

# Influence of public insecurity and mobile phone use on university academic performance

*Influencia de la inseguridad ciudadana y el uso móvil en el rendimiento académico universitario*

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## Abstract

The objective of this research was to determine the impact of public insecurity and the use of mobile devices on students' academic performance. A non-experimental, correlational, cross-sectional design was used to analyze the relationship between the variables. To this end, quantitative and qualitative techniques were applied to a population of 1,112 enrolled students, from which a sample of 286 participants, consisting of men and women, was selected. Among the main findings, it was identified that only 20% of students feel safe (15%) or very safe (5%), which shows a negative impact of the perception of insecurity in the vicinity of the university. Likewise, a high level of insecurity was found in the vicinity of the institution. Regarding the use of mobile devices, the results show a complex effect: while some students report that these resources contribute to improving their academic performance, others point out that inappropriate use generates anxiety and decreases their performance.

**Keywords:** public safety, mobile devices, academic performance.

## Resumen

La presente investigación tuvo como objetivo determinar el impacto de la inseguridad ciudadana y del uso de dispositivos móviles en el desempeño académico de los estudiantes. Se empleó un diseño no experimental, correlacional y transversal, orientado a analizar la relación entre las variables. Para ello, se aplicaron técnicas cuantitativas y cualitativas a una población de 1,112 estudiantes matriculados, de la cual se seleccionó una muestra de 286 participantes, conformada por hombres y mujeres. Entre los principales hallazgos se identificó que solo el 20 % de los estudiantes se sienten seguros (15 %) o muy seguros (5 %), lo que evidencia un impacto negativo de la percepción de inseguridad en los alrededores de la universidad. Asimismo, se constató un alto nivel de inseguridad en las inmediaciones de la institución. En cuanto al uso de dispositivos móviles, los resultados muestran un efecto complejo: mientras algunos estudiantes reportan que estos recursos contribuyen a mejorar su rendimiento académico, otros señalan que un uso inadecuado genera ansiedad y disminuye su desempeño.

**Palabras clave:** inseguridad ciudadana, dispositivos móviles, rendimiento académico.

## Introduction

Citizen insecurity is defined as the perception and fear an individual experiences regarding the possibility of becoming a victim of a crime, a concept supported by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2022). The relationship between insecurity and school risk focuses on individual well-being, as this issue arises from daily interactions and affects both class attendance and academic performance, with visible repercussions on students' emotional burden. Additionally, mobile device usage impacts learning processes, either by facilitating access to information or generating distractions (Castillo & Medina, 2024). At the university level, academic performance is closely linked to attention and concentration during academic activities.

Mobile devices enable constant connectivity, and their impact on learning can be either positive or negative. The developmental stage of a student justifies the use of technology as part of their habitual environment, while in-class usage largely depends on the pedagogical guidelines established by instructors. Nevertheless, these devices can become sources of distraction during academic sessions. The first hypothesis of this research posits that citizen insecurity affects students' attention, attendance, and academic performance, drawing on literature that examines the relationship between the perception of insecurity and learning activities. The second hypothesis asserts that mobile device usage influences participation and academic performance, supported by evidence regarding the effects of distraction and multitasking on attentional processes (Organización Mundial de la Salud [OMS], 2021).

University policies aim to establish conducive learning conditions, with student safety—understood as tranquility and absence of danger—being a fundamental element for the normal development of academic activities. The risk-focused approach associated with insecurity has gradually been replaced by a well-being framework, directed toward ensuring favorable educational environments. The relationship between mobile phone usage and classroom dynamics has been extensively studied, and literature indicates that devices can enhance learning motivation when utilized appropriately. However, studies that simultaneously integrate security and technology within the university context are scarce. Analyzing both factors together is essential to understand how the perception of insecurity could moderate or mediate the relationship between technology usage and academic performance, thus allowing for the identification of more effective interventions that address these variables in a coordinated manner.

In this context, the theoretical review is organized around three dimensions: citizen insecurity and academic performance; the use of mobile devices and the learning process; and the interaction between both. The first dimension examines the relationship between citizen insecurity and academic performance. The second analyzes the impact of mobile device usage on attention, participation, motivation, and autonomous learning, as well as the theories that explain these effects. The third dimension addresses the interactions between security and technology, exploring relational models, potential moderators or mediators, and an unresolved research gap.

