A Qualitative Assessment on Library Anxiety Among the Library Users of Assam University

Rajesh Chutia
PhD Scholar
Department of Library and Information Science
Assam University

Abstract

Library anxiety was an unknown and unheard term for many library professionals but the term took storm many years back when Constance Mellon, a Professor of Library Science in North Carolina, USA mentioned about it in 1986. Later on, many theories and scales were developed and assessed library anxiety among the library users around the globe. In the year 1992, Sharon L Bostick first developed the Library Anxiety Scale known as AQAK scale or Bostick’s Library Anxiety Scale, which was very successful in measuring library anxiety. This paper attempts to assess the library anxiety of library users of Assam University, Silchar that is in mid-level. This study has adopted a modified version of AQAK scale to assess library anxiety. Any delay in taking action could increase this level to extreme. Indirectly library anxiety hampers the academic performance of the users and incapability in academics. This paper also suggests some measures to minimise or diminish library anxiety among the users.

Keywords: Anxiety, Stress, Library Anxiety Scale, AQAK scale, Assam University, Library Users

1. Introduction

In today’s world of competition, thrive for excellence and the need to remain updated has taken special toll on the library users whether they are teachers, students or research scholars. For teachers, it is crucial to arrange, organise, and update the course materials for the students to be acquainted with. Students and scholars also have to find new facts; have to acquire the required knowledge, prepare assignments and projects, and to attend exams to obtain degree within the stipulated period.

There are many impediments which can be faced by teachers, students, scholars and other readers alike if the libraries viz a viz the librarians fail to organise and arrange/update books or other study materials. University libraries are powerhouse of knowledge and pertinent for research purposes as well. Thus, mismanagement of libraries or lack of organising skills or failing to update the required infrastructure or reading materials may result in extreme stress of users, shake up their minds and create inner turmoil and might lead up to anxiety.

2. Library Anxiety

Every individual has worries and fears, whether he is poor or rich, famous or failure. According to experts, anxiety can be adaptive if the discomfort that goes with it motivates people to learn new challenges. However, whether it is adaptive or maladaptive, this discomfort can be intense.

The term anxiety is defined as diffuse, vague, discomfort, very unpleasant state of mind, feeling of fear and apprehension. The anxious people may often keep themselves from
enjoying real life experiences. Those who have anxiety cannot sleep properly at night, often seen nightmares. The anxious people tend to be very impulsive or nervous in uneven situations. The people with anxiety alienated himself or herself from social functions. Some of the symptoms of anxiety are:

- Nervous
- Tension
- Feeling tired
- Lack of interest
- Feeling low
- Poor concentration
- Impulsive

The term ‘Library anxiety’ stems from an article in 1986 by Constance Mellon, a professor of library science in North Carolina, USA, titled "Library anxiety: A grounded theory and its development" in the College & Research Libraries journal. Library anxiety is a psychological barrier to academic success among library users. It is a feeling overwhelmed by the volume of information, confused by library systems, and uncertain where to begin their search (Mellon, 1986). Library anxiety may stem from simple but unfamiliar procedural tasks, such as checking out a book, but also from more complex research activities (Jiao, Onwuegbuzie, and Lichtenstein, 1996).

The library services for the users have been drastically changed since 1992 when Bostick’s Library Anxiety Scale was developed. The scale had been used to understand users’ anxiety levels while availing the library services. A three-stage study was conducted, using students of Kuwait University. A variety of statistical measures, including factor analysis, were used to process the data. The proven, resulting scale, named as AQAK scale or Bostick’s Library Anxiety Scale (1992) consists of 40 statements clustered into five factors, which are: (1) Library resources, (2) Library staff, (3) User knowledge, (4) Library environment, and (5) User education (Figure 1). These five factors are further subdivided for better understanding of the process, which will be applied in the study. This scale with a Cronbach’s alpha value of 0.904 is 90 percent reliable.

