Academic related anxieties: A case study investigating the relationships among library, communication and language anxieties among non-native speakers of English

Janaki Sinnasamy[1] and **Noor Harun Abdul Karim**[2]
[1]Library, University of Malaya
50603 Kuala Lumpur, MALAYSIA
[2]Department of Library and Information Science,
Faculty of Computer Science and Information Technology,
University of Malaya, 50603 Kuala Lumpur, MALAYSIA
e-mail: janaki@um.edu.my (corresponding author); nharun@um.edu.my

ABSTRACT

Library anxiety has been identified as one of the academic related anxieties which can affect college students. The Library-Anxiety-Expectation Model indicated innate characteristics of students and environmental variables such as gender, race, and year of study, as possible antecedents of library anxiety. This means that the arousal of library anxiety can be influenced by students' other forms of inherent anxieties. The objective of this paper is therefore to investigate the level of academic related anxieties among final year undergraduates and the relationships among the dimensions of the anxieties. The scope of this study focuses on three anxieties; library anxiety, English language anxiety and communication anxiety. Three sets of survey instruments were used; Library Anxiety Scale (LAS), Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), and Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24). All instruments were translated into the Malay language and statements with the word 'foreign language' in FLCAS were changed to 'English language'. The findings showed that final year students in this study experience only a moderate level of all three academic related anxieties. It was found that all four dimensions of communication anxiety – formal, interpersonal conversations, group discussion, and public speaking – correlated with at least one or more of the five dimensions of library anxiety – barriers with staff, library services barriers, library resources barriers, affective barriers, and internet services barriers. All three dimensions of language anxiety – speaking anxiety, classroom anxiety, and learner anxiety – correlated with at least one or more of library anxiety dimensions. Although the correlations were moderate, the study nevertheless provided empirical evidence that the dimensions of communication and language anxieties have relationship with the dimensions of library anxiety. Acknowledgment of the prevalence of these anxieties among students can help libraries and librarians to make learning in the library less stressful by focusing more on students and their problems instead of the library and its environment only.

Keywords: Academic anxieties; Library anxiety; English language anxiety; Communication anxiety; Non-native English speakers.

INTRODUCTION

University and college students are susceptible to anxieties which can impede academic performance. Among the anxieties, library anxiety was indicated as one of the academic related anxieties that can affect college students (Battle 2004)   The concept of library anxiety as formulated by Mellon (1986) describes it 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"* (p.163). Bostick (1992) developed a quantitative scale to measure library anxiety called the Library Anxiety Scale (LAS). The scale identified five dimensions of library anxiety; *barriers to library staff, affective barriers, comfort with the library, knowledge of the library*, and *mechanical barriers*. Using LAS, a number of studies have investigated and reported the prevalence of library anxiety among college and university students (Jiao and Onwuegbuzie 2002, 2003; Van Kampen 2004; Bowers 2010). These anxious feelings are often traced to students' negative perceptions of the library staff and the library (Jiao and Onwuegbuzie 1999; Van Kampen 2004; Abusin and Zainab 2010).

Onwuegbuzie, Jiao and Bostick (2004) in their Library-Anxiety-Expectation Model stated that dispositional and environmental antecedents of students influence their behaviour when using the library resources, facilities, and services. Dispositional antecedents are described as innate characteristics of students such as self-perception, self-concept, self-evaluation, and learning preferences. Environmental antecedents in the model refer to the variables brought into the library situation such as gender, race and year of study. A scan of the literature related to academic related anxieties reveal that such dispositional and environmental antecedents are also found in other anxieties particularly language (Onwuegbuzie, Bailey and Daley 1997; Von Worde 1998; Kitano 2001; Gregersen and Horwitz 2002; Razlina 2010) communication (Indra Devi and Farah 2008; Khairi and Nurul 2011) and information seeking anxieties (Erfanmanesh, Abrizah and Karim 2014). It would be beneficial for libraries to explore the prevalence of other academic related anxieties which students bring into the library situation so as to plan and provide services accordingly.

