A Correlational Study of Foreign Language Anxiety and Library Anxiety Among Non-native Speakers of English: A Case Study in a Malaysian Public University

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 23 January 2014
Accepted 23 July 2014
Available online 2 September 2014

Keywords:
Library anxiety
Foreign language anxiety
Non-native speakers of English
Library services
Library environment
Barriers with library staff

ABSTRACT

This study examines the correlation of the dimensions of foreign language anxiety and library anxiety among undergraduates at a public university in Malaysia. The Malay translated versions of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) and the Library Anxiety Scale (LAS) were completed by 147 students pursuing a Foundation in Science course. Analysis revealed a significant correlation in all the dimensions of library anxiety with three of the dimensions of foreign language anxiety, namely speaking anxiety, self-evaluation anxiety, and learner anxiety. The findings in this study will enable librarians to be aware of the anxieties faced by students which can help in the planning and delivery of services and instruction.

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INTRODUCTION

Library anxiety as a distinct term of academic related anxiety was empirically articulated in a qualitative study by Mellon (1986) who formulated the theory of library anxiety 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” (Mellon, 1986, p.163). In her study, students were found to develop feelings of apprehension whenever they have to use the library for research. Some of the reasons were lack of knowledge about the location of things; how to begin research; and what to do. Mellon was perplexed that the size of the library can also be the cause because her study was conducted in a relatively small academic library of only three floors. Students who encountered problems with their research actually discussed feelings of fear using the library which has hampered their research progress, instead of the actual problems with their research.

A valid and reliable instrument to measure library anxiety known as the Library Anxiety Scale (LAS) was developed by Bostick (1992). The LAS comprises five dimensions: barriers to staff; comfort with the library; knowledge of the library; affective barriers; and mechanical barriers. Interestingly, factor analysis of studies carried out among native speakers of English consistently yielded the same five dimensions as Bostick’s original LAS (Jerabek, Meyer, & Kordinak, 2001; Jiao & Onwuegbuzie, 1997, 2002, 2003; Jiao, Onwuegbuzie, & Bostick, 2004). However, when LAS was translated or modified to suit cultural needs of non-native speakers of English, the subsequent factor analysis yielded new dimensions unique to the population under study. The LAS has been modified and validated among non-native speakers of English both in English language (Abusin, Zainab, & Noor Harun, 2011; Anwar, Al-Kandari, & Al-Qallaf, 2004; Noor Harun & Ansari, 2010) and translated versions (Anwar et al., 2012; Shoham & Mizrachi, 2001; Swigon, 2011). The different factor dimensions of these studies are tabulated and shown in Table 1: Factor dimensions of the Library Anxiety Scale when administered among non-native speakers of English. The new dimensions which surfaced in these studies include: feelings of inadequacy and library confidence (Anwar, Al-Kandari, & Al-Qallaf, 2004); psychological barriers (Abusin et al., 2011); language discomfort (Shoham & Mizrachi, 2001); resources barriers (Anwar et al., 2012; Swigon, 2011); and user education (Anwar et al., 2012).

OBJECTIVE OF STUDY

The emergence of the additional dimensions seems to foretell that non-native speakers of English are burdened by other anxieties inherent in them which when combined with anxiety stimulus in the library environment, results in the manifestation of library anxiety. The rationale behind this study therefore, is to explore the link between library

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anxiety and foreign language anxiety among students studying and residing in countries such as Malaysia, where English is not the native language. Foreign language anxiety is specifically selected for this study because most of the major textbooks, reading materials, online databases, web resources, as well as electronic books and journals, are in the English language. Consequently, library instruction classes inevitably teach search strategies, and citation styles in the English language. Similarly, signposts, call numbers, subject headings, reference chatting, and social media naturally use English.

