Student anxieties and future implications for the library

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to explore anxieties inherent in students which can hinder the optimal use of library resources, services, and facilities. The instruments used were the Malay translated versions of LAS, FLCAS, and PRCA-24. The study was carried out among final year undergraduates at a public university in Malaysia. The findings revealed that communication anxiety in students correlated with Library Staff Barriers, Library Services Barriers, Library Resources Barriers, Affective Barriers, and Internet Services Barriers. Foreign language anxiety correlated with Library Staff Barriers, Library Services Barriers, and Affective Barriers. The implications for the library is that students who are anxious using a foreign language and have difficulty communicating with others will be unlikely to make full use or demand services from the library. While it is difficult to extricate the multifarious dimensions, to be aware of other anxieties manifesting as library anxiety must be acknowledged and acted upon by librarians.

Keywords: Student anxieties, Library services, Library anxiety, Communication anxiety, Language anxiety

INTRODUCTION

University and college students are susceptible to anxieties which can impede academic performance. Among the types of academic anxieties identified by the Academic Anxiety Resource Center are mathematics anxiety, reading anxiety, foreign language anxiety, science anxiety and social phobia (Academic Anxiety Resource Center). Battle (Battle 2004) indicated library anxiety as one of the academic anxieties that can affect college students. The potential sources of study anxieties identified among Malaysian undergraduates (Prima et al. 2010) were related to examination, presentation, mathematics, language, and social anxiety while family and library anxieties were found to arouse student anxiety on a moderate scale.

Academic-related anxieties are of relevant concern to libraries and librarians. Firstly, substantial funds are allocated annually to provide adequate information resources, services and facilities. Studies at the University of Malaya where this study was conducted, have reported that students were found to be more concerned with locating materials listed in their reading lists rather than searching additional reference materials for increasing knowledge (Chan & Zaharah, 2001). In another study, the behavioural pattern of students when looking for information sources for their final year projects favoured internet sources, followed by lecturers, friends, seniors, and only then the

sources in the library (Mohd Shariff & Zainab, 2007; Nor Edzan, 2007). Secondly, a large portion of the print and electronic resources procured by libraries are in the English language. The analysis of students' diaries among Sudanese undergraduates reveal that they become anxious if the textbooks are written in English, especially if the mastery of the English language is poor (Abusin & Zainab, 2010).

In Malaysia, English has increasingly became more of a foreign language. In a study among third year students in a public university in Malaysia, 50.7% identified English as a second language, 36.2% as a third language and 10.2% as a fourth language (Faridah Noor, 2004). Students coming from the west part of Peninsular Malaysia speak relatively good English due to urbanization as compared to the east part of Peninsular Malaysia. In some of the eastern states like Sabah and Sarawak, government funding for computers in schools is a recent initiative. Students entering the universities at a young age of 17 to 20 years come from all parts of the country resulting in a very diversified group of learners. Furthermore, some students can originate from states where there are no public or school libraries, while some had been members of public libraries ever since they were children. Students from well to do families have parents buying books for them and inculcating reading habit amongst them when compared to students who had only read school textbooks and may find the library books and reading intimidating. This awareness of students' background is vital for libraries because it reveals that students using libraries have individual differences which can influence their perceptions and use of the library resources, services, and facilities.

OBJECTIVE OF STUDY

It has been reported that besides the usual demographic characteristics such as race, gender, age, year of study and personality, behavioral traits can influence the level of library anxiety (Onwuegbuzie, Jiao & Bostick, 2004). In Cleveland's (2004) summary of the antecedents of library anxiety, behavioral traits identified are perfectionism, lack of persistence, procrastination, negative self-perception, learning preferences, and study habits. Interestingly, such behavioral traits have also been reported in other anxieties such as communication anxiety and foreign language anxiety. Students' behavior and perception of the library and library staff, at any one particular time, can be caused by pre-existing anxieties. Earlier research by Mellon (1986) and Karabenick and Knapp (1988) have repeatedly reported that students categorised as not interested in getting information may in fact be experiencing some kind of fear and anxiety and are actually afraid of approaching library staff for assistance. The scope of this study was limited to three academic related anxieties namely library anxiety, communication anxiety, and foreign language anxiety. The objective of this study is thus to explore the correlation between library anxiety with (i) communication anxiety, and (ii) foreign language anxiety.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Past library research reports have stated that students who needed help most are the least likely to ask for it (Karabenick & Knapp, 1988). Asking for help by some students