ACADEMIC RELATED ANXIETIES

Academic related anxieties are of relevant concern to libraries and librarians because substantial amount of funds are allocated annually to provide adequate information resources, services and facilities. It would not be cost effective if anxieties impede the optimal use of library. The potential sources of academic related 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. Evaluation of anxiety among medical and engineering students revealed that the common anxiety causing factors are anger, exhaustion, worry, lack of confidence, and confusion (Ercan et al. 2008). Students perceived oral competence in English and teachers' verbal behaviour were identified as predictors of classroom participation anxiety (Noor and Shah 2012).

In the past, efforts by libraries to reduce 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 (Jiao and Onwuegbuzie 1997; Anwar, Al-Kandari and

Al-Qallaf 2004; Battle 2004) but also had no impact sometimes (Mohundro 1999; Moore 2005) citing other factors influencing the affective behavior of students. Students whose native language is not English, demonstrated high levels of library anxiety despite attending more library instruction courses than their English-speaking counterparts (Onwuegbuze, Bailey, and Daley 1997; Jiao, and Onwuegbuzie 1997). The general observation in these studies is that anxious students feel embarrassed which can be attributed to factors which originate from the students' own sense of self, or from the situation or social environment of which he/she is part of.

Non-native speakers of English too, are significantly disadvantaged when compelled to learn new information mediated in a second language (Miller and Peleg 2010). In a survey from 2009-2011 among Malaysian students (Mohd 2013), it was reported that although students visit the libraries, the rate of borrowing has decreased. Ironically it cannot be denied that information resources procured by libraries are mostly in the English language. In tandem with Grassian's (2001) view that what constitutes information recipients' deficits are seldom explored by libraries and librarians, this study intends to find out the prevalent level of library, language, and communication anxieties and the relationships among them.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Early studies on student behaviour in libraries have reiterated that libraries tend to misunderstand students as not interested in getting information when in fact, they maybe experiencing some kind of fear and anxiety and are actually afraid of approaching library staff for assistance (Karabenick and Knapp 1988; Noor and Ansari 2013). Keefer (1993) categorization of such students as 'hungry rats syndrome' aptly describes the students' behaviour when using the library resources, services, and facilities. The students when desperate for information tend to overlook signage, brochures, and other form of help offered by libraries.

There has been a growing interest to investigate the prevalence of library anxiety among non-native speakers of English (Shoham and Mizrachi 2001; Anwar, AL-Kandari, and Al-Qallaf 2004; Mohd and Zainab 2007; Abusin and Zainab 2010; Noor and Ansari 2010; Swigon 2011; Song, Zhang and Clarke 2014). In their studies, it is realized that non-native speakers of English are found to feel anxiety on distinct factors different from that of native speakers of English. Shoham and Mizrachi (2001) translated LAS into the Hebrew language and used it among Israeli students. New factors which emerged include; language, computer and physical comfort, library procedures/policies, and feelings of inadequacy. In Anwar, AL-Kandari, and Al-Qallaf's study (2004) among Kuwait students, dimensions related to feelings of inadequacy and lack of confidence were identified. Abusin and Zainab's study (2010) among Sudanese students reported that library anxiety stem from the students' negative perceptions towards library environment. Swigon (2011) translated the LAS into polish language and identified technological barriers and resources barriers. Song, Zhang and Clarke (2014) translated the LAS into Chinese language and reported that resources and retrieval are factors causing library anxiety. Studies among international students reported that male students who are non-native speakers of English have the highest level of library anxiety (Jiao and Onwuegbuzie 1997). In that study, it was 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. In another study among international students, it was

reported that they are reluctant to approach the reference desk due to feelings of insecurities about communication skills (Safahieh and Diljit 2006).

