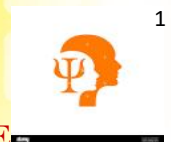




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## Influence of Self-Concept, Body Dissatisfaction, and Interaction Anxiety on Fear of Negative Evaluation among Kaduna State University Students, Kaduna State

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### Abstract

*Fear of negative evaluation (FNE) is a critical psychosocial concern among students, impacting academic engagement, social interaction, and overall psychological adjustment. Despite growing research on social anxiety, few studies have examined the joint influence of self-concept, body dissatisfaction, and interaction anxiety on FNE. This study investigated how these factors predict FNE among undergraduate students at Kaduna State University, Kaduna State. A cross-sectional research design was adopted, and participants were selected using a multistage sampling technique. Data were collected from 402 undergraduate students aged 16–30 years ( $M = 22.06$ ,  $SD = 2.93$ ) using standardised measures of Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation, Self-Concept, Body Dissatisfaction Scale, and Social Interaction Anxiety Scale. Three hypotheses were tested using multiple regression analysis and independent samples  $t$ -tests at a 0.05 level of significance. Results indicated that self-concept, body dissatisfaction, and interaction anxiety jointly predicted FNE ( $R = .417$ ,  $R^2 = .174$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Independently, self-concept negatively predicted FNE ( $\beta = -.157$ ,  $p < .01$ ), whereas body dissatisfaction ( $\beta = .134$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and interaction anxiety ( $\beta = .367$ ,  $p < .001$ ) positively predicted FNE. Gender differences were observed, with male students reporting higher FNE ( $M = 19.13$ ,  $SD = 4.13$ ) than females ( $M = 17.15$ ,  $SD = 3.43$ ). Age and academic level jointly predicted FNE ( $R = .20$ ;  $R^2 = .04$ ;  $Adj. R^2 = .04$ ;  $F(2, 381) = 8.30$ ;  $p < .001$ ), though only age independently predicted FNE ( $\beta = -.25$ ;  $t = -2.89$ ;  $p < .01$ ), indicating lower FNE among older students. The findings highlight the importance of self-perception, body-related concerns, and interaction anxiety in shaping FNE among undergraduates. Interventions aimed at fostering positive self-concept, promoting body acceptance, and enhancing social confidence are recommended to reduce evaluative fears and support students' psychosocial well-being.*

**Keywords:** *Self-concept, body dissatisfaction, interaction anxiety, fear of negative evaluation*

### Introduction

Social anxiety and fear of negative evaluation (FNE) are significant contributors to psychological distress and functional impairment among adolescents and young adults (Okeke, 2025; Segun Martins, 2024). FNE is characterised by apprehension and discomfort in situations where individuals anticipate judgment, criticism, or disapproval from others, and it constitutes a core component of social anxiety (Gazo et al., 2024; Afolabi et al., 2023). Among university students, this phenomenon is particularly pronounced, as they face repeated exposure to evaluative situations, including oral presentations, group assignments, examinations, and informal peer assessments. Elevated FNE in this population has been associated with avoidance behaviours, diminished class participation, social withdrawal, and impaired academic performance, highlighting its profound impact on students' psychosocial and educational functioning (Fatoki & Oladejo, 2023; Adeleke & Afolabi, 2023). In the Nigerian context, vulnerabilities associated with FNE are compounded by sociocultural and academic pressures. University students navigate complex peer networks, competitive learning environments, and culturally embedded expectations of achievement and public performance (Fadipe et al., 2024; Afolabi et al., 2023). These pressures interact with developmental

processes characteristic of late adolescence and early adulthood, including heightened self-consciousness, identity exploration, and sensitivity to social evaluation (Gazo et al., 2024). Consequently, FNE is not restricted to isolated situations but often permeates multiple aspects of students' academic, social, and psychological lives, affecting engagement, self-esteem, and mental well-being (Segun Martins, 2024; Lv et al., 2024).