Evidence indicates that insecurity affects attention, increases anxiety—due to the constant perception of threat or vulnerability—reduces class attendance, and consequently diminishes academic performance. Conversely, literature suggests that in high-risk contexts, the use of mobile devices may differ from typical usage centered on academic purposes or basic communication, potentially becoming a coping mechanism or an alternative source of distraction. This implies that drawing general conclusions about distraction without considering the context would be premature. In this regard, a research gap emerges related to the limited evidence analyzing how citizen insecurity and mobile device usage interact to influence university academic performance.

Citizen insecurity is conceived as the fear experienced by an individual or group of becoming involved in a crime or misdemeanor. In recent decades, this phenomenon has gained relevance in Latin America due to its impact on daily life and the perception of social well-being. Meanwhile, attention constitutes one of the most studied cognitive processes in contemporary psychology. According to the Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo (2024), attention is a mental resource with limited capacity, implying that only a reduced amount of information can be processed simultaneously. Therefore, the selection and focus on relevant stimuli are essential for optimizing cognitive performance. When the environment is perceived as insecure, attention tends to shift toward environmental factors associated with risk, which diminishes concentration, motivation, and even class attendance, ultimately affecting academic performance and educational continuity.

The relationship between insecurity and academic performance has garnered increasing interest in educational research, although most studies have focused on primary and secondary education levels (Cabrera & Galán, 2002; UNESCO, 2024). In the university context, this relationship has been explored somewhat tentatively and has yet to develop into a solid analytical framework. Available evidence indicates that insecurity does not directly affect performance; rather, it does so through intermediary variables such as attention, anxiety,

attendance, and student motivation (Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo, 2023; OCDE, 2025). In contexts where the perception of insecurity is high, students may experience distractions, stress, or absenteeism, factors that negatively impact their academic performance.

Attention can be defined as the capacity to concentrate on a stimulus or set of stimuli at the expense of others, influenced by the characteristics of the stimuli themselves, the individual's motivation, and prior knowledge. Anxiety, in turn, encompasses the physiological and psychological responses a person experiences in the face of a perceived threatening situation, and it can be assessed through personality tests or through the analysis of disturbing thoughts or worries that arise during academic activities (Cuzco, 2022). Finally, class attendance is one of the factors that directly impact academic performance (Cabrera & Galán, 2002) and can be analyzed through the recording of sessions attended by students, though this does not necessarily imply an increased workload.

Mobile devices, such as smartphones, have become essential components of daily life. They provide access to pertinent information and resources for learning, but they can also create distractions that interrupt or negatively impact attention. Classical theories of attention suggest that distractions can lead to a temporary weakening of concentration or even a complete breakdown in efforts to maintain it. This dynamic is evident in the academic arena, where unregulated use of mobile devices results in constant distractions that hinder attention in class (Castillo & Medina, 2024). However, when utilized appropriately, these devices can enhance student participation, motivation, and autonomous learning.

The literature review linking insecurity and academic performance indicates that environmental insecurity can adversely affect class attendance—whether physical or virtual—generate anxiety, and diminish attentional capacity. Attention, viewed as a "gateway" to learning, is a limited resource that can become depleted through use, yet can also be restored; furthermore, it plays a critical role in knowledge acquisition. In this context, the use of mobile phones as academic tools depends on the available attentional capacity, suggesting a need to promote responsible use in the classroom.

The classroom serves as the central space for education, and the instructor's ability to foster student attention is crucial for learning, significantly increasing opportunities for knowledge acquisition. The relationship between mobile device usage and classroom learning is complex and non-linear. Accordingly, it has been suggested that unregulated use may harm academic performance (Fraga et al., 2024).

In recent years, research on the university experience has adopted a more holistic approach, considering various factors that influence learning and student well-being. Within this framework, the study of the interaction between citizen insecurity and mobile device usage in higher education has gained momentum. Some authors, such as Quintero (2020), have proposed analytical models that explore the mediating or moderating role of mobile device usage in the relationship between the perception of insecurity and educational outcomes. These models suggest that contexts of insecurity can influence how students utilize their devices, impacting variables such as attention, motivation, anxiety, class participation, and academic performance.