Negative self-perceptions among students are also found in language and communication anxieties. 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. Communication anxiety or apprehension as defined by McCroskey (1984) is, *"an individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons"* (p.13). 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.

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"* (p.128). 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 afraid of making mistakes in front of them which can have an effect on their self-esteem. On a general note, feelings, symptoms and behavioural responses of the anxious foreign language learner are essentially the same as for any specific anxiety (Chen and Chang 2004). Kitano (2001) reported that students' fear of negative evaluation and self-perception of their speaking ability can result in a high level of language anxiety. Shy personality which has a negative correlation with self-esteem has also been shown to be one of the antecedents of language anxiety (Razlina 2010).

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Past research studies have studied the link between library anxiety, statistics and composition anxieties (Onwuegbuzie, 1997); research anxiety (Jiao and Onwuegbuzie 1997) and computer anxiety (Jerabek, Meyer, and Kordinak 2001; Mizrachi and Shoham 2004; Matacio and Robertson 2011). Jiao and Onwuegbuzie had also examined the relationships between library anxiety and variables such as, self-perception (1999), social interdependence (2002), and reading ability (2003).

The scope of this study focuses on two academic related anxieties which are English language anxiety and communication anxiety. The research objectives are to find out the level of library, language, and communication anxieties prevalent among final year students in a Malaysian public university, and to investigate the relationships among the dimensions of the three anxieties.

The research questions (RQ) for this study include:
  (a) RQ1: To what extent do library, English language, and communication anxieties prevail among final year Malaysian students in a public university?
  (b) RQ2: Are there statistically significant relationships between the dimensions of library and communication anxieties?
  (c) RQ3: Are there statistically significant relationships between the dimensions of library and English language anxieties?

METHODOLOGY

The design of this study is a cross-sectional survey design. The model used is the Library Anxiety Expectation Antecedent Model by Onwuegbuzie, Jiao and Bostick's (2004). Based on this model, 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 re-establish equilibrium. In this study, it is hypothesised that communication and language anxieties correlate with each other to influence the behavior of a student towards the library. Students susceptible to language anxiety and communication anxiety are predicted to experience any one or more of the dimensions of library anxiety.
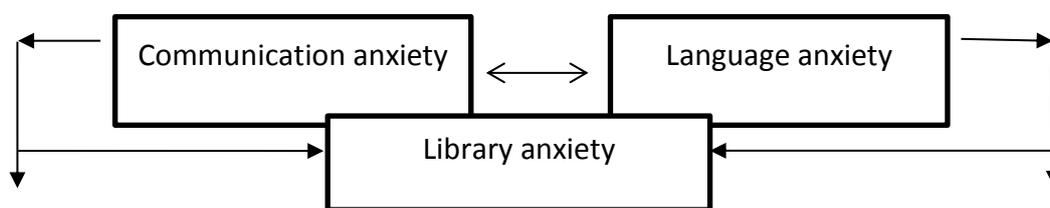

Figure 1: Language anxiety and communication anxiety and the relationship with library anxiety

Three sets of survey instruments were used to collect data for this study; (i) Library Anxiety Scale (LAS), (ii) Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), and (iii) Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24). All three instruments were translated into the Malay language. All statements in the FLCAS with the word 'foreign language' were changed to 'English language'. Hereafter it will be referred to as ELCAS. 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 instruments used the five point Likert statements: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, and Strongly Agree. The higher the score on these instruments, the higher the level of anxiety. The study was conducted among final year undergraduates.

A pilot study to test the Malay translated versions was carried out among 147 students. The questionnaires were distributed in class with the permission from the lecturer. For the final study, a random sample of 438 final year students registered for the first semester 2012/2013, was chosen. The names and emails of the students were obtained from the Admission Unit of the university. The survey questions were distributed online using their emails. A total of 112 final year students responded to the survey. Their responses were transferred into SPSS version 21 for analysis.