Psychosocial variables such as self-concept, body dissatisfaction, and interaction anxiety are critical determinants of FNE. Self-concept, defined as an individual's perception and evaluation of their abilities, appearance, and social roles, influences confidence, resilience, and adaptive coping in evaluative contexts (Balogun et al., 2024;2025; Fernández & Chacón, 2022; Shavelson et al., 1976). Positive self-concept promotes persistence and social engagement, whereas negative or unstable self-concept increases vulnerability to social anxiety and evaluative fears (Akinyede & Obosi, 2025; Matos et al., 2023). Body dissatisfaction, characterised by negative perceptions of one's physical appearance, further exacerbates FNE by fostering heightened self-consciousness and fear of judgment, particularly in peer and public contexts (Abamara et al., 2022; Chiaghana et al., 2024). Similarly, interaction anxiety, or discomfort during social interactions under observation, is strongly linked to FNE, as individuals high in this trait anticipate criticism and exhibit excessive self-monitoring, avoidance, and distress (Olawuyi et al., 2023; Darteh et al., 2024). The academic environment amplifies these challenges. Contemporary learning platforms, including digital classrooms and social media, create additional evaluative spaces where students' actions and appearances are publicly scrutinised (Jarrar et al., 2022; Ruan et al., 2025). The combination of in-person and online evaluations increases the likelihood of fear, avoidance, and reduced participation, which may hinder skill acquisition, collaborative learning, and overall social integration. For students in Nigerian universities, particularly in regions where mental health literacy is limited and stigma surrounding psychological difficulties remains high, these pressures may remain unrecognised and unmanaged, perpetuating cycles of anxiety and underperformance (Fadipe et al., 2024; Afolabi Aroyewun et al., 2023).

Despite growing recognition of FNE as a key psychological challenge among students, empirical studies in Nigerian higher education contexts remain limited. Most existing research has focused on general social anxiety or personality correlates, with less attention given to psychosocial determinants such as self-concept, body dissatisfaction, and interaction anxiety in combination (Paul & Olowoleni, 2025; Segun Martins, 2024). Moreover, most studies are based in Western contexts, where cultural norms, educational systems, and socialisation processes differ markedly from those in Nigerian universities, particularly in Northern Nigeria, creating a significant research gap. Without context-specific evidence, the design of effective counselling interventions, skill-building programmes, and social support strategies to reduce FNE remains challenging (Segun Martins, 2024; Okeke, 2025).

### **Theoretical Synthesis**

Self-Presentation Theory serves as the theoretical framework for this study on fear of negative evaluation among university students (Leary, 1992; Schlenker, 1980). This theory emphasizes that individuals are motivated to control how they are perceived by others, striving to elicit favourable evaluations and avoid negative judgment. Self-presentation behaviours can be both deliberate and automatic, encompassing verbal, non-verbal, and habitual strategies aimed at shaping impressions in social contexts. According to the theory, humans possess a fundamental need for social approval and acceptance, which drives behaviours such as ingratiation, self-promotion, or social avoidance, depending on situational demands and perceived audience scrutiny (Leary, 1992). In the context of Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE), Self-Presentation Theory provides a robust framework for understanding the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural processes that underlie evaluative anxiety. Students with elevated FNE are particularly sensitive to social cues and anticipate criticism, disapproval, or rejection in both academic and social settings (Carleton et al., 2021; Elhai et al., 2022). The theory posits that repeated experiences of perceived social failure or critical evaluation reinforce vigilance, avoidance behaviours, and psychological discomfort, including embarrassment, shame, and heightened anxiety (Leary, 1992; Schlenker, 1980). Consequently, FNE is not merely a transient emotional response but reflects enduring patterns of self-monitoring and impression management shaped by individual goals and social feedback.

Self-Presentation Theory also highlights the interplay between internal states, such as self-esteem and self-consciousness, and external social evaluations. Students' perceptions of their abilities, appearance, and

social competence influence the intensity of self-presentational strategies and the likelihood of experiencing FNE (Olawuyi et al., 2023; Fadipe et al., 2024). In academic environments, situations requiring public performance, such as oral presentations, group projects, or classroom discussions, serve as high-stakes contexts where self-presentation and evaluative anxiety converge. Students high in FNE may engage in hypervigilance, over-preparation, or avoidance of participation, reflecting attempts to manage impressions and minimise the perceived threat of criticism (Jarrar et al., 2022). Furthermore, Self-Presentation Theory explains the cognitive-affective mechanisms underlying FNE. Individuals high in FNE tend to ruminate on potential negative outcomes, interpret ambiguous social cues as critical, and anticipate rejection, creating a feedback loop that perpetuates anxiety and avoidance behaviours over time (Schlenker, 1980; Leary, 1992). This theoretical perspective aligns with empirical findings showing that FNE impairs academic engagement, social participation, and overall psychological well-being among university students (Carleton et al., 2021; Elhai et al., 2022; Fadipe et al., 2024). By integrating self-presentation processes, the theory provides a comprehensive explanation for why students may experience persistent anxiety in evaluative settings and how psychosocial factors such as self-concept, body dissatisfaction, and interaction anxiety may amplify these experiences.

