



**Citation:** Fayyaz, M., Sikander, A., Anjum, F. A., & Jamil, U. (2026). Relationship between Perceived Acceptance and Social Anxiety among Adolescents: Mediating Role of Emotional Intelligence. *Regional Lens*, 5(1), 217–222. <https://doi.org/10.55737/rl.v5i1.26182>

Pages: 217–222 ▶ DOI: 10.55737/rl.v5i1.26182 ▶ Volume 5 ▶ Issue 1 (Jan-Feb 2026) ▶ © The Author(s) 2026

## Relationship between Perceived Acceptance and Social Anxiety among Adolescents: Mediating Role of Emotional Intelligence

Maryam Fayyaz <sup>1\*</sup> Asma Sikander <sup>2</sup> Fayyaz Ahmed Anjum <sup>3</sup> Uroosa Jamil <sup>4</sup>

**Corresponding Author:** Maryam Fayyaz (Email: [maryamfayyaz14@gmail.com](mailto:maryamfayyaz14@gmail.com))

**Abstract:** Adolescence is an essential developmental level marked via way of means of elevated sensitivity to look approbation and social appraisal. Adolescents` mental adjustment is substantially inspired via way of means of perceived acceptability, and social tension regularly manifests throughout this phase. Emotional intelligence has been advised as a protecting trait that can buffer towards tension symptoms, however little examine has checked out its mediation effect among perceived popularity and social tension, mainly in collectivistic cultural situations. In a pattern of three hundred students (a long time 10 to 19) from public, private, and semi-authorities faculties in Islamabad, Pakistan, the modern examine investigated the relationships among social tension, emotional intelligence, and perceived popularity. The examine followed a cross-sectional correlational technique. The contributors finished the Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale for Children and Adolescents (LSAS-CA), the Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT), and the Perceived Acceptance Scale (PAS). Pearson correlation and mediation evaluation had been performed. The outcomes confirmed that social tension and emotional intelligence had been negatively correlated. However, neither social tension nor emotional intelligence had been proven to be considerably correlated with perceived popularity. According to a mediation examine, the affiliation among social tension and perceived popularity became now no longer considerably mitigated via way of means of emotional intelligence. The findings display that even as emotional intelligence via way of means of itself protects towards social tension, it can't account for the connection among tension and perceived popularity on this cultural context.

**Key Words:** Perceived Acceptance, Emotional Intelligence, Social Anxiety, Adolescents, Mediation, and Collectivistic Culture

### Introduction

Adolescence is a critical developmental stage characterized by rapid biological, psychological, and social changes. During this period, peer relationships become central to identity formation and self-evaluation (La Greca & Harrison, 2005). Adolescents begin to assess their self-worth based on how accepted and valued they feel within their social environment. Perceived acceptance defined as the subjective belief that one is loved, respected, and valued by others plays a significant role in shaping adolescents' emotional and psychological well-being. Research indicates that adolescents' subjective perceptions of social acceptance are more strongly associated with emotional adjustment than objective indicators such as popularity or peer status (Wang et al. (2024).

Perceived acceptance significantly influences adolescents' mental health outcomes. Adolescents who feel accepted by their peers and social groups tend to report higher levels of happiness, better emotional adjustment, and healthier social functioning (Wang et al. (2025). Conversely, experiences of rejection or exclusion may lead to emotional distress,

<sup>1</sup> MS Clinical Psychology, Department of Psychology, Riphah International University, Gulberg Greens, Islamabad, Pakistan. Email: [maryamfayyaz14@gmail.com](mailto:maryamfayyaz14@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup> Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, Riphah International University, Gulberg Greens, Islamabad, Pakistan. Email: [asma.sikandar@riphah.edu.pk](mailto:asma.sikandar@riphah.edu.pk)

<sup>3</sup> Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, Muslim Youth University, Islamabad, Pakistan. Email: [fayyaz.anjum@myu.edu.pk](mailto:fayyaz.anjum@myu.edu.pk)

<sup>4</sup> M.Phil. Psychology, Muslim Youth University, Islamabad, Pakistan. Email: [uroosaj7@gmail.com](mailto:uroosaj7@gmail.com)

social withdrawal, and increased vulnerability to internalizing problems. Persistent feelings of non-acceptance have been linked with the development of social anxiety and other psychological difficulties (Platt et al. (2013).

