

## **The Moderating Role of Assertiveness in the Relationship Between Social Intelligence and Fear of Negative Evaluation among University Lecturers**

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DOI:10.56201/jhsp.v10.no5.2024.pg53.64

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### **Abstract**

*The study investigated social intelligence and assertiveness as predictors of fear of negative evaluation among ESUT lecturers, Eighty (80) lecturers comprised of 49 males and 31 females with a mean age of 40.86 and SD of 6.454 were selected using multi-stage (cluster, simple random: by balloting and purposive) sampling techniques as participants from Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Enugu. Enugu. Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE), Tromso Social Intelligence Scale and Rathus Assertiveness Scale were used for data collection, a correlational design was adopted, hierarchical multiple regression using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 27 was used for data analysis. Findings revealed that only social information processing dimension of social intelligence  $UnSt = -.375^*$  and  $t = -2.487^*$  at  $p < .05$  negatively predicted fear of negative evaluation among lecturers. While the social skills  $UnSt = -.300$  and  $t =$*

1.955 and social; awareness  $UnSt = .107$  and  $t = .651$  failed to predict fear of negative evaluation. Social intelligence  $r = .542$  was related to fear of negative evaluation, it contributed 29.4% variance to fear of negative evaluation at  $r^2 = .294$ . Assertiveness  $UnSt = .048$  and  $t = .321$  failed to predict fear of negative evaluation. Social intelligence and assertiveness jointly  $r = .544$  are related to fear of negative evaluation, they contributed 29.6% variance to fear of negative evaluation, and the jointly failed to predict fear of negative evaluation at  $p < .05$ . Assertiveness failed to moderate the relationship between social skills dimension of social intelligence and fear of negative evaluation  $UnSt = -.038$  and  $t = -.219$  at  $p < .05$ . Assertive positively moderated the relationship between social awareness and fear of negative evaluation  $UnSt = .489^{***}$  and  $t = 4.945^{***}$  and assertiveness positively moderated the relationship between social information processing dimension of social intelligence  $UnSt = .633^{***}$   $t = 12.749^{***}$  at  $p < .001$ . Hence, Lecturers should perceive the lecturing process as an interactive one was both lecturers and the students learn from each other, this will help to reduce over-expectations.

**Keynotes:** Assertiveness, Social Intelligence, Fear of Negative Evaluation, Lecturers

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## Introduction

Cognitive models suggest that the fear of negative evaluation is a key feature of social anxiety, resulting in biased information processing when faced with social evaluation. The current study aimed to explore the neural mechanisms underlying the anticipation and processing of social-evaluative feedback, and how it is influenced by fear of negative evaluation. In addition, the study investigated the relationship between social intelligence and assertiveness as predictors of fear of negative evaluation and examined a different conceptualization of these predictor variables and how they contribute to the development of fear of negative evaluation. The study was motivated by insufficient literature connecting the three study variables and aimed to explore whether demographic variables play a role in the development of fear of negative evaluation and how they interact with the predictor variables. The results of the study may assist counsellors, school authorities, and caregivers in developing effective strategies to help students cope with fear of negative evaluation.

Thorndike in 1920 defines social intelligence as the ability to understand and manage men and women and boys and girls, to act wisely in human relations (Zautra, et al., 2015). No one is born socially intelligent. Instead, it involves a set of skills that an individual learns over time (Morin, 2020). Individuals with social intelligence can sense how other people feel, know intuitively what to say in social situations, and seem self-assured, even in a larger crowd (Morin, 2020).

While some people may seem to develop social intelligence without really trying, others have to work to develop it. Some strategies can help a person build social skills. These tactics can help develop social intelligence: Pay close attention to what (and who) is around you. Socially intelligent people are observant and pay attention to subtle social cues from those around them (Graziano, & Kastner, 2011; Morin, 2020). If you think that someone in your life has strong people skills, watch how they interact with others.

Work on increasing emotional intelligence. Although similar to social intelligence, emotional intelligence is more about how one control his or her own emotions and how they empathize with others. It requires recognizing when the individual experiencing an emotion—which will help them recognize that emotion in others—and regulating them appropriately. An emotionally

intelligent person can recognize and control negative feelings, such as frustration or anger, when in a social setting (Qian, et al., 2017).

