friends on campus.

An interesting finding in this study is the influence of cultural and language context on interpersonal relationships. Students from Malaysia experience anxiety when they have to speak in formal academic situations due to limited use of the Indonesian language. However, this condition does not affect their ability to build social relationships outside the classroom. These results are consistent with research (Zulfa, Farmawati, Mufida, Akmala, & Rizqi, 2024) which explains that communication anxiety in cross-cultural students is often situational and more related to the ability to use a second language rather than the ability to build interpersonal relationships in general. These findings suggest that social anxiety is not always generalized, but can appear specifically in certain situations, like academic presentations or formal communication.

Overall, the results of this study reinforce previous research suggesting that social anxiety affects students' ability to build interpersonal relationships by reducing their courage to start interactions, increasing avoidance behaviors, and limiting social participation. However, this study also provides findings that enrich previous studies, namely that social anxiety tends to affect the quantity of interpersonal relationships rather than the quality of the relationships that are successfully formed. Students are still able to form close and meaningful relationships once they feel safe, receive social support, and have the opportunity to adapt to the campus environment. Additionally, this study shows that the impact of social anxiety is contextual, especially for students from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Therefore, guidance and counseling services at universities need to focus not just on reducing social anxiety, but also on strengthening peer support, improving interpersonal communication skills, and providing adaptation programs

for new students and students from diverse cultural backgrounds so they can build healthy interpersonal relationships and support both academic success and personal development.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that social anxiety among students in the Islamic Guidance and Counseling program at UIN North Sumatra manifests through physiological, cognitive, and behavioral symptoms influenced by internal factors such as an introverted personality, low self-confidence, insecurity, and overthinking, as well as external factors like adapting to the campus environment, negative social experiences, and differences in culture and language. These conditions affect students' ability to build interpersonal relationships, especially during the early stages of college. However, as they adapt and receive social support, most students are able to develop better relationships. The findings highlight the importance of strengthening counseling services, training in interpersonal communication skills, peer support, and creating a supportive learning environment to help students reduce social anxiety. This research is still limited by the number of informants and the study location, which only covers one study program, so the results can't really be generalized widely. Therefore, future research is recommended to involve more diverse participants, use mixed methods or quantitative approaches, and develop and test the effectiveness of various interventions, like social skills training, cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), or peer counseling, in reducing social anxiety and improving students' interpersonal skills.

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