However, the application of these models within the university context remains limited. At this educational level, insecurity may reduce attention during sessions, lower attendance, and consequently affect academic performance (Romero et al., 2021). Mobile device usage in the university context can play a decisive role in how students respond to insecurity, both on and off campus. From the perspective of multitasking theory, mobile devices act as tools that allow for the simultaneous management of various cognitive and emotional demands. In this sense, mobile phones can function as mediators or moderators between the perception of insecurity and key academic variables, such as participation, motivation, and the educational climate.

On one hand, responsible and academic use of mobile devices can mitigate the negative effects of insecurity by facilitating access to information, enabling immediate communication, and providing learning resources, thereby strengthening students' sense of control and belonging. On the other hand, excessive or distracting use may exacerbate the adverse effects of insecurity by diminishing concentration, generating anxiety, and impacting performance. Analyzing the interplay between citizen insecurity and mobile device usage allows for a deeper understanding of how both factors interact and shape the university educational experience. This perspective is essential for justifying the present study, as it offers a more comprehensive view of academic performance by integrating psychological, contextual, and technological variables that have traditionally been examined separately.

In this context, the current research explores the influence of citizen insecurity and mobile device usage on university academic performance. The main objective is to determine how both factors, individually and in combination, affect students' academic performance.

## Methodology

The research was conducted using a mixed-methods approach, with a non-experimental, correlational, and cross-sectional design. Both quantitative and qualitative techniques were employed, facilitating the analysis of numerical data alongside the experiences and perceptions of students.

The study considered a population of 1,112 students enrolled in the Faculty of Education at the National University Federico Villarreal (UNFV) during 2024. Data collection occurred in the second semester of the same year. The sample was determined using the Cochran formula with adjustments for finite populations, resulting in 286 students selected through stratified random sampling to ensure representativeness by course and year of study.

Selection criteria included age, gender, academic year, and other relevant characteristics. The unit of analysis comprised the students in the sample, whose responses to questionnaires and interviews facilitated the evaluation of perceptions regarding insecurity, mobile device usage, and academic performance.

Data collection included interviews and document reviews to identify perceptions and delve into specific aspects. Interviews conducted with a subsample that completed the questionnaire provided a deeper exploration of how insecurity and mobile device usage influence academic performance.

The questionnaire—administered in either printed or digital format—gathered information on the three main variables of the study: citizen insecurity, mobile device usage, and academic performance. Semi-structured interviews were conducted either in person or via videoconference, ensuring a suitable environment for participants.

## Results

The study identified a frequent use of mobile devices during classes, which can serve both as an academic support and a source of distraction. Additionally, the average grades reveal differences linked to the level of perceived security and patterns of mobile phone usage, indicating that both variables influence academic performance. These findings substantiate further comparative analyses.

**Table 1**

*Perception of security at the university*

Level of Perception of Security	Frequency (n)	Percentage of Students (%)
Very safe	14	5%
Safe	43	15%
Neither safe nor unsafe	86	30%
Unsafe	100	35%
Very unsafe	43	15%

**Table 1** shows that most students feel "unsafe" (35%) or "neither safe nor unsafe" (30%) when commuting to university, reflecting a perceived vulnerable environment. Only 20% express feeling safe or very safe. This trend suggests that the physical and social surroundings do not provide a sense of protection, potentially increasing emotional tension and affecting concentration and academic stability.

**Table 2**

*Frequency of mobile device use during classes*

Frequency of Use	Frequency (n)	Percentage of Students (%)
Never	29	10%
Rarely	57	20%
Sometimes	114	40%
Frequently	57	20%
Always	29	10%