Respect cultural differences. More than that, seek out cultural differences so you can understand them. Although most people learn people skills from their family, friends and the community surrounding them, a socially intelligent person understands that others might have different responses and customs based on their upbringing (Morin, 2020). Practice active listening. Develop social intelligence by working on communication skills—which requires active listening (Kawamichi, et al., 2015). Don't interrupt. Take time to think about what someone else is saying before you respond. Listen to the inflections in what others say, which can give you clues to what they really mean.

Appreciate the important people in one's life. Socially intelligent people have deep relationships with people who are meaningful to them. Pay attention to the emotions of one's love once, co-workers, and other peers.

Interactions with friends and peers in the academic and social spheres of the institution and interaction with teaching staff are the core area of campus social engagement (Zhoc et al., 2020). Sociability and social adaptability are interchangeable terms with social intelligence and are crucial for successful social engagements. Social intelligence manifests in an individual's social behaviour (Strang, 1930; Mohd, & Shiva, 2022). Sociability is social skills, traits, and abilities that help achieve desired social success (Gilliland & Burke, 1926; Mohd, & Shiva, 2022). These skills of social interactions aid in adapting to social situations (Gerardi, 2015). Social intelligence is a visible social skill, observed mainly through the responses experienced practically by oneself and others (Boyatzis et al., 2015). For students, social skills predict strategies for valuing acceptance by peers and involvement in campus activities (Chan, 2003; Mohd, & Shiva, 2022). Social intelligence enables a behavioural repertoire of social problem-solving skills, positive social actions, and pro-social traits that promotes success in friendships (Newcomb et al., 1993; Mohd, & Shiva, 2022). Thus, Interpersonal intelligence benefits social functioning in higher education institutions.

Assertiveness is the ability to express your feelings and assert your rights while respecting the feelings and rights of others (Scott, 2020). Assertive communication is appropriately direct, open, and honest, and clarifies your needs to the other person. Being assertive comes naturally to some, but it is also a skill that can be learned. And there are many advantages of becoming more assertive, making it worth the effort. Assertive people tend to have fewer conflicts in their dealings with others (Ames, et al., 2017). This translates into less stress in their everyday lives. They get their needs met (which equates to less frustration over unmet needs) and help others get their needs met, too. Having stronger, more supportive relationships means that, if you are ever in a bind, you have people that you can count on. This also helps with stress management and even leads to a healthier body (Scott, 2020).

Studies have also found that assertiveness is positively associated with self-esteem (Unal, 2012; Scott, 2020). In other words, the more assertive you are, the better you tend to think of yourself. Assertiveness can be confused with aggressiveness since both types of behaviour involve standing up for one's rights and expressing one's needs. The key difference between the two styles is that individuals behaving assertively express themselves in ways that respect the other person.

In contrast, individuals behaving aggressively tend to employ tactics that are disrespectful, manipulative, demeaning, or abusive (Scott, 2020). They often make negative assumptions about others' motives and think in retaliatory terms, or they don't think of the other person's point of view at all. Aggressiveness can alienate others and create unnecessary stress. Those on the receiving end of aggressive behaviour often feel attacked and, as a result, avoid the aggressive individual.

Over time, people who behave aggressively can have a string of failed relationships and little social support (Scott, 2020). They don't always understand that this is related to their own behaviour. Ironically, they may feel like victims themselves.

Passive individuals are the direct opposite of assertive (Scott, 2020). They don't know how to adequately communicate their feelings and tend to fear conflict so much that they don't reveal their emotions in order to keep the peace. They let their needs go unmet, so others win while they lose out. Passive behaviour damages relationships in the long run, sometimes turning them toxic. By avoiding confrontation, it's easy to become increasingly angry, so when you finally do say something, it comes out aggressively (Scott, 2020). If you stay quiet most of the time, the other party often doesn't even know there's a problem until you explode. This leads to hard feelings, weaker relationships, and even more passivity (to avoid the conflict again) in the future (Scott, 2020).