Social anxiety disorder is characterized by an intense fear of negative evaluation, embarrassment, or humiliation in social situations (Hofmann et al., 2014). Adolescents with social anxiety often avoid social interactions, experience heightened self-consciousness, and demonstrate reduced participation in academic and social activities. Studies suggest that peer rejection and low perceived acceptance significantly contribute to the development of social anxiety symptoms during adolescence (Platt et al., 2013; Shahid et al., 2025). Negative interpersonal experiences such as bullying, rejection, or criticism can intensify adolescents' fear of social judgment and increase avoidance behaviors (Carvalho & Vilaça (2024).

But now no longer all young adults who experience unaccepted develop as much as be socially anxious. Individual protecting traits might also additionally have an effect on how teenagers recognise and address social events. Emotional intelligence (EI) is a vast mental aid this is receiving an increasing number of attention. The ability to recognize, recognise, control, and successfully use feelings in oneself and others is called emotional intelligence (Salguero & Palomera (2012). Higher emotional intelligence in teenagers makes it less complicated for them to cope with annoying social situations, control emotional difficulties, and uphold superb social relationships.

The defensive feature of emotional intelligence in teenage mental adjustment is highlighted through empirical studies. Adolescents with more potent emotional intelligence show extra social competencies and greater effective peer connections (Mavrouli & Sánchez-Ruiz (2011). According to (Davis & Humphrey (2012), there's a bad correlation among emotional intelligence and social anxiety. This indicates that folks that own extra emotional cognizance and law are much less susceptible to social worry and avoidance. Adolescents with emotional intelligence are higher capable of manage bad emotional reactions in tough social conditions and interpret social comments greater realistically.

Moreover, psychological resilience and well-being have been significantly predicted by emotional intelligence. According to research, emotionally intelligent individuals have the ability to manage stress, manage conflicts with other people, and maintain psychological stability (Zhang & Chen (2024)). Furthermore, (Wang et al. (2025) demonstrated that emotional intelligence significantly reduced the negative psychological effects of social anxiety among university students (Shengyao et al., 2024). Adolescents with high emotional intelligence have the ability to reinterpret negative social experiences and maintain emotional balance; hence, the possibility of acquiring anxiety symptoms is low.

Even though there is a substantial amount of study on perceived acceptance, emotional intelligence, and social anxiety, there is less research on the combination influence of these characteristics on teenagers. In order to successfully address and prevent these problems, it is crucial to understand the function of emotional intelligence in the relationship between perceived acceptance and social anxiety.

Because of this, the current study aims to investigate the connection between teenage social anxiety and perceived acceptability, as well as the part emotional intelligence plays in this relationship. By looking at all of these characteristics, it might be possible to comprehend how psychological aspects contribute to teenagers' emotional well-being and how they might be taken into account while developing educational interventions.

## Rationale of the Study

Although previous research has shown a connection between social anxiety and perceived rejection, it is unclear how this connection is made in the setting of collectivistic culture. Emotional intelligence could help to alleviate the impacts of perceived rejection by enhancing emotional regulation and coping. The significance of emotional intelligence as a mediator in the relationship between social anxiety and perceived acceptability among Pakistani youth has received very little attention. This study attempts to add to the culturally contextualized psychological research in the country.

## Objectives

1. To examine relationships among perceived acceptance, emotional intelligence, and social anxiety.
2. To investigate whether emotional intelligence mediates the relationship between perceived acceptance and social anxiety.



## Hypotheses

**H1:** Perceived acceptance negatively associates with social anxiety and positively associates with emotional intelligence among adolescents.

**H2:** Emotional intelligence mediates the relationship between perceived acceptance and social anxiety among adolescents.