## Study Rationale

Despite recognition of FNE as a significant concern in higher education, research examining the antecedents and mechanisms of evaluative anxiety among Nigerian university students remains limited. Most studies have explored general social anxiety or personality traits, with minimal attention to the combined influence of self-concept, body dissatisfaction, and interaction anxiety within the cultural and academic context of Nigerian universities. Applying Self-Presentation Theory to this study enables a nuanced understanding of how students' internal perceptions and social motivations interact to produce FNE. Specifically, it provides a framework for examining how impression management strategies mediate responses to evaluative pressures, guiding the development of context-specific interventions aimed at reducing anxiety, improving academic engagement, and promoting social integration.

## Current Study

This study seeks to address these gaps by investigating the influence of self-concept, body dissatisfaction, and interaction anxiety on fear of negative evaluation among undergraduate students at Kaduna State University. Specifically, it examines how these variables independently and jointly predict FNE while accounting for socio-demographic factors such as gender, age, and year of study. By providing empirical evidence from a Nigerian higher education context, this study aims to inform culturally relevant interventions that enhance students' psychosocial well-being, academic engagement, and resilience in evaluative situations.

Based on the research questions and the conceptual framework of the study, the following hypotheses have been formulated:

1. There will be a joint and independent predictive effect of self-concept, body dissatisfaction, and interaction anxiety on fear of negative evaluation among undergraduate students of Kaduna State University.
2. Female undergraduate students will significantly score higher on fear of negative evaluation than their male counterparts.
3. There will be a joint and independent prediction of socio-demographic variables (age and year of study) on fear of negative evaluation among undergraduate students of Kaduna State University.

## Methodology

### Study Design

This study employed a cross-sectional survey design to investigate the influence of self-concept, body dissatisfaction, and interaction anxiety on fear of negative evaluation among undergraduate students of Kaduna State University, Kaduna State. Guided by the interpretivist paradigm, the study focuses on understanding how psychosocial variables interact to shape students' anticipatory anxiety in evaluative

social contexts. Fear of negative evaluation serves as the dependent variable, while self-concept, body dissatisfaction, and interaction anxiety are treated as independent variables. The cross-sectional design is suitable for examining both the relationships and predictive effects among these constructs at a single point in time, providing a snapshot of students' psychological experiences within their academic environment.

### **Selection of the Study Site**

Kaduna State University was purposively selected as the study site due to its diverse student population, which includes individuals from different ethnic, cultural, and socio-economic backgrounds across Nigeria. The university comprises multiple faculties, such as Arts and Social Sciences, Natural and Applied Sciences, Management Sciences, Law, Education, Environmental Sciences, Agriculture, and Health Sciences, each offering a variety of undergraduate programs. This heterogeneity allows the study to capture a wide range of academic experiences and psychosocial factors relevant to self-concept, body dissatisfaction, interaction anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. Data collection took place across lecture halls, hostels, libraries, and student recreational centres, which serve as natural settings where students encounter evaluative and social pressures. The university's support for student organisations, clubs, and extracurricular activities further provides opportunities to explore the influence of social engagement and peer interaction on students' psychological outcomes. By situating the study within these academic and social contexts, the research captures authentic experiences of students' engagement with evaluation, social comparison, and impression management.

### **Geophysical and Socio-Cultural Context of Kaduna State University**

Kaduna State, located in North-West Nigeria, is one of the most ethnically and culturally diverse regions of the country, home to numerous ethnic groups and religious traditions. The state hosts both urban and rural communities, which are represented within the student population at Kaduna State University. This socio-cultural diversity provides a rich context for examining psychological variables, as students' experiences of evaluation, social comparison, and interaction anxiety are shaped by their backgrounds and the social norms they internalise. The university environment itself creates structured opportunities for evaluative interactions, from academic assessments and oral presentations to collaborative group projects and social events. These repeated exposures to evaluative contexts make it a suitable site for exploring fear of negative evaluation. Variations in students' socio-economic status, cultural upbringing, and academic discipline allow for a nuanced analysis of how these factors may interact with psychosocial predictors, such as self-concept, body dissatisfaction, and interaction anxiety.

### **Historical Context of Kaduna State University**

Kaduna State University was established to provide higher education opportunities to students from across the North-West region of Nigeria. Over the years, it has developed into a multi-disciplinary institution attracting a heterogeneous student body. Historically, the region has experienced complex socio-cultural and educational dynamics influenced by ethnic diversity, religious affiliations, and urban-rural divides. These historical and socio-cultural factors contribute to students' socialisation processes, academic expectations, and experiences of peer and instructor evaluation. Understanding these historical and contextual dimensions is critical for interpreting students' psychological responses, particularly their fear of negative evaluation within the university setting.