A series of exploratory factor analysis, and reliability tests were conducted. Using eigenvalue greater than 1.00 and factor loadings of 0.5 or greater, the Malay translated LAS yielded 27 items loaded on five dimensions which explained 56.8% of total variance. The dimensions are; *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 fact that *Library Staff Barriers* was found to be the one that explained the greatest proportion of variance

in the library anxiety construct was also reported in another study among Malaysian students (Noor and Ansari 2010) which used the original English version of the LAS instrument.

The Malay translated 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 Malay translated 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. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to find out the correlation value among the dimensions of the three translated instruments.

FINDINGS

(a)   The level of library, communication and language anxieties

The findings showed that final year students in this study experience only a moderate level of all three academic related anxieties. Noor and Ansari (2010), in a study among Malaysian students also reported that library anxiety is not really a big problem that affects undergraduate students. A visual inspection of Table 1 show that the overall mean and standard deviation of library anxiety level was M=72.2, SD=12.7, with dimensions; *Library Staff Barriers*, 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.

Table 1: Mean levels of Library, Communication, and Language Anxieties

	Library anxiety		Communication anxiety		Language anxiety	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
This study	72.2	12.7	59.7	11.4	87.4	17.3
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

The overall mean and standard deviation of communication anxiety was M=59.7, SD=11.4 with 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 language anxiety was M=87.4, SD=17.3 with 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.

b) The relationships among the dimensions of communication and library anxieties

The results of this study provided empirical evidence that there are correlations among the dimensions of the three academic related anxieties. All the four dimensions of communication anxiety correlated with at least one or more of library anxiety dimensions (Table 2). The communication anxiety dimension, *Formal* correlated significantly with *Library Services Barriers* (r = 0.4, p<0.01), *Library Resources Barriers* (r = 0.2, p<0.05), and *Affective Barriers* (r = 0.2, p<0.05) of library anxiety. The dimension, *Interpersonal Conversations* correlated significantly with *Library Staff Barriers* (r = 0.4, p<0.01) and *Affective Barriers* (r = 0.4, p<0.01). The third dimension of communication anxiety, *Group Discussion*, correlated significantly with *Library Services Barriers* (r = 0.2, p<0.05), *Library Resources Barriers* (r = 0.2, p<0.01), and *Internet Services Barriers* (r = 0.2, P<0.05). The dimension, *Public Speaking,* correlated significantly with *Library Staff Barriers* (r = 0.3, p<0.01), and *Affective Barriers* (r = 0.3, p<0.01).

Table 2: Relationships among the Dimensions of Communication and Library Anxieties

Library anxiety dimensions	Communication anxiety dimensions			
	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*p<0.05, **p<0.01

(b)   The relationships among the dimensions of language and library anxieties

The results of this study provided empirical evidence that there are correlations among the dimensions of language and library anxieties. All three dimensions of language anxiety correlated with at least one or more of library anxiety dimensions (Table 3). It was found that the language anxiety scale dimension*, Speaking Anxiety* correlated significantly with *Library Staff Barriers* (r = 0.2, p<0.05) and *Affective Barriers* (r = 0.2, P<0.05) of library anxiety dimensions. The second dimension of language anxiety*, Classroom Anxiety*, correlated significantly with *Library Services* Barriers (r = 0.2, p<0.05) while the third dimension, Learner Anxiety, correlated significantly with *Affective Barriers* (r = 0.3, p<0.01). However, all three dimensions of the language anxiety did not correlate at all with two of the dimensions of library anxiety, which are *Library Resources Barriers*, and *Internet Services Barriers*. The most probable reason could be the original FLCAS was developed and

designed to test student anxieties during speaking and learning a second, third, or foreign language and not for reading, retrieving, or using information resources.