Some people are passive-aggressive, meaning that they appear to be passive, yet show aggressiveness indirectly. An example of this is feeling hurt by your partner so you no longer cook their meals or wash their clothes (Scott, 2020). This type of communication style can be damaging to a relationship as well. It sends mixed messages when your words say that you are okay but your actions suggest that you are not (Scott, 2020).

Here are some common scenarios, with examples of each style of behaviour: Scenario A: Someone cuts in front of you at the supermarket. An aggressive response to this situation would be to assume that they did it on purpose and angrily respond with, "Hey, jerk! No cuts!" A passive response would be to let the person stay in front of you and say nothing at all. A passive-aggressive response would be to let the person stay in front of you but sigh loudly to show your disgust. An assertive response would be to assume that they may not have seen you in line and politely say, "Excuse me, but I was waiting to be helped." Scenario B: Your friend calls to vent about their bad day. Unfortunately, you have a lot of work to do and don't have time to talk.

An aggressive response would be to become angry because they obviously don't respect your time, cut them off, and sarcastically say, "Oh, get over it! I have my own problems!"

A passive response would be to let your friend talk for as long as they need and become resolved that you won't hit your deadline because they need your help. A passive-aggressive response would be to let them talk, yet throw in little "jabs," such as by saying, "I understand that you feel stressed by not having enough time to get everything done today (Scott, 2020). I feel that way too because I keep getting interrupted." An assertive response would be to listen for a minute or two, and then

compassionately say, “Wow, it sounds like you’re having a tough day! I’d love to talk to you about it, but I don’t have the time right now. Can we chat later tonight?” (Scott, 2020).

Cognitive behavioural theory by Beck (2011) is adopted as the theoretical framework for this study because cognitive-behavioural theoretical framework of human functioning is based on the premises that thoughts, emotions, and behaviours are inextricably linked and that each of these aspects of human functioning continuously effects and influences the others. Cognitive-behavioural theory posits that thoughts about the self, relationships, the world, and the future shape emotions and behaviours. The meaning and interpretation one give to event determine the how the individual react to situations. Hence the following hypotheses were tested:

Social intelligence (social skills, social awareness and social information processes) will independently and jointly predict fear of negative evaluation.

Assertiveness will significantly predict fear of negative evaluation among ESUT lecturers

Assertiveness will moderate the relationship between social intelligence (social skills, social awareness and social information processing) and fear of negative evaluation among university lecturers

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Eighty (80) lecturers comprised of 49 males and 31 females with a mean age of 40.98 and SD of 6.471 were drawn using multi-stage (cluster, simple random: by balloting and purposive) sampling techniques as participants from Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Enugu. The lecturers were clustered according to their faculties, simple random: by balloting was used to pick the faculties, while purposive: a criterion selection-based sampling technique was used to select the participants from Social sciences and humanities (27), law (8), Agricultural Extension (12) faculty of Applied natural sciences (18), Engineering (9) Pharmacy (6).

### **Instrument**

These set of instruments will be used:

- Watson and Friend (1969) Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE)
- Silvera et al. (2001) Tromso Social Intelligence Scale and
- Rathus, (1973) Rathus Assertiveness Scale

### **Watson and Friend (1969) Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE)**

Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE) was a 30-item instrument designed to measure social anxiety characterized by marked and persistent fear of social or performance situations appraised from being evaluated by others. It was scored using Likert response pattern of 1 to 4, where 1 = Some or a little of the time, 2 = Some of the time, 3 = Good part of the time, and 4 = Most or all of the time. All the items are directly scored. Watson and Friend (1969) reported reliability coefficient of KR -20 = .94- and one-month interval test-retest = .78 for FNE. On Nigerian validity, Odedeji (2004) in correlating FNE with STAI Y-2 (Spielberger, 1983), obtained a concurrent validity coefficient of .63.