### **Participants and Procedure**

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Department of Psychology, Nigerian Defence Academy, Kaduna, and institutional access was granted by the Registrar of Kaduna State University. The participants in this study consisted of both male and female undergraduate students currently enrolled at Kaduna State University, Kaduna State, who were actively engaged in academic activities on campus. Students were recruited from a range of faculties, years of study, and age groups to ensure diverse representation. Participation was entirely voluntary, and only students who provided informed consent were included in the study. Inclusion criteria were limited to undergraduate students officially enrolled at Kaduna State University, while students from other universities or institutions were excluded to ensure that the sample accurately represented the target population. To determine an appropriate sample size, Slovin's formula was employed, taking into account the total student population of 25,000 and a 5% margin of error.

Using this calculation, the required sample size was approximately 394 participants, which was deemed sufficient to provide reliable and representative results for the study.

A multistage sampling technique was used to select participants systematically. Kaduna State University was purposively chosen as the study site due to its diverse student population in terms of socio-economic background, culture, and academic experience. Four faculties, Social Sciences, Education, Science, and Law, were randomly selected through a balloting method to ensure equal opportunity for selection. Within each selected faculty, two departments were purposively chosen based on accessibility and student population size. Finally, individual students from the selected departments were recruited using an accidental (convenience) sampling approach, with participants approached during lecture sessions and invited to participate if available and willing. To facilitate data collection, two trained research assistants supported the researcher in administering and retrieving questionnaires. The assistants provided guidance, clarified instructions, and ensured that ethical procedures were maintained throughout the process. Before participation, all students were briefed on the purpose, objectives, and potential benefits of the study. They were assured that participation was voluntary, responses would remain confidential, and they could withdraw from the study at any point without negative consequences. Students were also informed that there were no right or wrong answers, and they were encouraged to respond honestly to all items. The questionnaires were self-administered in a quiet and comfortable environment within the university premises. The structured approach allowed participants to complete the instruments independently while research assistants were available to provide clarification if needed. This method ensured consistency in data collection, minimised potential biases, and created an environment conducive to honest and thoughtful responses.

## Instruments

Data for this study were collected using a structured self-report questionnaire, divided into five sections (A–E), designed to assess socio-demographic characteristics, fear of negative evaluation, self-concept, body dissatisfaction, and social interaction anxiety among undergraduate students at Kaduna State University.

**Socio-Demographic Variables:** This section captured participants' background information, including age, sex, religion, ethnicity, and year of study. These variables were used to describe the sample and examine potential associations with fear of negative evaluation.

**Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale (BFNE):** The BFNE, originally developed by Leary (1983) and revised by Carleton et al. (2006), measures an individual's apprehension and distress related to being negatively evaluated by others. The scale consists of 12 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 ("Not at all") to 5 ("Extremely"). Eight items are positively worded to reflect the presence of fear, while four items are reverse-scored to capture the absence of fear. Psychometric evaluations indicate strong reliability, with Cronbach's alpha ranging from .89 (original BFNE) to .95 (BFNE-II). In this study, the BFNE served as the criterion measure for assessing fear of negative evaluation, reporting a Cronbach's alpha of .720.

**Questionnaire of Self-Concept-18 (QSC-18):** The QSC-18, developed by Dolejš, Dostál, Obereignerů, and Orel (2021) and translated into English in 2022, is an 18-item instrument designed to assess self-concept across personal, social, and emotional domains. Respondents indicate their agreement with each statement on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree." The scale has demonstrated good reliability and validity in previous studies, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from .81 to .87. In the present study, the QSC-18 reported a Cronbach's alpha of .781.

**Body Dissatisfaction Scale for University Students (BDS-US):** The BDS-US, developed by Tariq and Ijaz (2015), measures multidimensional aspects of body dissatisfaction among university students. The 26-item scale assesses four domains: body shape, skeletal structure, facial features, and hair. Items are rated on a Likert scale, and the scale has demonstrated high internal consistency ( $\alpha > .80$ ) and strong concurrent validity with established measures of body image. In this study, the BDS-US reported a Cronbach's alpha of .710.

**Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS):** The SIAS, developed by Mattick and Clarke (1998), assesses anxiety related to social interactions and fear of scrutiny by others. The scale consists of 20 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 0 ("Not at all characteristic or true of me") to 4 ("Extremely characteristic or true of me").

of me”). Psychometric studies indicate excellent internal consistency, with Cronbach’s alpha values typically ranging from .88 to .94. The SIAS also demonstrates strong convergent and discriminant validity. In this study, the scale reported a Cronbach’s alpha of .740.

### Data Analysis

Responses to the questionnaire would be coded and entered into SPSS version 27 for analysis. Hypothesis one will be tested using hierarchical multiple regression analysis, hypothesis two will be tested using an independent sample t-test, while hypothesis three will be tested using multiple regression analysis.