was perceived as a failure. Self-esteem and the accumulation of repeated failures were cited as important factors for the refusal of students to communicate and seek guidance from librarians. Keefer (1993) referred to this emotional state as the hungry rats syndrome where poor performers who desperately need information face feelings of low expectations and experience cognitive and emotional obstacles to obtain the required help. Daly and Stafford (1984) have also reported that an individual who had prior unpleasant experiences tend to withdraw or avoid communication situations in future. McCroskey (1984), the father of research on communication apprehension, claims that communicating with people who are similar to themselves is easier than talking to people who are greatly different. Jiao and Onwuegbuzie (1997) also reported that students' levels of library anxiety perhaps are exacerbated by their own incompetence and belief that the others are better, resulting in the individual feeling shameful of their incompetence. This arousal of anxiety when communicating particularly in English seems more significant among Asians than Europeans or Americans (Maio, 1995).

In the past, efforts by libraries to reduce any form of anxiety among students have tended to be more library-centered rather than student-centered. Interventions designed to reduce anxiety in the form of bibliographic instruction classes, online tutorials, and collaboration with faculty had reduced library anxiety at times (Mumtaz, Noriah & Al-Qallaf, 2004; Battle 2004; Jiao & Onwuegbuzie, 1997) but also had no impact sometimes (Mohundro, 1999; Moore, 2005) citing other factors influencing the affective behavior of students. What constitutes information recipients' deficits are seldom explored by libraries and librarians (Grassian, 2001). The concern is that these students' other anxieties may be spilling over and influencing students' behaviour when using library resources, facilities, and services.

Library anxiety while using the libraries were best described by Mellon (1986) as "when confronted with the need to gather information in the library for their first research paper many students become so anxious that they are unable to approach the problem logically or effectively". In 1992, Sharon L. Bostick (1992) developed a quantitative scale called the Library Anxiety Scale (LAS) to measure library anxiety. She categorised five subscales for the occurence of library anxiety: barriers to library staff, affective barriers, comfort with the library, knowledge of the library, and mechanical barriers.

Communication anxiety or apprehension as defined by McCroskey (1984) as "an individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons". McCroskey's cognitive approach to communication explains that people develop expectations with regards to other people and situations. When expectations are not met and found to be inaccurate repeatedly, anxiety is produced. In new situations, strong anxious feelings can be evoked creating a state of helplessness. This fits Mellon's (1986) description of how freshmen at college feel lost and helpless when using the academic library for the first time.

Foreign language anxiety as defined by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) is a "distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behavior related to classroom learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process". Students become

anxious when they have to speak in front of others. They experience social anxiety where they fear being negatively evaluated by their peers as well as instructors and also making mistakes in front of them which can have an effect on their self-esteem.

METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH

The design of this study is a combination of exploratory and explanatory methodology. The model used is the Library Anxiety Expectation Antecedent Model by Onwuegbuzie, Jiao and Bostick's (2004). Based on this model, cognitive and affective variables are related to each other in a reciprocal manner such that a change in either one would culminate in changes in the other in order to reestablish equilibrium. In this study, it is hypothesised that communication anxiety (affective variable) and foreign language anxiety (cognitive variable) correlate with each other to influence the behavior of a student towards the library. Students susceptible to foreign language anxiety and communication anxiety are predicted to experience any one or more of the subscales of library anxiety.
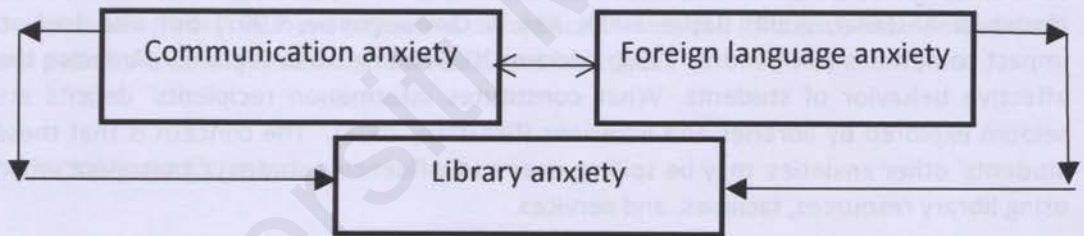

Figure 1: Foreign language anxiety and communication anxiety
as correlates of library anxiety

Three sets of survey instruments were used to collect data for this study. They were the Malay translated versions of (i) Library Anxiety Scale (M-LAS), (ii) Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (M-FLCAS), and (iii) Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (M-PRCA). All statements in the M-FLCAS with the word 'foreign language' were changed to 'English language'. The LAS and FLCAS were translated using the back translation method with the help of linguists while the PRCA was earlier translated into the Malay language and validated (Fuziah, 1995). The study was conducted among final year undergraduates. The names and emails of the students were obtained from the Admission Unit of the university. Allowing for plus/minus 5% error rate, a sample of 438 students was randomly selected. A total of 114 responded; 37% (n=42) were males and 63% (n=72) were females.