### **Silvera et al. (2001) Tromso Social Intelligence Scale**

Developed by Silvera et al. (2001) in order to reveal social intelligence level, the Tromso Social Intelligence Scale (TSIS) is a self-report instrument including 21 items. The TSIS measures intelligence on the base of three different subscales: (i) Social Information Processing (SIP): This subscale measures the ability of understanding verbal or nonverbal messages regarding human relations, empathizing and reading hidden messages as well as explicit messages. Sample Item: "I usually understand what people are trying to do without feeling the need for their explanations." (ii) Social Skills (SS): This subscale measures the basic communication skills such as active listening, acting boldly, establishing, maintaining, and breaking up a relationship. Sample Item: "I am good at becoming acquainted with people and being involved in new social circles." (iii) Social Awareness (SA): This subscale measures the ability of active behaving in accordance with the situation, place, and time. Sample Item: "I usually break others' heart without being aware." Each of the subscales comprises of 7 items. A 7-point Likert-type scale form was prepared for the items included in the scale. The minimum and maximum scores in the items are 1 and 7 respectively. By Silvera et al. (2001), Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficients for social information processing, social skills and social awareness were found to be .81, .86 and .79 respectively. Regarding validity studies, expert opinion was asked, structure validity was conducted and similar scales validity was applied in the original scale. Among 130 items in the item pool, 21 items having a factor value higher than .045 and .30 correlation were selected. When varimax factor analysis was applied to 21 items, 3 factors were found to correspond to the theoretical basis. In terms of similar scale validity, it was examined by the Marlowe Crowne Social Desirability Scale (MSCD) and the correlation was found to be .22.

### **Rathus, (1973) Rathus Assertiveness Scale**

The *second part* concerns the RAS (Rathus, 1973). This questionnaire aims to assess the assertiveness skill and impression of one's own assertiveness and frankness (Rathus, 1973). The French validated version was used (Bouvard M, Cottraux, 1986). It contains 30 items: 17 are described as negative/passive, and 13 of them are positive. Items were rated on a six points Likert scale ranging from (-3) (*ie*; very uncharacteristic of me) to (+3) (*ie*; very characteristic of me). Total scores were obtained by adding numerical responses to each item, after changing the signs of reversed items, which were intended to avoid response bias. Scores range is between -90 (*ie*; highest degree of unassertiveness) to +90 (*ie*; highest level of assertiveness). The cut-off score is of +10 points: scores below +10 define unassertive profiles, and scores above +10 define assertive ones. The scale has relatively high internal consistency and stability (Rathus, 1973; Bouvard, Cottraux, 1986). In our study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.802, indicating a good internal consistency measure reflecting assertiveness

### **Procedure**

Academic staffs were drawn as participants from six faculties in Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT) using multi-stage sampling (cluster, simple random: by balloting, and purposive) techniques for this study. The lecturers were clustered according to their faculties, simple random: by balloting was used to pick the faculties while purposive sampling techniques was used to draw the final participants. A research assistants whom are student faculties' executives from the selected faculties were employed and trained to help distribute and retrieve

the questionnaire. One hundred and twenty-one (121) questionnaires were sent out, ninety-eight (98) were returned. Among the returning once, six (6) bears multiple initials and the other two (4) were not properly responded to, which make the numbers properly responded to be eighty (80), which was used for data analysis.

**Design and Statistics**

Correlational design will be adopted based on the fact that the relationships between the predictor variables and dependent variable are being investigated and also, they do not manipulate or control any of the variables. The statistical test that will be used for data analysis is moderated hierarchical multiple regression using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 25 software.

**Result**

**table I: descriptive statistics of the moderating role of assertiveness in the relationship between social intelligence and fear of negative evaluation**

S/ N	Variables	M	S. D	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1	Fear of negative evaluation	13.07	3.401	1	.338	.364	-	-	.664	.867	.815	.017	.070	.048	-	.055
2	Social skills	32.32	11.107	1	.403	.017	-	-	.917	.490	.360	-	-	-	.101	.109
3	Social awareness	29.56	7.025	1	-	-	.402	.746	.188	-	-	-	.105	.170	.074	
4	Social information processing	37.54	5.904	1	.235	-	-	.175	-	-	.005	.238	.008	.005	.104	.028
5	assertiveness	7.731	20.31	1	-	-	.115	.236	1	3	.007	.093	.267	.106	-	.152
6	Assertiveness*soci al skills	434.92	262.34	1	.716	.601	-	-	-	-	.109	.133	.178	.031	.138	
7	Assertiveness*soci al awareness	394.95	155.55	1	.650	.058	-	-	-	-	.073	.073	.041	.051	.144	
8	Assertiveness*soci al information process	482.70	125.84	1	.028	.042	-	-	-	-	.083	.004	.004	.004	.064	
9	Age	40.98	6.471	1	-	-	.081	.298	-	-	.173	.593	-	-	.000	