### Results

**Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of undergraduate students**

Category	Subcategory	N	%	X	SD
Age (years)	16–30	402	100	22.06	2.93
Gender	Male	117	29.1		
	Female	285	70.9		
Religion	Christianity	152	37.8		
	Islam	244	60.7		
	Traditional	6	1.5		
Ethnicity	Hausa	347	86.3		
	Yoruba	26	6.5		
	Others	29	7.2		
Level	100 level	73	18.2		
	200 level	158	39.3		
	300 level	61	15.2		
	400 level	89	22.1		
	500 level	21	5.2		
Faculty	Social Sciences	145	36.1		
	Education	117	29.1		
	Law	17	4.2		
	Art	40	10.0		
	Environmental Sciences	12	3.0		
	Agriculture	50	12.4		
	Allied Health Sciences	21	5.2		

Table 1 presents the socio-demographic characteristics of undergraduate students of Kaduna State University. The participants' ages ranged from 16 to 30 years, with a mean age of 22.06 years (SD = 2.93), indicating that most respondents were young adults within the typical undergraduate age range. Regarding gender, the majority of the participants were female (n = 285, 70.9%), while males accounted for 29.1% (n = 117) of the sample. This indicates a higher representation of female students in the study population. In terms of religion, most participants identified as Muslims (n = 244, 60.7%), followed by Christians (n = 152, 37.8%), while a small proportion practised traditional religion (n = 6, 1.5%). The ethnic composition of the participants was predominantly Hausa (n = 347, 86.3%), with smaller proportions of Yoruba (n = 26, 6.5%) and other ethnic groups (n = 29, 7.2%). This reflects the regional demographic characteristics of the university.

Academic level distribution showed that most students were in 200 level (n = 158, 39.3%), followed by 400 level (n = 89, 22.1%), 100 level (n = 73, 18.2%), 300 level (n = 61, 15.2%), and 500 level (n = 21, 5.2%). This indicates that the sample comprised students across different stages of undergraduate study, with a concentration in the early to middle academic levels. In terms of faculty representation, most students were enrolled in Social Sciences (n = 145, 36.1%) and Education (n = 117, 29.1%). Other faculties included Agriculture (n = 50, 12.4%), Art (n = 40, 10.0%), Allied Health Sciences (n = 21, 5.2%), Law (n = 17, 4.2%), and Environmental Sciences (n = 12, 3.0%). The socio-demographic profile suggests that the study sample was predominantly female, largely young adults, mainly of Hausa ethnicity, and drawn from a wide range of academic levels and faculties. This indicates that the sample reasonably reflects the diversity of undergraduate students at Kaduna State University.

**Table 2: Zero-order correlation matrix showing the relationships among self-concept, body dissatisfaction, interaction anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation among undergraduate students of Kaduna State University**

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Age	22.06	2.93	—						
2. Gender	1.71	0.45	-.51**	—					
3. Level	2.57	1.17	.81**	-.49**	—				
4. Self-concept	31.37	4.74	-.14**	-.09	-.23**	—			
5. Body dissatisfaction	51.49	6.99	.26**	-.21**	.26**	.15**	—		
6. Interaction anxiety	22.33	6.61	.02	-.11*	.03	.19**	.19**	—	
7. Fear of Negative Evaluation	28.07	3.94	-.20**	-.23**	.15**	-.21**	.04	.37**	—

**Note.**  $p < .05$ ,  $p < .01$  (2-tailed). 1= Male and 2 = Female

The correlations presented in Table 2 show the relationships between selected demographic variables (age, gender, and academic level), self-concept, body dissatisfaction, interaction anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation (FNE) among undergraduate students of Kaduna State University.

Regarding demographic variables, age was negatively and significantly correlated with fear of negative evaluation ( $r = -.20$ ,  $p < .01$ ), indicating that older students reported slightly lower fear of negative evaluation compared to younger students. Gender was also significantly correlated with fear of negative evaluation ( $r = -.23$ ,  $p < .01$ ), suggesting that male students experienced higher levels of fear of negative evaluation than female students. Academic level showed a positive and significant correlation with fear of negative evaluation ( $r = .15$ ,  $p < .01$ ), indicating that students in higher academic levels reported slightly greater fear of negative evaluation.

Self-concept was negatively and significantly correlated with fear of negative evaluation ( $r = -.21, p < .01$ ), suggesting that students with higher self-concept tended to experience lower fear of negative evaluation. Body dissatisfaction, however, was not significantly correlated with fear of negative evaluation ( $r = .04, p > .05$ ), indicating that variations in body dissatisfaction did not meaningfully correlate with fear of negative evaluation in this sample. Interaction anxiety showed a strong positive and significant correlation with fear of negative evaluation ( $r = .37, p < .01$ ), suggesting that students who reported higher interaction anxiety also experienced higher fear of negative evaluation.