A series of exploratory factor analysis and reliability tests were conducted on the results of the final survey. Using Eigenvalue greater than 1.00 and factor loadings of 0.5 or greater, the M-LAS yielded 27 items loaded on five factors which explained 56.8% of total variance. The factors were Library Staff Barriers (10 items, 19.6% variance), Library Services Barriers (6 items, 12.2% variance), Library Resources

Barriers (4 items, 9.5% variance), Affective Barriers (4 items, 8.8% variance), and Internet Services Barriers (3 items, 6.7% variance). The overall Cronbach's coefficient alpha value was 0.89. The M-FLCAS yielded 27 items loaded on three factors which explained 58.1% of total variance. The factors were Speaking Anxiety (17 items, 38.3% variance), Classroom Anxiety (6 items, 9.1% variance) and Learner Anxiety (4 items, 5.7% variance). The overall Cronbach's coefficient alpha value was 0.79. The M-PRCA yielded 23 items loaded on four factors which explained 59.1% of total variance. The factors describing the various communication settings were Formal (10 items, 31.7% variance), Interpersonal Conversations (6 items, 11.6% variance), Group Discussion (4 items, 9.3% variance) and Public Speaking (3 items, 6.4% variance). The overall Cronbach's coefficient alpha value was 0.83.

FINDINGS

Mean Level of Library Anxiety, Foreign Language Anxiety, and Communication Anxiety

The findings showed that the final year undergraduates experienced library anxiety, communication anxiety and foreign language anxiety on a moderate level. The anxiety levels were within +/- 1 SD from the norm except for library anxiety where the mean level was below the norm. The norm values were obtained from original studies by Bostick (1992), McCroskey (1984) and Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986). A visual inspection of Table 1 shows that the overall mean and standard deviation of library anxiety level was M=72.2, SD=12.7 and the subscales: Barriers with Staff, M=22.7, SD=5.7; Library Services Barriers, M=10.1, SD=2.6; Library Resources Barriers, M=11.8, SD=3.6; Affective Barriers, M=8.7, SD=3.0; and Internet Services Barriers, M=7.6, SD=2.2. The overall mean and standard deviation of communication anxiety was M=59.7, SD=11.4 and the dimensions: Formal, M=26.0, SD=5.9; Interpersonal Conversations, M=13.1, SD=3.4; Group Discussion, M=5.6, SD=2.0; Public Speaking, M=7.0, SD=1.8. The overall mean and standard deviation of foreign language anxiety was M=87.4, SD=17.3 and the dimensions: Speaking Anxiety, M=49.6, SD=12.7; Classroom Anxiety, M=11.1, SD=2.8; and Learner Anxiety, M=8.9, SD=2.4.

The level of library anxiety in this study was lower when compared to reports across populations such as Americans (Jiao & Onwuegbuzie, 2002), African-Americans (Jiao, Onwuegbuzie & Bostick, 2006), and Caucasian Americans (Kwon, Onwuegbuzie, & Alexandar, 2007). One of the possible reason could be the students in this study have attended a compulsory bibliographic instruction course for 14 weeks. Earlier studies by Jiao and Onwuegbuzie (1997), Abusin (1998), and Cleveland (2004) have reported that attending library instruction programs will significantly lower the level of library anxiety. A comparison of the mean level of foreign language anxiety across populations revealed that the overall mean in this study was lower than Aida's study (1994) among Japanese students. The fact that Malaysian students are bilinguals could have made a difference. The mean level of communication anxiety was comparatively lower than other Malaysian students from a northern university in the country (Azmi & Gillani, 2011), and a central university (Indra Devi & Farah, 2008). The findings of this study was similar

to Norshaipah, Natrah, and Junaidah's study (2004) which reported that final year students have the lowest level of communication anxiety.