In this paper, it is hypothesized that the experience of library anxiety among students who are non-native speakers of English can be a consequence of their experience of other anxieties such as language anxiety, which are projected into library anxiety. The concern is that activities and programs organized by the libraries often adapt the ‘one size fits all’ approach. Moreover, the best practices of the libraries in Western countries are often used as sources of reference and for benchmarking. It would be useful for librarians in countries where English is not a native language, to be aware of the possibility of other inherent anxieties of students which can influence the optimal use of library resources and services. The objective of this paper is therefore, to attempt to explore empirically the relationship between the dimensions of foreign language anxiety and library anxiety.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

One of the earliest studies on library anxiety among non-native speakers of English by Jiao, Onwuegbuzie, and Lichtenstein (1996) reported that students whose native language is not English demonstrate high levels of library anxiety despite attending more library instruction courses than their English speaking counterparts. In a subsequent study, Jiao and Onwuegbuzie (1997) further substantiated their findings by reporting that non-native speakers of English, particularly male students, reported higher levels of library anxiety associated with barriers with staff, affective barriers, and mechanical barriers. Onwuegbuzie, Jiao, and Bostick (2004) have categorized the antecedents of library anxiety into dispositional, situational and environmental antecedents. Dispositional antecedents pertain to factors that an individual brings to the setting. Situational antecedents refer to factors that are in the immediate environment. Environmental antecedents relate to demographic factors that place an individual at risk for library anxiety or to events that occurred in the past. Native language as an antecedent of library anxiety has been subsumed under environmental antecedent category.

In a qualitative study among Sudanese university students using a diary method (Abusin & Zainab, 2010), 78.4% indicated psychological barriers when looking for books and references in the library and 9.8% expressed the view that language affects their acceptance of a given task. If a book is written in English language, the students feel anxious especially if mastery of the language is poor. In another study by Safahieh and Diljit (2006), it was reported that international students face barriers in their information needs, primarily related to language and understanding the library. The modified and translated version of LAS into Hebrew language by Shoham and Mizrachi (2001), found that although library anxiety is not an overwhelming phenomenon (Mean = 2.51), the language factor had a mean value of Mean = 3.65 and was the only factor that showed significant relationships with all the independent variables in the study. The most debilitating library task was found to be searching and using English materials and resources.

**FOREIGN LANGUAGE ANXIETY**

MacIntyre (1998) defines foreign language anxiety as “the worry and negative emotional reaction aroused when learning or using a second (non-native) language”. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) views foreign language anxiety as a “distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings and behavior related to classroom learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process”. It was observed that the feelings, symptoms and behavioral responses of the anxious foreign language learner are essentially the same as for any specific anxiety (Chen & Chang, 2004). It has to be realized that the effects of foreign language anxiety are not necessarily limited to problems encountered during speaking in class or performance but actually can pervade the entire language learning process. Anxious students feel a deep self-unconsciousness when asked to risk revealing themselves by speaking the foreign language in the presence of others (Horwitz et al., 1986).

The original FLACS by Horwitz et al. (1986) is related to three performance anxieties which are: fear of negative evaluation, communication apprehension and test anxiety. When the FLACS is administered in a setting where English is not the dominant or native language, test anxiety seems to be left out (Aida, 1994; Hizwari, Ahmad, Hizfurrahman, & NorHaizar, 2011; Tok, 2009). Instead, other factors such as fear of failing the class, comfortableness in speaking with native speakers and negative attitudes toward the language class influence the level of foreign language anxiety. The implication is that the content and validity of the instruments and the observed findings among non-native speakers of English differ when compared with native speakers of English.

Investigation of foreign language anxiety among Malaysian students revealed that students experienced moderate feelings of communication apprehension associated with the English language. In a study conducted among undergraduates at the University of Technology, Malaysia (UTM), it was reported that 96.7% experienced moderate feelings of apprehension communicating with others in English (Khairi & Nurul, 2011). Students were reported to feel nervous and very self-conscious when they have to speak in front of other students especially when they were unprepared. In another study at Malacca University (UTeM), a linear relationship was reported between self-perceived competence and lecturer’s evaluation implying that when students are more confident, their oral presentation and communication improve (Indra Devi & Farah Shahnaz, 2006). Zuhana’s (2007) research on comprehensive performance among English as second language learners...
showed that students experienced anxiety reactions while reading academic texts in the English language.

**METHODOLOGY**

This study was carried out among 147 students at the University of Malaya (UM). It is one of the five research universities in the country and had been ranked as one of the top 200 universities in the world by the QS World University Rankings in the year 2012. UM is also the oldest university in Malaysia and its origins date back to the colonial pre-independence times. Hence, the medium of instruction, as well as the library collections have maintained the English language as the main language. The respondents in this study belong to the same ethnic group of non-native speakers of English and were pursuing the Foundation in Science program; 47.6% Biology (n = 70), 30.6% Physical Sciences (n = 45), and 21.8% Built Environment (n = 32). Their native or dominant language is Malay which is Malaysia’s official language. Attending English class was a requirement for their course program.