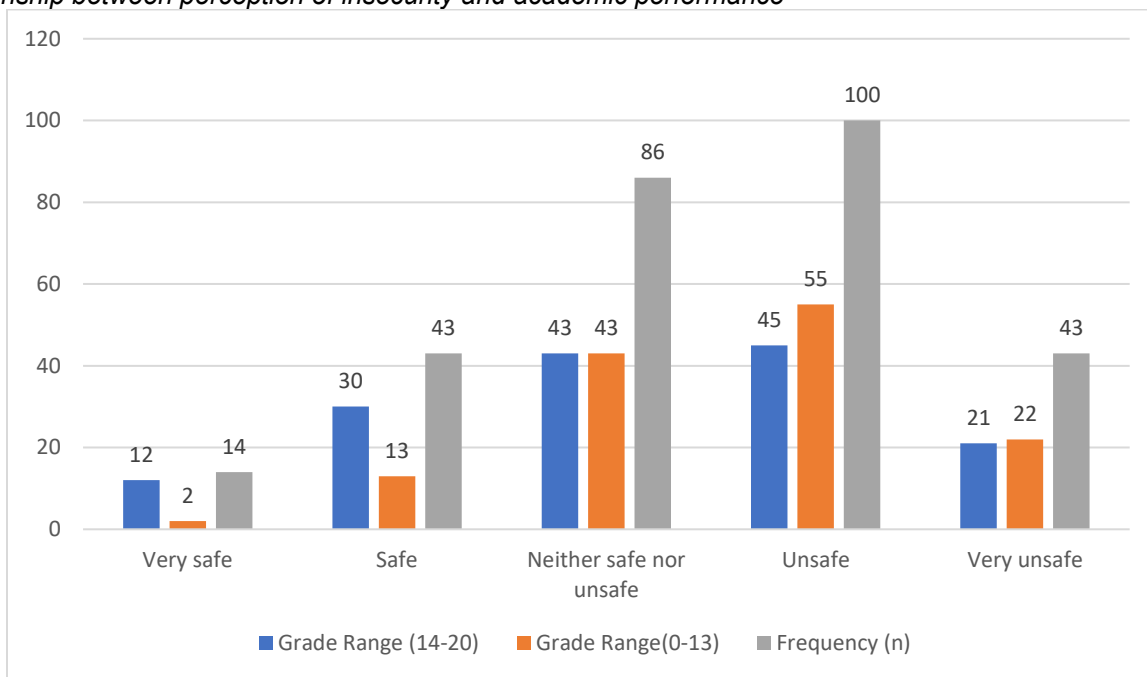
In **Table 2**, 40% of students report using their phones "sometimes" during classes, while 20% do so frequently and 10% always. This indicates regular interaction with devices during academic hours. While moderate use may facilitate learning, constant utilization is often associated with non-academic activities that detract from attention. The 30% who rarely use their phones may belong to a group with higher self-regulation. These patterns demonstrate two profiles: one that integrates the device into study efforts and another that primarily uses it for recreational purposes.

**Table 3**  
*Distribution of average grades among students*

Grade Range	Frequency (n)	Percentage of Students (%)
0-10	29	10%
11-13	86	30%
14-16	114	40%
17-20	57	20%

**Table 3** reveals that 40% of students achieve averages between 14 and 16 (good performance), 30% between 11 and 13 (average performance), and only 20% attain grades between 17 and 20 (very good performance). A mere 10% exhibit low grades (0-10). This distribution indicates that, despite the presence of students with outstanding results, a considerable proportion demonstrates performance that is susceptible to improvement, potentially impacted by factors like insecurity and excessive mobile usage.