## Method

### Research Design

In this study, a cross-sectional research design approach has been employed to investigate the relationship between perceived acceptance social anxiety and emotional intelligence, whereas emotional intelligence also been examined as a mediating variable. Cross-sectional research design involves collecting data at a single point in time.

### Participants

300 teenagers between the ages of 10 and 19 made up the sample, with 150 males and 150 girls. The sampling was done from a number of Islamabad, Pakistan, schools. Convenience sampling was used as the sample strategy. The G\*Power software was used to calculate the sample size.

### Inclusion Criteria

- ▶ Students currently enrolled from Grade 5-8, 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> were included.
- ▶ Adolescents who have knowledge of English was also included.

### Exclusion Criteria

- ▶ Participants who are currently under treatment whether physiological or psychological were not included.
- ▶ Adolescents who are not enrolled in any educational institution were also excluded.

## Instruments

### Perceived Acceptance Scale (PAS)

The Perceived Acceptance Scale (PAS), created by Brock, Sarason, and Sanghvi in 1998, was used to measure how accepted people feel. This scale has 44 questions split into four groups: 10 about mothers, 10 about fathers, 12 about family, and 12 about friends. People answer using a Likert scale, which helps show how much emotional support they feel, how much they belong, and how much they feel valued in their relationships. The PAS has good psychometric qualities, with internal consistency scores between .80 and .96. It has been tested with teenagers and is strongly linked to measures of emotional and social well-being.

### Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT)

The Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT), created by Schutte et al. in 1998, was used to measure emotional intelligence. Participants rate each other on 33 statements using a five-point scale, where 5 means they strongly agree and 1 means they strongly disagree. This test checks how well people understand and manage their emotions, and how they use emotional knowledge to deal with problems. It has good discrimination and construct validity, and a reliability score of Cronbach's alpha .87.

### Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale for Children and Adolescents (LSAS-CA)

The Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale for Children and Adolescents (LSAS-CA) should be used to measure social anxiety. Originally developed by Liebowitz in 1987, it was later modified by Masia-Warner and colleagues in 2003. It is a 24-item measure that uses a four-point Likert type rating scale to assess fear and avoidance in social and performance situations. Overall scores reflect the intensity of social anxiety manifestations. The LSAS-CA is well accepted and practiced for its excellent validity and high reliability ( $\alpha > .90$ ).

## Procedure

Before data collection begins, approval was obtained from the relevant governing bodies. Permission was obtained from the authors of the instruments and heads of the educational institutes to ensure compliance with copyright requirements and to appropriately credit the primary authors. As the study involves minors aged 10 to 19, informed consent was obtained from their legal guardians, and formal agreement in the form of assent was secured from the respondents.

## Ethical Considerations

All participants were thoroughly briefed about the objectives of the research, the nature of the questions, their right to decline participation in any part of the study, and their will to withdraw at any time without facing any adverse outcomes. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained throughout the study. No personal information such as names, school identification numbers, or contact details were collected. Completed questionnaires were anonymized and stored securely, with permission restricted to the investigator.

## Results

Result highlights current study, the relationship between emotional intelligence, social anxiety fear, social anxiety avoidance and perceived acceptance through Pearson product moment correlation. Mediation analysis was carried out to determine the role of emotional intelligence as a mediator among social anxiety fear, social anxiety avoidance and perceive acceptance. The results have yielded significant findings which are appended in the following tables.

**Table 1**

*Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis among the Variables of Perceived Acceptance, Social Anxiety Fear, Avoidance and Emotional Intelligence (N = 300)*

	1	2	3	4
1. SSEIT	-	-.10	-.15**	-.10
2. SAS Fear		-	.58**	-.03
3. SAS Avoidance			-	.07
4. PASS				-

*Note:* \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ ; SSEIT: Schutz Scale of Emotional Intelligence, SAS Fear: Social Anxiety Scale Fear, Social Anxiety Scale Avoidance, PASS: Perceived Acceptance Scale.