Table 1: Mean levels of library anxiety, communication anxiety, and foreign language anxiety

	Library anxiety Bostick, 1992		Communication anxiety McCroskey, 1984		Foreign language anxiety Howitz, 1986	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Norm	118.6	15.8	65.6	15.3	94.5	21.4
This study	72.2	12.7	59.7	11.4	87.4	17.3
Subscales/Dimensions						
Barriers with Staff	22.7	5.7				
Library Services Barriers	10.1	2.6				
Library Resources Barriers	11.8	3.6				
Affective Barriers	8.7	3.0				
Internet Services Barriers	7.6	2.2				
Formal			26.0	5.9		
Interpersonal Conversations			13.1	3.4		
Group Discussion			5.6	2.0		
Public Speaking			7.0	1.8		
Speaking Anxiety					49.6	12.7
Classroom Anxiety					11.1	2.8
Learner Anxiety					8.9	2.4

Correlation of the Dimensions of Communication Anxiety and Subscales of Library Anxiety

The results of this study provided empirical evidence that there is a correlation between communication anxiety and library anxiety (Table 2). Using Pearson Product Moment Correlation, it was found that the communication settings 'Formal' correlated significantly with Library Services Barriers (r=0.4, p<0.005), Library Resources Barriers (r=0.2, p<0.05), and Affective Barriers (r=0.2, p<0.05). 'Interpersonal Conversations' correlated significantly with Library Staff Barriers (r=0.4, p<0.005) and Affective Barriers (r=0.4, p<0.005). 'Group Discussion' correlated significantly with Library Services Barriers (r=0.2, p<0.05), Library Resources Barriers (r=0.2, p<0.005), and Internet Services Barriers (r=0,2, P<0.05). 'Public Speaking' correlated significantly with Library Staff Barriers (r=0.3, p<0.005), and Affective Barriers (r=0.3, p<0.005).

Table 2: Correlation of library anxiety and communication anxiety

	Communication anxiety dimensions			
Library anxiety subscales	Formal	Interpersonal Conversations	Group Discussion	Public Speaking
Library Staff Barriers		0.4**		0.3**
Library Services Barriers	0.4**		0.2*	
Library Resources Barriers	0.2*		0.2**	
Affective Barriers	0.2*	0.4**		0.3**
Internet Services Barriers			0.2*	

*p<0.05, **p<0.005

The findings revealed that students perception of the library as a formal, serious situation and their anxious feelings during interpersonal conversations, group discussions and public speaking do spill over when having to seek assistance from library staff. Status discrepancy between participants such as subordinate status, unfamiliarity, and formality in communication settings can lead to anxiety (Buss, 1984). Students perceive library staff as having higher status and more knowledge about the library resulting in the perception of a superior-subordinate communication setting. Malaysian students have been reported to feel nervous and very self-conscious when they have to speak in front of others especially when they are unprepared (Khairi & Nurul, 2011). The anxieties that students experienced when using the library's collections and services are influenced by the students' self-perception of their abilities. This was also observed and reported by Mellon (1986) that students felt scared and inhibited to use library resources because they feel inferior and thought the other students were smarter and were also afraid of how others perceive them.

Correlation of Dimensions of Foreign Language Anxiety and Subscales of Library Anxiety

The results of this study provided empirical evidence that there is a correlation between foreign language anxiety and library anxiety (Table 3). Using the Pearson Product Moment Correlations, it was found that the dimension 'Speaking Anxiety' correlated significantly with Library Staff Barriers (r=0.2, p<0.05) and Affective Barriers (r=0.2, P<0.05). 'Classroom Anxiety' correlated significantly with Library Services Barriers (r=0.2, p<0.05). 'Learner Anxiety' correlated significantly with Affective Barriers (r=0.3, p<0.005).

Table 3: Correlation of foreign library anxiety and language anxiety

Library anxiety subscales	Foreign language anxiety dimensions		
	Speaking Anxiety	Classroom Anxiety	Learner Anxiety
Library Staff Barriers	0.2*		
Library Services Barriers		0.2*	
Library Resources Barriers			
Affective Barriers	0.2*		0.3**
Internet Services Barriers			

*p<0.05   **p<0.005

The findings revealed that students' own incompetence in the form of affective barriers is an obstacle when speaking out and articulating reference queries in English language. A person's information seeking feelings, thoughts and actions are influenced by the individual's past experiences and anticipation of future events (Kuhlthau, 2004). Onwuegbuzie, Jiao, and Daley (1997) have also reported that students' perceptions of librarians increased their level of anxiety. The correlation of Affective Barriers with 'Speaking Anxiety' and 'Learner Anxiety' inferred that anxious feelings using a foreign language can spill over when using the services offered by the library.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE LIBRARY

Malaysian students, based on the findings of this study, do have a risk of experiencing library anxiety due to language and communication anxiety. Students come from different parts of the country which are marginally divided economically, digitally, and in some instances by language. The students' understanding of the library's policies and practices may be blurred particularly if it is the first time they are exposed to a big library and university (Mellon, 1986). They may not even comprehend fully what the librarians say during orientation tours. Limited communication skills and lack of confidence make them hesitate to ask for help. Using academic libraries can be a bewildering experience (Liu, 1993) since school libraries have closed stacks and are used mainly for studying only.