**Table 3: Multiple regression analysis showing the joint and independent influence of self-concept, body dissatisfaction, and interaction anxiety on fear of negative evaluation**

Predictors	$\beta$	t	p	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	F	p
Self-concept	-.157	-3.293	< .01	.417	.174	.167	26.666	< .001
Body dissatisfaction	.134	2.812	< .01					
Interaction anxiety	.367	7.630	< .001					

Table 3 presents results on the joint and independent influence of self-concept, body dissatisfaction, and interaction anxiety on fear of negative evaluation among undergraduate students of Kaduna State University. Results show that the overall regression model was statistically significant [ $R = .417; R^2 = .174; \text{Adj. } R^2 = .167; F(3, 381) = 26.666; p < .001$ ], indicating that self-concept, body dissatisfaction, and interaction anxiety jointly accounted for approximately 17% of the variance in fear of negative evaluation among undergraduate students. Independently, self-concept significantly negatively predicted fear of negative evaluation ( $\beta = -.157; t = -3.293; p < .01$ ), suggesting that students with higher self-concept reported lower fear of negative evaluation. Body dissatisfaction significantly positively predicted fear of negative evaluation ( $\beta = .134; t = 2.812; p < .01$ ), indicating that higher body dissatisfaction was associated with greater fear of negative evaluation. Interaction anxiety was the strongest positive predictor ( $\beta = .367; t = 7.630; p < .001$ ), suggesting that students with higher levels of interaction anxiety experienced greater fear of negative evaluation. These findings support the hypothesis.

**Table 4: Independent samples t-test showing gender differences in fear of negative evaluation among undergraduate students of Kaduna State University**

Dependent Variable	Gender	N	M	SD	t	df	P	Effect Size (Cohen's d)
Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE)	Male	117	19.13	4.13	4.84	401	< .001	0.54
	Female	285	17.15	3.43				

Table 4.4 presents an independent samples t-test conducted to examine gender differences in fear of negative evaluation among undergraduate students. Male participants ( $M = 19.13, SD = 4.13$ ) scored higher than female participants ( $M = 17.15, SD = 3.43$ ) on FNE. The difference was statistically significant,  $t(400) = 4.84, p < .001$ , with a medium-to-large effect size (Cohen's  $d = 0.54$ ), indicating a meaningful difference between male and female students. These results suggest that male students experience significantly higher fear of negative evaluation compared to female students. Therefore, the hypothesis that females would score higher on FNE than males is not supported in this sample.

**Table 5: Multiple regression analysis showing the joint and independent influence of age and academic level on fear of negative evaluation among undergraduate students**

Predictor	$\beta$	t	p	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	F	p
Age	-.25	-2.89	< .01	.20	.04	.04	8.30	< .001
Level	.06	0.67	> .05					

Table 5 presents the results on the joint and independent influence of socio-demographic variables on fear of negative evaluation among undergraduate students. Collectively, age and academic level significantly predicted FNE [ $R = .20$ ;  $R^2 = .04$ ;  $\text{Adj. } R^2 = .04$ ;  $F(2, 381) = 8.30$ ;  $p < .001$ ], indicating that together, these socio-demographic variables explained approximately 4% of the variance in fear of negative evaluation. Independently, age significantly negatively predicted FNE ( $\beta = -.25$ ;  $t = -2.89$ ;  $p < .01$ ), suggesting that older students reported slightly lower fear of negative evaluation. Academic level, however, did not significantly predict FNE ( $\beta = .06$ ;  $t = 0.67$ ;  $p > .05$ ), indicating that a student's year of study was not meaningfully related to their fear of negative evaluation. Therefore, the hypothesis is partially supported.

## Discussion

This study investigated the influence of self-concept, body dissatisfaction, and interaction anxiety on fear of negative evaluation (FNE) among undergraduate students at Kaduna State University. Employing a quantitative cross-sectional design, the study examined how these psychological constructs, alongside socio-demographic factors, contribute to students' apprehension about being judged negatively by others. A total of 402 undergraduates participated, encompassing diverse age groups, genders, academic levels, faculties, religions, and ethnic backgrounds, providing a representative view of the university population.