The correlation analysis revealed several significant associations among the variables of Emotional Intelligence, Perceived Acceptance and Social Anxiety. The results revealed that Emotional intelligence (SSEIT) was negatively correlated with social anxiety–avoidance ( $r = -.15$ ,  $p < .01$ ), suggesting that higher emotional intelligence is linked to lower avoidance behaviors in social contexts. Social anxiety–fear of negative evaluation (SAS Fear) was strongly and positively correlated with social anxiety–avoidance ( $r = .58$ ,  $p < .01$ ), indicating that adolescents who fear negative evaluation are also more likely to avoid social situations, similarly social anxiety avoidance showed non-significant relationship social anxiety avoidance. No significant relationship were observed between social anxiety avoidance and perceived acceptance (PASS) suggesting that adolescents' subjective sense of acceptance operate independently from emotional intelligence and social anxiety in this sample.

**Table 2**

*Mediating Effect of Emotional Intelligence between Perceived Acceptance and Social Anxiety among Adolescents (N=300)*

Variable	B	95% CI		SE B	$\beta$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
		LL	UL				
Step 1						.10	.01
Constant	154.47	143.59	165.36	5.53			
SUMPAS	-.07	-.14	.00	.03	.08		
Step 2						.16	.02
Constant	56.93	20.53	93.33	18.49			
SUMPAS	.06	-.07	.20	.07	.01		
SUMSEIT	-.29	-.45	-.05	.64	.06		

Table 2 shows the impact of Perceived Acceptance and Emotional Intelligence on Social Anxiety. The  $\Delta R^2$  value of .02 revealed a 2% change in variance between Model 1 and Model 2. The regression weight for Perceived Acceptance reduced from Model 1 to Model 2 (.08 to .01), which confirms no mediation. Emotional Intelligence does not play a mediating role between Perceived Acceptance and Social Anxiety.

## Discussion

In the setting of collectivistic society, the current study sought to examine the connections between social anxiety, emotional intelligence, and perceived acceptance. Emotional intelligence was discovered as an essential protective factor for social anxiety. In line with earlier research that highlighted the function of emotional intelligence in reducing social anxiety, adolescents with higher emotional intelligence scores also exhibited less avoidance behaviors. Remarkably, neither social anxiety nor emotional intelligence were substantially correlated with perceived acceptance. The cultural setting, where the opinions of the family and community are valued more than those of the individual, may have been a significant factor. Furthermore, the association between social anxiety and perceived acceptance was not mediated by emotional intelligence. The findings imply that other factors, such as self-esteem, attachment, or parenting styles, may better explain the relationship between perceived acceptance and social anxiety in collectivistic cultures, even though emotional intelligence alone helps to mitigate the presence of social anxiety.

## Conclusion

By examining the function of emotional intelligence as a mediator between perceived acceptance and social anxiety, the study adds to the body of information on teenage mental health. Emotional intelligence was found to have a negative link with social anxiety; however, it did not operate as a mediator between perceived acceptance and anxiety.

## Limitations

The sample of the study mainly belongs to different institutions of Islamabad city, however samples from other cities if included may have more generalizability of entire population of Pakistan. Many cultural factors may have influenced the development of self-concept such as ethnicity, different sects, socioeconomic class system may have implications, such factors are to be included in future research. Family dynamics such as cohesiveness, disruptive and broken families, joint and nuclear family and different child rearing practices like parenting styles may have effect on the development of self-concept are to be considered in future studies.

## Recommendations

To improve the ability to generalize, it is advised that the representative sample of the entire nation be employed in the future. Additionally, it is suggested that qualitative approaches be employed to investigate the phenomenon of perceived acceptance and social anxiety, or that alternative mediating factors like attachment and self-esteem be used in the study of perceived acceptance and social anxiety. It is also thought to be feasible to investigate the phenomenon of perceived acceptance and social anxiety in more detail using qualitative methodologies.

## Practical Implications

School-based initiatives that attempt to enhance emotional intelligence in kids may help relieve social anxiety in young individuals. Programs that assist parents in supporting their children's emotional wellbeing and those that assist pupils in developing emotional regulation abilities must be integrated. There is a need to assist the establishment of mental health literacy initiatives that help vulnerable young people.

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