<b>10</b>	<b>Gender</b>	1.61	.542	1	-	-	.00
					.01	.19	3
					4	5	
<b>11</b>	<b>Marital status</b>	2.05	.740	1	.18	.28	
					0	6	
<b>12</b>	<b>Educational status</b>	2.20	.679		1	.14	
						9	
<b>13</b>	<b>length of service</b>	7.07	2.81			1	

At  $p < .05^*$ ,  $p < .01^{**}$ ,  $p < .001^{***}$

Table I above shows that social skills at  $r = .338$ , social awareness at  $r = .364$ , moderating role of assertiveness on social skills  $r = .664$ , moderating role of assertiveness on social awareness  $r = .867$  and moderating role of assertiveness on social information processing  $r = .815$  positively relate to fear of negative evaluation, this implies that an increase the list variables will lead to an increase in fear of negative evaluation. Social information processing  $r = -.409$  negatively relate to fear of negative evaluation, this implies that an increase in social information processing will cause a decrease in fear of negative evaluation among lecturers. While assertiveness  $r = -.118$ , age  $r = .017$ , gender  $r = .070$ , marital status  $r = .048$ , educational status  $r = -.050$ , and length of service  $r = .065$  fail to correlate with fear of negative evaluation among lecturers.

**Table II: moderated regression of the role of assertiveness in the relationship between social intelligence and fear of negative evaluation among lecturers**

Model	R	R <sup>2</sup>	UnStβ	Stβ	t
<b>Social skills</b>	.542**	.294**	.092	.301	1.955
<b>Social awareness</b>			.052	.107	.651
<b>Social information processing</b>			-.216*	-.375*	-2.487*
<b>assertiveness</b>	.544 <sup>b</sup>	.296	.008	.048	.321
Assertiveness*social skills			.000	-.038	-.219
Assertiveness*social awareness			.011***	.489***	4.945***
Assertiveness*social information process			.017***	.633***	12.749***
Age			-.007	-.013	-.467
Gender			-.060	-.010	-.442
<b>Marital status</b>			.032	.007	.319
<b>Educational status</b>			.033	.007	.311
<b>length of service</b>			-.010	-.008	-.298

At  $p < .05^*$ ,  $p < .01^{**}$ ,  $p < .001^{***}$ . R= relationship,  $r^2$ = relationship square, UnStβ= unstandardized beta, Stβ= standardized beta.

Table II above shows that only social information processing dimension of social intelligence UnSt=  $-.375^*$  and  $t = -2.487^*$  at  $p < .05$  negatively predicted fear of negative evaluation among lecturers, this indicates that an increase in social information processing dimension of social intelligence will cause a decrease in fear of negative evaluation among lecturers. While the social skills UnSt=  $-.300$  and  $t = 1.955$  and social; awareness UnSt=  $.107$  and  $t = .651$  failed to predict fear



of negative evaluation. Social intelligence  $r = .542$  was related to fear of negative evaluation, it contributed 29.4% variance to fear of negative evaluation at  $r^2 = .294$ . Assertiveness  $UnSt = .048$  and  $t = .321$  fail to predict fear of negative evaluation. Social intelligence and assertiveness jointly  $r = .544$  are related to fear of negative evaluation, they contributed 29.6% variance to fear of negative evaluation, and the jointly failed to predict fear of negative evaluation at  $p < .05$ .

Assertiveness failed to moderate the relationship between social skills dimension of social intelligence and fear of negative evaluation  $UnSt = -.038$  and  $t = -.219$  at  $p < .05$ . Assertive positively moderated the relationship between social awareness and fear of negative evaluation  $UnSt = .489^{***}$  and  $t = 4.945^{***}$  and assertiveness positively moderated the relationship between social information processing dimension of social intelligence  $UnSt = .633^{***}$   $t = 12.749^{***}$  at  $p < .001$ , this indicate that an increase in assertiveness on social awareness and information processing will cause an increase in fear of negative evaluation among lecturers.