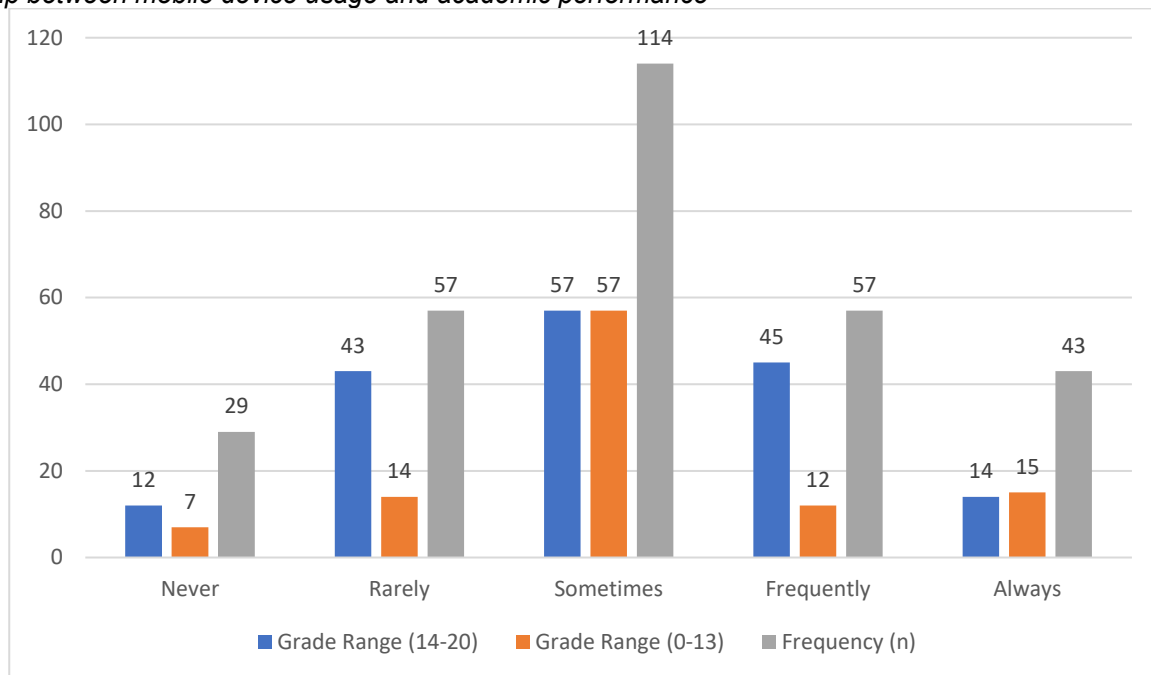
**Figure 1**  
*Relationship between perception of insecurity and academic performance*



The data suggest a potential relationship between the perception of insecurity and academic performance. A higher percentage of students who feel insecure or very insecure tend to have lower grades (0-13) compared to those who feel safe or very safe. This preliminary finding supports the hypothesis that perceptions of citizen insecurity may negatively affect academic performance.

**Figure 2**

*Relationship between mobile device usage and academic performance*



Quantitative data suggest a relationship between the perception of insecurity and academic performance: those who feel insecure tend to achieve lower grades. Furthermore, frequent mobile usage during classes appears to be associated with decreased performance, particularly when recreational use predominates. In contrast, academic use may have less negative effects. Collectively, the results indicate a heterogeneous scenario in which perceptions of insecurity and mobile device usage directly or indirectly influence academic performance. These trends will be discussed to understand their impact on university education and inform institutional improvement strategies.

**Interview results:**

The analysis of interviews conducted with five students (E1–E5) shows convergent experiences regarding insecurity and mobile phone usage. A prevailing sense of vulnerability during commutes to university was noted, with over half claiming to have been victims of some criminal act, prompting them to adopt precautionary measures that limit their connectivity.

Regarding mobile device usage, all interviewees consistently use their phones during classes for both academic activities and social media. Some express anxiety or stress when forgetting their devices, reflecting a dependence on technology with emotional components.

Several students mention using their phones as a resource to cope with insecurity, whether for communicating with family or distracting themselves in perceived risky situations. This suggests that insecurity may heighten non-academic phone usage, reinforcing the relationship between stress, anxiety, and technological dependence.

In summary, the interviews provide a qualitative context that complements the quantitative information. Although they do not represent the entire population, they validate observed trends and offer relevant insights for future research on security, student well-being, and technology usage in higher education.

**Discussion**

The results of this research reveal a significant perception of insecurity among university students in the Faculty of Education, which appears to influence their academic performance. This conclusion aligns with a growing body of evidence documenting the detrimental effects of exposure to crime and violence in educational environments. The sense of vulnerability affects not only concentration but also manifests in tangible academic consequences.

In this regard, Hernández Vázquez et al. (2021) found in a study conducted at a public university in Mexico that nearly half of students who experienced criminal incidents faced academic consequences, such as class

absences, with a concerning 10% even discontinuing their studies for this reason. This finding suggests that insecurity could constitute a significant factor in the low graduation rates at higher education institutions.