The first hypothesis posited that self-concept, body dissatisfaction, and interaction anxiety would jointly and independently predict FNE. The results confirmed this, revealing that all three factors significantly influenced FNE both collectively and individually, underscoring the multidimensional nature of evaluative fears. These findings indicate that FNE arises from an interplay of cognitive, emotional, and social factors rather than from a single psychological domain. Specifically, self-concept was a significant negative predictor of FNE, suggesting that students with higher self-concept are less prone to apprehension about negative evaluation. This aligns with prior research demonstrating that a stable and positive self-concept serves as a protective factor against social evaluative concerns (Chinawa et al., 2024; Biachi et al., 2025; Glory & Ben, 2025). Students with stronger self-concept are better equipped to interpret social feedback less threateningly and maintain confidence in interpersonal and academic settings. Supporting this, studies in China reported that students with unstable self-concepts experienced heightened FNE, which negatively affected social interactions and self-disclosure (Pang et al., 2024). These findings emphasise the importance of interventions aimed at enhancing self-concept to mitigate FNE and support both social and academic functioning.

Body dissatisfaction also emerged as a significant predictor of FNE. Students dissatisfied with their body image exhibited higher levels of evaluative fear, consistent with literature linking negative body perceptions to heightened sensitivity to social judgment (Glory & Ben, 2025; FA & van Onselen, 2024). Body dissatisfaction often interacts with self-concept, whereby negative evaluations of one's physical appearance exacerbate overall negative self-perceptions and vulnerability to FNE. This interplay is reflected in studies demonstrating that marginalised populations, such as LGBTQ individuals or those experiencing stigmatisation, report elevated body dissatisfaction and social evaluative anxiety (Kalash et al., 2023; Willemsse et al., 2023). The findings indicate that interventions targeting body image enhancement and positive self-perception could significantly reduce FNE among undergraduates.

Interaction anxiety was identified as the strongest positive predictor of FNE, highlighting the centrality of social apprehension in evaluative fears. Students with high interaction anxiety exhibited increased FNE,

consistent with prior research linking social anxiety to avoidance behaviours, reduced social participation, and diminished academic engagement (Segun Martins, 2024; Ugwuanyi, 2022; Liu et al., 2022; Macovei et al., 2023). Furthermore, global evidence suggests that social evaluative fears extend beyond academic settings to digital and professional environments, with FNE mediating maladaptive behaviours such as problematic smartphone use in students with body dissatisfaction (Liu et al., 2023). Personality traits, including conscientiousness, extraversion, and social boldness, have been shown to buffer the impact of interaction anxiety on FNE, indicating potential avenues for targeted interventions (Macovei et al., 2023). These findings underscore the interconnectedness of self-concept, body dissatisfaction, and interaction anxiety in shaping FNE. Cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions operate synergistically, reinforcing the notion that FNE is a multidimensional construct (Beckers et al., 2025; Balogun et al., 2024). Interventions should therefore adopt a holistic approach, incorporating cognitive restructuring, body image enhancement, and social skills development to promote resilience, self-efficacy, and adaptive social functioning.

The second hypothesis predicted that female students would report higher FNE than males. Contrary to expectations, male students reported significantly higher FNE, with a medium-to-large effect size. This finding challenges conventional assumptions that females exhibit greater social evaluative anxiety due to relational socialisation and emotional expressiveness. In the Nigerian context, male students may experience unique pressures related to academic performance, social competence, and adherence to gender norms, which can amplify FNE (Segun Martins, 2024; Ugwuanyi, 2022). Males with fragile self-concept may perceive evaluative feedback as threatening to competence or social status, while interaction anxiety further intensifies these concerns (Chinawa et al., 2024; Biachi et al., 2025; Macovei et al., 2023). These findings highlight the need for gender-sensitive interventions, acknowledging that male students are also vulnerable to FNE in academic and peer contexts.

The third hypothesis proposed that socio-demographic variables, specifically age and academic level, would predict FNE. The findings partially supported this hypothesis. Age emerged as a significant negative predictor, indicating that older students experienced slightly lower FNE, while academic level did not significantly influence FNE. The protective effect of age aligns with research suggesting that accumulated social experience and cognitive maturity buffer individuals against evaluative fears (Pang et al., 2024; Nwankwo et al., 2020). In contrast, mere academic progression appears insufficient to reduce FNE, as psychological and social factors, self-concept, body image, and interaction anxiety, play a more substantial role (Glory & Ben, 2025; Ugwuanyi, 2022; Segun Martins, 2024). These results underscore the importance of interventions that target psychosocial variables rather than relying solely on chronological or academic development.

This study demonstrates that FNE among Kaduna State University undergraduates is influenced by an interplay of cognitive, emotional, and social factors. Self-concept and body satisfaction function as protective mechanisms, while interaction anxiety amplifies evaluative fears. Additionally, male students and younger undergraduates appear more vulnerable to FNE, highlighting the need for gender- and development-sensitive interventions. The findings contribute to a nuanced understanding of FNE in Nigerian higher education contexts and offer practical implications for psychological support and student well-being initiatives.