Two instruments used to collect data included the Library Anxiety Scale (LAS) and the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). Both instruments were translated into the Malay language with the help of lecturers from the Language and Linguistics Department. It was considered necessary to translate the instruments into the Malay language because Malaysian students entering the institutions of higher learning come from diversified backgrounds in terms of culture, religion, language proficiency, family background, and geographical factors. 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). However, all of them are reasonably proficient in the Malay language.

The Malay translated instruments were validated using exploratory factor analysis. Using a varimax rotation and factor loading coefficient of 0.40 or greater as a criterion for deeming an item as a useful indicator, the library anxiety construct resulted in a 29-item solution with four dimensions that collectively explained 39.9% of the variance. Dimension barriers to staff with ten items explained the biggest amount of variance at 16.1%, followed by barriers with library resources with seven items which explained 9.35%, barriers with library environment with four items which explained 7.7%, and the fourth and final dimension barriers with library services with eight items which explained 6.8% of the total variance in the library anxiety construct (Table 2).

An exploratory factor analysis was performed on the Malay version of FLCAS. Using a varimax rotation and factor loading coefficient of 0.40 or greater as a criterion resulted in a 30-item solution with five dimensions that collectively explained 52% of the total variance in the foreign language anxiety construct. Dimension speaking anxiety with 12 items explained the biggest amount of variance at 20%, followed by classroom anxiety with nine items which explained 13%, self-evaluation anxiety with three items which explained 7%, learner anxiety with three items which explained 6%, and the fifth and final dimension general anxiety with three items which explained 6% of the total variance in the foreign language anxiety construct (Table 3).

**Table 2**

Description of factors of Malay translated LAS.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Number of items</th>
<th>% of variance explained</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barriers with staff</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barriers with library resources</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barriers with library environment</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barriers with library services</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>29 items</td>
<td>39.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3**

Description of factors of Malay translated FLCAS.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Number of items</th>
<th>% of variance explained</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Speaking anxiety</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom anxiety</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-evaluation anxiety</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learner anxiety</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General anxiety</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>30 items</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**FINDINGS**

Correlation analysis was performed on each of the four dimensions of library anxiety and five dimensions of foreign language anxiety (Table 4). The results of running Pearson Product Moment Correlations between the dimensions of the two anxieties are briefly described below:

(a) A statistically significant relationship existed between speaking anxiety of foreign language anxiety and barriers with staff ($r = 0.20, p < .05$) of library anxiety.

The significant relationship between speaking anxiety and barriers with staff shows that students who experienced uneasiness in verbalizing their thoughts and ideas are also the ones who are likely to experience anxieties when interacting with library staff. One can only obtain assistance and make profitable use of library staff and services if one can communicate verbally. Although the language of general communication in Malaysia is the Malay language, information needs for students’ assignments have to be articulated in the English language. Malaysian students have been reported to feel nervous and very self-conscious when they have to speak in front of other students especially when they were unprepared (Khairi & Nurul, 2011). During schooldays, some of these students have only communicated in their own dialect (Malay language variety which differs according to the different states in Malaysia) with family members, friends, and even teachers. At the university, when these students realized others do not share their communication style and language, they often experience uncomfortable feelings and encounter difficulties code switching to the proper Malay or the English language.

(b) A statistically significant relationship existed between speaking anxiety of foreign language anxiety and barriers with library resources ($r = 0.30, p < .05$) of library anxiety.

The significant relationship between speaking anxiety and barriers with library resources have shown evidence that it is a reality that some students are faced with difficulties when using the library’s resources and when communicating with library staff. This is supported by a study on the behavioral pattern of students in this university which stated that when looking for information sources for their final year projects, students favored internet sources, followed by lecturers, friends, seniors, and only then the sources in the library (Mohd Shariff & Zainab, 2007; Nor Edzan, 2007). Library collections are searchable using the Library of Congress Subject Headings in the English language. Similarly, catalog information, and the library instruction programs are also in the English language. Many times students approached the reference desk with questions which were quite incomprehensible because of their confusion in the use of the correct terminologies. There is a tendency for students to confuse the electronic journal subscriptions with internet sources, articles for journals, methodology for methods, and so on. The general observation among librarians in this university is that students who are fairly proficient in the English language are able to articulate well their need for information.