The connection between the perception of insecurity and the deterioration of academic performance seems to be mediated by psychological factors such as stress and anxiety. The data from this study correspond with reports from the National Observatory of Citizen Security from the Ministry of the Interior, which has highlighted the impact of criminality on the well-being of the population. Research by Hadad Arrascue de Maurtua (2025) has demonstrated a direct relationship between perceived insecurity and anxiety levels in university students.

This emotional state, as described by Jadue (2001), can generate excessive sensitivity, fears, and shyness, which hinder students' ability to thrive academically. Additionally, academic stress alone is a relevant issue; a study by Silva-Ramos et al. (2020) reported that 86.3% of assessed university students exhibited moderate stress levels, interfering with their activities and potentially compromising their mental health.

Regarding mobile device usage, the results confirm its dual nature. While these tools can facilitate access to information and support learning when used appropriately, prevailing evidence—including findings from this research—points to negative effects when their use is excessive. Cuzco (2022) observed that addictive mobile usage, particularly centered around social media, negatively impacts academic performance. This conclusion aligns with the systematic review by Amez and Baert (2020), which found a predominant negative association between smartphone usage frequency and academic success. Mechanisms behind this phenomenon include distractions, multitasking, and the presence of addictive behaviors that reduce time and cognitive resources allocated to study.

The interaction between citizen insecurity and mobile device usage presents a complex and potentially synergistic dynamic. The qualitative findings of this study illustrate that the perception of insecurity generates a negative emotional state expressed as fear, anxiety, and stress, leading students to engage in intensive mobile usage as a mechanism for escape, distraction, or emotional regulation. Although this behavior may provide temporary relief, it is also associated with technological dependence, which adversely affects academic performance, as documented by Novoa and Sánchez (2020).

This research provides direct evidence of this relationship by identifying through interviews that students with a higher sense of insecurity tend to use their phones more frequently for non-academic purposes, thereby validating the connection between both phenomena across qualitative and quantitative data. This finding reinforces the necessity for university policies that simultaneously address environmental security and promote a balanced and conscientious use of technology, aiming to improve the educational experience and student well-being.

Therefore, it is plausible that students, when experiencing anxiety derived from insecurity, turn to their mobile devices, entering a cycle of problematic use that exacerbates their academic difficulties rather than alleviating them. The study by Petrucco and Agostini (2023) supports this assertion by demonstrating that smartphone usage time has a direct negative effect on exam grades.

Ultimately, the results underscore the urgent need to implement measures that mitigate citizen insecurity in the areas surrounding the university. This responsibility does not rest solely on law enforcement; it necessitates a comprehensive approach involving the educational institution itself. Compliance with the National Multi-Sectoral Citizen Security Policy by 2030 (Decreto Supremo N.º 006-2022-IN) should be a priority; however, its application must be adapted to the university context to create safe environments that ensure not only the physical integrity of students but also their capacity to reach their maximum academic potential in a fear- and stress-free environment.

## Conclusions

Citizen insecurity affects university academic performance through its impact on attention and attendance. The more at risk a student perceives themselves to be, the lower their capacity for attention. A decrease in attention subsequently translates into lower class attendance, and reduced attendance leads to inferior academic performance.

On the other hand, mobile device usage negatively impacts participation and performance. Among students who use these devices more frequently, those who maintain healthy usage (guided by instructors and not focused on distraction) tend to participate more and achieve better academic results than those who utilize them unhealthily (for distracting activities or without attention to the class).

However, in both cases, the relationship is less favorable when compared to groups that use devices moderately. Furthermore, the relationship between mobile usage and performance takes on a U-shaped curve, where unhealthy usage is associated with the lowest levels of academic achievement.

Attention and performance are the two factors that most strongly moderate the relationship between insecurity and mobile usage. For students with lower attention, the negative effect of insecurity on performance

intensifies, while it diminishes among those with higher attentional capacity. Likewise, among students with lower academic performance, the harm of mobile usage on participation is exacerbated.

Collectively, these findings indicate that both a decrease in the sense of security and unhealthy mobile device usage affect the learning experience within the classroom. This underscores the need for universities to implement policies and initiatives that promote a safe environment and healthy use of technology.

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