It is evidenced from this study that using the library is intertwined with apprehensive feeling. The distal effect of using a foreign language manifesting in speaking anxiety and learner anxiety result in communication anxiety in various situations. Trying to articulate reference queries, seeking information from library resources, having confidence to optimize the use of library facilities can be traced to the dimensions of language anxiety. In comparision, it had been observed that private university students have lower levels of communication anxiety particularly with lecturers (Gecer & Gumus, 2010). There are opportunities to communicate in private universities and students are encouraged to communicate, resulting in willingness of students to participate. Another reason given is that students in private universities have a high socio economic status since they have to pay higher fees. The traditional and conservative approach in public universities, including academic libraries in Malaysia, may add to the anxiety already inherent in the students.

As library anxiety is a state of anxiety and has a social context (Jiao & Onwuegbuzie, 2002), any form of anxiety using the library resources, facilities and services cannot be elevated by taking steps within the library alone. The implication is that the experience of library anxiety seem more of the perception of individual students. This somehow reiterates the findings of Jiao and Onwuegbuzie (1999) and Van Kampen (2004) when they reported that library anxiety is a factor of the perceptions of students towards the library, library staff and library services. The significance of this study is a revelation that students' inherent learner anxieties and their fear of communicating with other people in public or formal situations are also brought into the library scenario.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and data analysis of this study, the following recommendations can be made to embark on an 'anxiety-free' environment in the library:

(a) Computer Medicated Communication (CMC) Tools

Libraries and librarians should acknowledge that students who require assistance feel anxious to seek assistance from librarians. In an era of sophisticated technology combined with the presence of the Net generation, the library must enhance more use of CMC tools as a means to assist students who are experiencing student-related

anxieties. Tools such as interactive virtual map of locating library materials, electronic signages directions on every shelf area on every floor could be of help for students who are reluctant to seek assistance. Jiao and Onwuegbuzie (1999) had indicated that students whose perception of librarians heightened their anxiety level, like to receive information via visual mode.

(b) Empathy

Librarians on duty should use gentle or non-authoritative methods of answering any queries, whether the query is face-to-face or via email/online. Library staff should be more sensitive to students' lack of composure in posing questions and should not be agitated and tense for questions which are too easy and obvious for the librarians. The highest point of anxiety in an interaction is during the greeting and opening line (Von Worde, 1988).

(c) Interactive Information Skills Sessions

Bibliographic instruction librarians have to be alert and sensitive to individual students' needs. It must be remembered that high anxious students are reluctant to share their feelings of anxiety which can lead instructors to overestimate their library skills (Jacobson, 1991). Letting the students know that we understand their anxiousness and that they are not alone can go a long way to make them feel less stressful using the library. Most of the time bibliographic instruction classes are in groups and students seldom will admit their feelings of anxiety in front of their peers.

(d) Understanding cultural diversity

Familiarity with culture and ethnic background can be helpful in reducing anxiety. The findings of this study revealed that students who use Chinese as their first (dominant) language have the highest level of library anxiety, foreign language anxiety and communication anxiety. This could be due to their perfectionist nature. Perfectionism as described by Onwuegbuzie and Jiao (1998) is important for some students as they have to maintain a perceived need to attain standards and expectations by their friends, families, and teachers. Such people, because of their anxiety, refrain from asking for help (Keefer, 1993). This could explain their need to use Internet resources and seeking friends' help rather than the librarians as reported by Nor Edzan (2007) and Safahieh and Diljit (2006). Students who use Tamil as their first (dominant) language have the lowest levels of anxiety in almost all the subscales and dimensions. This could be because of their individualistic nature as ascertained by Jiao and Onwuegbuzie (2002) that individualistic culture have the lowest level of anxiety. Students who use other languages as their first (dominant) language have high levels of anxiety using the Internet and speaking with library staff. Students who use Malay as their first (dominant) language have no problem communicating with library staff most probably because almost all of the library staff are of the Malay ethnic group.

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Page | 98

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