(c) A statistically significant relationship existed between self-evaluation anxiety of foreign language anxiety and barriers with library services ($r = 0.30, p < 0.01$) of library anxiety.
Mellon’s (1986) theory of library anxiety posited that students are afraid to ask questions when required to use library services because by doing so they would reveal their inadequacies and consequently be negatively appraised by their peers and others. Such a fear could now be traced to self-evaluation anxiety of foreign language anxiety as evidenced by the statistically significant relationship between sub-scale self-evaluation anxiety and barriers with library services. Fear of negative evaluation is a component of both language anxiety and communication anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986). When students’ have perceived feelings of incompetency when compared to others, it can spill over when using the library services.

(d) A statistically significant relationship existed between self-evaluation anxiety of foreign language anxiety and barriers with library resources \((r = 0.20, p < 0.05)\) of library anxiety.

Students’ levels of library anxiety are exacerbated by their own incompetence and belief that the others are better resulting in the individual feeling shameful of his/her incompetence (Jiao & Onwuegbuzie, 1997). When searching the online databases, Malaysian students in institutions of higher learning often use the same keywords for their searching. Their ability to use alternate keywords seems low probably because of their level of proficiency in the English language. The significant relationship between self-evaluation anxiety and barriers with library resources show evidence that some students are not confident of optimizing the library’s collections particularly the electronic sources which are predominantly and pre-eminently in the English language.

(e) A statistically significant relationship existed between self-evaluation anxiety of foreign language anxiety and barriers with library environment \((r = 0.24, p < 0.01)\) of library anxiety.

The significant relationship between self-evaluation anxiety and barriers with library environment shows that the anxieties that students experience when using the library’s collections and services are influenced by the students’ self-perception of their abilities. For some students, the transition from rural schools to universities may have an influence on their affective behavior toward the university and library environment. Some students come from states where there are no public or school libraries. On the other hand, there are students who have been members of public libraries ever since they were children. Students from well to do families have parents buying books for them and inculcating in them the habit of reading as compared to students who have only read school textbooks and may find the library, books and the environment intimidating. 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 also were afraid of how others perceive them.

(f) A statistically significant relationship existed between learner anxiety of foreign language anxiety and barriers with library services \((r = 0.20, p < 0.05)\) of library anxiety.

The significant relationship between learner anxiety and barriers with library services shows that students who are afraid of being negatively appraised by their teachers and peers also have similar apprehensions when required to make use of library services. Even if relevant library services were provided and librarians were to facilitate well, how much anxiety students feel upon using the library and its resources varies with the inherent anxieties faced by the students.

(g) No relationship was observed between classroom anxiety and general anxiety of foreign language anxiety and any of the dimensions of library anxiety.

(h) All the four dimensions of library anxiety correlated with at least one of the dimensions of foreign language anxiety.

### DISCUSSION

The strongest relationship is between the dimension speaking anxiety \((r = 0.30, p < 0.05)\) of foreign language anxiety and barriers with library resources of library anxiety, and also self-evaluation anxiety \((r = 0.30, p < 0.01)\) of foreign language anxiety and barriers with staff of library anxiety. From the results, it can be inferred that students’ level of speaking anxiety can manifest as library anxiety while dealing with library staff and when using the facilities and resources. This supports Kulthau’s (2011) view that a person’s information seeking feelings, thoughts and actions are influenced by the individual’s past experiences and anticipation of future events. Students can get nervous whenever they feel the need to use English in and outside the classroom (Zafar, Tanveer, Ayaz, & Mirza, 2011). There is a probability that students who experience uneasiness in verbalizing their thoughts and ideas in a foreign language classroom are likely to experience anxiety when interacting with library staff. The communication apprehension in an individual can be caused by many factors such as hereditary, social environment, culture, role model and the learning environment (Richmond & McCroskey, 1998). Since library anxiety is a situational-based anxiety, the situational communication can fluctuate accordingly when the student comes into contact with the library staff. The whole process of encoding, interpreting, transmitting and coding messages come into play and both student and library staff will have an influence on each level of communication apprehension.