### **Recommendations and Implications**

The findings of this study highlight the critical role of self-concept, body dissatisfaction, and interaction anxiety in shaping fear of negative evaluation (FNE) among undergraduate students at Kaduna State University. Accordingly, it is recommended that university management and student support services implement targeted interventions to enhance students' psychological resilience. Programs aimed at strengthening self-concept, such as workshops, seminars, and counselling sessions focused on self-awareness, personal competence, and self-acceptance, may reduce students' susceptibility to evaluative fears. Similarly, psychoeducational initiatives addressing body dissatisfaction, through promotion of body positivity, realistic appearance standards, and healthy self-perception, are likely to mitigate the impact of appearance-related concerns on FNE.

Given the pronounced effect of interaction anxiety, structured interventions that improve social skills, assertiveness, and gradual exposure to evaluative situations are warranted. Such programs can foster

confidence in interpersonal interactions, reduce avoidance behaviours, and support students' academic and social engagement. Furthermore, gender-sensitive approaches are essential, particularly in light of the finding that male students exhibited higher FNE. Creating inclusive and supportive environments that acknowledge gender-specific psychosocial challenges may encourage help-seeking and facilitate equitable access to mental health resources. From a practical perspective, these findings underscore the importance of integrating psychosocial support into broader student well-being initiatives. The influence of age, rather than academic level, on FNE suggests that younger students may require additional support during their transition into university life. More broadly, university policies should prioritise mental health promotion, fostering environments that reduce evaluative pressure, challenge harmful societal and peer-driven norms, and cultivate resilience.

### **Limitations and Future Research Directions**

While this study provides valuable insights into the psychosocial predictors of fear of negative evaluation (FNE) among undergraduate students at Kaduna State University, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inference, limiting the ability to determine the directionality of relationships among self-concept, body dissatisfaction, interaction anxiety, and FNE. Longitudinal research would be more suitable for examining temporal dynamics and causal pathways.

Second, the exclusive reliance on self-report questionnaires introduces potential response biases, including social desirability and inaccurate self-perception. Given the sensitivity of psychological constructs and cultural norms surrounding emotional expression, participants may have under- or over-reported their experiences, which could influence the observed associations.

Third, the study was conducted within a single institution, which may limit the generalisability of findings to undergraduate populations in other universities or regions of Nigeria. Differences in institutional culture, social norms, and demographic characteristics may impact levels of FNE and its psychosocial determinants. Additionally, although key psychosocial and socio-demographic variables were examined, other relevant factors such as peer support, family environment, academic stress, social media exposure, and personality traits were not assessed, potentially overlooking additional influences on FNE. Lastly, the unequal gender distribution, with a higher proportion of female participants, may have affected gender-based comparisons despite statistical controls.

In light of these limitations, future research should consider longitudinal designs to explore developmental and causal relationships among self-concept, body dissatisfaction, interaction anxiety, and FNE across different stages of undergraduate education. Expanding the study population to include multiple universities across diverse Nigerian regions would enhance generalisability and facilitate cross-institutional comparisons. Incorporating qualitative or mixed-methods approaches, such as interviews or focus group discussions, could provide richer insights into students' lived experiences, sociocultural influences, and perceptions of social evaluation.

Further investigations should examine additional psychological and environmental variables, including peer attachment, social media use, academic pressure, coping strategies, and personality traits, as well as potential mediating and moderating mechanisms. Finally, intervention-based and experimental studies are recommended to evaluate the effectiveness of programmes aimed at enhancing self-concept, promoting positive body image, and managing interaction anxiety, thereby informing evidence-based mental health practices and counselling services within university settings.

### **Conclusion**

This study investigated the influence of self-concept, body dissatisfaction, and interaction anxiety on fear of negative evaluation (FNE) among undergraduates at Kaduna State University. Results indicated that these psychological factors jointly and independently predict FNE, with interaction anxiety identified as the strongest determinant. Higher self-concept was associated with lower FNE, whereas greater body dissatisfaction and interaction anxiety corresponded with elevated evaluative fears. Unexpectedly, male students reported higher FNE than females, highlighting the influence of contextual, cultural, and psychosocial factors on gendered experiences of social evaluation. Age negatively predicted FNE, suggesting that older students experience slightly lower evaluative anxiety, while academic level was not a

significant predictor. Collectively, these findings suggest that psychological variables exert a stronger influence on FNE than socio-demographic characteristics. The study underscores the need for targeted interventions that enhance self-concept, promote positive body image, and reduce interaction anxiety. Such strategies can improve students' emotional well-being, social confidence, and academic engagement, while providing a foundation for future research on evaluative fears and evidence-based mental health programs tailored to the Nigerian university context.

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