## Discussion

The first hypothesis tested which stated that social intelligence (social skills, social awareness and social information process) will independently and jointly predict fear of negative evaluation was partially confirmed, hence the hypothesis was accepted. Social awareness and social skills dimensions of social intelligence did not significantly predict fear of negative evaluation, but the social information process social intelligence of dimension negatively predict fear of negative evaluation.

Social information process of social intelligence negatively predicted fear of negative evaluation. This means that increase in social information process will help to contribute to a decrease in fear of negative evaluation among lecturers. When the lecturers can understand their right and the status they are standing for, it will help to reduce the fear of negative evaluation among themselves. A better social information processes will help to guide the lecturer on what to do and what not to do, and it will increase the confidence level of the lecturer thereby assisting them to bring out their best.

The second hypothesis tested which stated that assertiveness will significantly predict fear of negative evaluation was not confirmed, hence the hypothesis was rejected. The result obtained shows that assertiveness is not a major determinant of fear of negative evaluation among ESUT lectures, this outcome shows that been assertive or not cannot lead to fear of been evaluated negatively. The result obtained is incongruity with the work of Himaja and Kiran (2021) which postulated that assertiveness and fear of negative evaluation are two side of a coin that their outcome cannot be determine by each other. This finding implies that been assertive or not is not the major trouble of ESUT lecturer, rather, other factors that are not been mentioned might have a full control of ESUT lecturers fear of negative evaluations.

Third hypothesis tested which stated that assertiveness will moderate the relationship between social intelligence (social skills, social awareness and social information processing) and fear of negative evaluation was confirmed, assertiveness was not able to moderate the relationship between social skill dimension of social intelligence and fear of negative evaluation, assertiveness was able to positively moderate the relationship between social awareness social along with social

information processing and fear of negative evaluation. This implies that an increase in assertive along with increase in either social awareness or social information processing might lead to fear of negation evaluation among lecturers. This indicate that lecturers that assertiveness and also aware of the school surrounding along with attitude of both the school management and student might experience fear of being evaluated negatively, because the lecturer knows their worth, and sense of feeling being neglected by both the school management and the school might lead fear of been judge negatively. Also when lectures makes law which student most abide by before they can attend their class, and much support is not coming from the school management direction, and student are not obeying the laws might lead to lecturers feeling poor judge or negatively rated.

### **Implication of the findings**

The findings is in congruity with cognitive behavioural theory which was adopted as the theoretical framework for this study because cognitive-behavioural theoretical framework of human functioning is based on the premises that thoughts, emotions, and behaviours are inextricably linked and that each of these aspects of human functioning continuously effects and influences the others. Cognitive-behavioural theory posits that thoughts about the self, relationships, the world, and the future shape emotions and behaviours. The meaning and interpretation one gives to event determine how the individual react to situations.

Findings from the study shows that social skill and social information processes significantly predicted fear of negative evaluation, when social skills reported a positive outcome, while social information process negatively predicted fear of negative evaluation. Hence clinicians should bring out a modality that can increase social information processes to reduce fear of negative evaluation. School management should frequently organise workshops on how to manage self and others among the lecturers. Lecturers should perceive the lecturing process as an interactive one was both lecturers and the student learn from each other, this will help to reduce over expectation.

### **Limitation of the Study**

So many factors militated against this study, one of such is the sampled size. The use of only one state government university reduces the population of participants, the number would have increased assuming more than one university was sampled.

Secondly, this study was conducted when some of the departments facing accreditation which limited the numbers of students' available.

### **Suggestion for further study**

Future researchers should consider sampling more than one schools so as to increase the numbers of students that will participate in the work.

Future researcher should consider carrying out this study when student are less busy and available.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

The study investigated social intelligence and assertiveness as predictors of fear of negative evaluation, findings revealed social intelligence significantly predicted fear of negative evaluation. Hence, lecturers should be encouraged to increase their social information processes

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