Another inference which can be made is that students who experience self-evaluation anxiety can also experience dimensions of library anxiety related to barriers with staff, barriers with library resources, and barriers with library environment. Students who feel embarrassed at their incompetence, often do not ask questions so as to avoid revealing their ignorance (Razlina, 2010). It has also been reported that students who are highly anxious do have a negative experience when using the library mainly because they feel that other students are adept at using the library while they are not (Fliotis, 1992). Students with high levels of foreign language anxiety tend to have a negative perception of their competence and self-worth (Onwuegbuzie, Bailey, & Daley, 1999). There is also a possibility that anxieties experienced as a learner can surface when the learner is making efforts to make use of the services offered by the university library since this study reveals a correlation between learner anxiety and barriers with library services.

### Table 4

Correlations between the dimensions of foreign language anxiety and library anxiety.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-scales</th>
<th>Barriers with staff</th>
<th>Barriers with library resources</th>
<th>Barriers with library environment</th>
<th>Barriers with library services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Speaking anxiety</td>
<td>0.20*</td>
<td>0.30*</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom anxiety</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-evaluation anxiety</td>
<td>0.30**</td>
<td>0.20*</td>
<td>0.24**</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learner anxiety</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0.20*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General anxiety</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* \(P < .05\).

** \(P < .01\).
The relationship between the dimensions of library anxiety and foreign language anxiety in this study indicates that the libraries’ efforts to encourage students to optimally use library resources and services must be more student-centered. It is also an indication that libraries and librarians cannot be entirely responsible for the students’ feelings of apprehension and anxiety toward the library. This study has provided some empirical evidence that students’ other anxieties in the form of foreign language anxiety has a correlational effect on the use of the library. This awareness can help librarians to plan the delivery of services and bibliographic instruction in a more empathic manner, particularly for students who are non-native speakers of English. The Malay translated version of the Library Anxiety Scale can now be used by other universities to enable a more standardized approach to the delivery of library services, facilities and instruction for the Malaysian undergraduate who are non-native speakers of English.

The findings of this study support earlier studies from non-English speaking countries such as Israel (Shoham & Mizrahi, 2001), Kuwait (Anwar, Al-Kandari, & Al-Qallaf, 2004), Sudan (Abusin & Zainab, 2010), and Poland (Swigon, 2011). Shoham and Mizrahi (2001) explored library anxiety among Israeli B.Ed. students and reported that although library anxiety is not an overwhelming phenomena, the language factor was the only factor that showed significant relationships with all the independent variables in the study. Anwar, Al-Kandari, & Al-Qallaf (2004) investigated library anxiety on undergraduate biological students of Kuwait University and reported that students whose English language is weak become quickly frustrated displaying a high level of anxiety. The analysis of students’ diaries among Sudanese undergraduates by Abusin and Zainab (2010), revealed that they become anxious if the textbooks are written in English, especially if their mastery of the English language is poor. Polish students (Swigon, 2011) face barriers using the library resources and appropriate tools for online resources and information. In another recent study using a Chinese translated LAS (Song et al., 2014), it was reported that ‘resources’ and ‘retirement’ are among the important factors causing library anxiety.

In 1986, Mellon’s theory of library anxiety posited that students are afraid to ask questions when required to use library services because by doing so they would reveal their inadequacies and consequently be negatively appraised by their peers and others. Such a fear could now be traced to speaking anxiety, self-evaluation anxiety, and learner anxiety among students both in and outside the classroom. Non-native speakers of English get nervous whenever they feel the need to use English in and outside the classroom indicating that a strict and formal classroom environment may be one of the reasons for students’ anxiety (Khattak et al., 2011). Fear of negative evaluation is a component of both language anxiety and communication anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986). When students have perceived feelings of incompetency when compared to others, it can spill over when using the library services. Students’ own negative personal evaluation anxieties do interfere when using the library services. Although Mellon’s (1986) theory was formulated two decades ago, it is obvious that library anxiety remains prevalent among university students regardless of the native tongue except that it can be more severe among non-native speakers because resources and consequently library instruction are in the English language.

REFERENCES