Table 3: Relationships among the dimensions of language and library anxieties

Library anxiety dimensions	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	-	-	-

*$p<0.05$ **$p<0.01$

DISCUSSION

In this study, it was found that the all four dimensions of communication anxiety correlated with at least one or more of the five dimensions of library anxiety. Students who fear communicating in formal situations may perceive libraries as a formal environment and view librarians as people of authority. Students perceive classroom as a serious learning environment and probably bring this perception into the library environment. Aidah, Embi and Shah (2010) ascertained that students merely want to comply and fulfil classroom assignments and requirements while teachers expect students to engage with information sources in a systematic way. Students have also been found to be more concerned with locating materials listed in their reading lists rather than searching additional reference materials for increasing knowledge (Chan and Zaharah 2001). Fear of communicating with library staff to ask for assistance may be a result of the arousal of anxiety within the student when having to communicate person to person. Students' feelings of ineptness or fear of negative evaluation can be a barrier in communicating. This is supported by Khairi and Nurul (2011) who reported that Malaysian students feel nervous and self-conscious when having to speak in front of others.

Traditionally, libraries aim to achieve missions and goals with intended and measurable outcomes. Students' bad or negative experiences during library visits due to their own communication and language anxieties can result in negative attitudes to library visit and use. Such negative attitudes can create negative outcomes for the library which are less apparent immediately and often only become visible in the long term development (Poll and Payne 2006). Findings from this research can be used to reassess the optimal use of library resources, services, and facilities and modify the delivery mode with the students' anxieties in mind.

Information literacy classes for students are opportunities for the librarians to study student behavioral patterns. As stated by Grassian (2001), students' information deficits are rarely explored by librarians. 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). Most of the time bibliographic instruction classes are in groups and students seldom will admit their feelings of anxiety in front of their peers. Malaysian students generally, do exhibit a higher rate of classroom participation anxiety

(Aidah, Embi and Shah 2010). The librarians' concern too, is more on the overall pre and post outcomes of these sessions. Perhaps students can be reassigned groups after the pre bibliographic tests where the poor scorers can be grouped together. More detailed sessions conducted at a slower pace for them might contribute to a better understanding and towards life-long learning. The students then may experience lesser anxiety when their peer group is at a similar level.

Libraries in non-native English speaking countries may also have to review benchmark standards accepted by English speaking countries in view of collection development particularly electronic databases. While libraries are attempting to provide the state-of-art collection and services, the students particularly non-native speakers of English, are struggling with academic related anxieties posing as barriers to library use. Libraries and librarians must now turn the attention to observing and recording students' behaviour. Even attendance at training sessions can be an indicator to investigate the reasons for the non-attendance.

The findings of this study have created an awareness that students' inherent academic related anxieties and their fear of communicating with other people in public or formal situations are also brought into the library scenario. Although the correlations were moderate, the study nevertheless provided empirical evidence that the dimensions of communication and language anxieties have relationships with the dimensions of library anxiety. Acknowledgment of the prevalence of these anxieties among students can help libraries and librarians to make learning in the library less stressful by focusing more on students and their problems instead of the library and its environment only.

CONCLUSION

More research have to be carried out among non-native speakers of English to investigate their academic related anxieties and how they can be barriers to using library resources, services, and facilities. Global changes in internationalization of education, education policies, open access information sources, and world ranking of universities are considered as opportunities but also challengers for libraries. In keeping up with the pace, libraries must not put students and their anxieties aside. Students are the means and ends of a university library. In an era of sophisticated technology combined with the presence of the Net generation, the library must enhance more use of computer mediated communication (CMC) tools as a means to reach out to the silent students who with their anxiety related problems do not approach the library and librarians for assistance. Tools such as interactive virtual map of locating library materials, electronic signage directions on every shelf area on every floor could be of help for students who are reluctant to seek assistance.

Future research for libraries should focus on areas besides usage reports, return of investment, space management, and digital initiatives. Areas of concern can include the social impact of libraries, longitudinal studies of students to investigate life-long learning and their scholarly contribution to the nation.

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