![Figure1. AQAK (A library anxiety scale)](image-url)
3. Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to explore the feelings and experiences equated with library anxiety in Assam University Library, which the users might face while using library for their day-to-day activities. The other objectives are:

- To measure the level of anxiety among the library users of Assam University with the help of Library Anxiety Scale (LAS)
- To find out if the users face anxiety while using the library resources in the context of ICT
- To find out the significant differences in anxiety of different categories of library users (students, teachers and research scholars) in Assam University
- To pinpoint the area which addresses the various dimensions of library anxiety and to conceptualize library anxiety antecedents in context of library users
- To review the findings of the study and suggest better to minimise the anxiety level of among the library users

4. Literature Review

Although the phenomenon of library anxiety had long been recognized in the Library and Information Science discipline, but it was Mellon (1986), who formulated its grounded theory based on a study of undergraduate students. Her theory was based on qualitative research. Bostick (1992) designed her study to ‘determine if a quantitative tool could be developed to accurately and adequately measure the construct’ of library anxiety. Starting with a master list of 294 library anxiety-related statements administered in two stages and using a variety of statistical procedures, she developed the Library Anxiety Scale (LAS) consisting of 43 statements grouped into five coherent factors. She found that LAS is an adequately valid and reliable measure of library anxiety indicated by the Cronbach’s Alpha (CA) for the instrument of 0.80, indicating adequate internal consistency. It may be noted that the LAS was developed using a sample of students that ‘included all levels from first year to post-graduate’.

Since its development in 1992, the LAS have been used in over 30 studies including two that modified it. Most of these studies have been conducted by Jiao and Onwuegbuzie (1997). They stated that they had limited information for the subclasses of the LAS. Another study, using the LAS along with two other anxiety scales on 171 undergraduate students concluded that the LAS ‘should be used as a multidimensional instrument measuring both anxiety and attitudes for women; for men, it appears to be a measure of attitude’ (Jerabeck et al., 2001).

Considering the age of Bostick’s scale and its unsuitability for research students, Van Kampen (2003) decided to conduct a study to determine if library anxiety was present among doctoral students. Her study, that included Bostick’s LAS statements in her instrument, resulted in the development of a new 54-item Lickert-type Multidimensional Library Anxiety Scale. Meanwhile Onwuegbuzie, et al. (2004) published a treatise on library anxiety. While discussing the issues for future research, they raised a legitimate question: How will the changing library and information landscape impact library anxiety research in the future? The library environment has drastically changed since 1992 when Bostick’s Library Anxiety Scale was developed. A three-stage study was conducted, using students of Kuwait University. There are no enough evidences of studies conducted on library anxiety in India.
5. Methodology

Survey method of research has been adopted to conduct the present study. The methods and techniques are mainly adopted from Sharon L Bostick’s Library Anxiety Scale (LAS). Bostick had used 43 statements for determine Library Anxiety Scale but for these study 31 statements out of 43 have been taken into consideration for doing the present study. These statements are categorised into five factors as shown below:

- Library resources
- Library staff
- User knowledge
- Library environment and
- User education.

5.1 Data Collection Tools and Techniques

Structured questionnaire was designed and distributed among randomly selected 150 respondents out of which 114 were received back. The questions were mainly close ended and the sample included students, teachers, and research scholars. Some data were also collected by meeting and interviewing the respondents.

5.2. Measurement

The questionnaire had 31 statements, which were converted into questions for better understanding of the respondents. After collection of the data, each and every question was again converted into statements and the result from each statement is measured in 1 to 5 point Lickert Scale. Range of the Lickert Scale varied from 1 to 5 where 1 was considered as the minimum level and 5 was the maximum.

5.3. Measurement of Library Anxiety

Library anxiety has been measured with the help of the scores proposed by Anwar, Al-Kandari and Al-Qallaf (2004). Following table represents a modified version of the anxiety score proposed by them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposed Categories for LAS Scores</th>
<th>Score Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Anxiety</td>
<td>0.0 – 2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Anxiety</td>
<td>2.3 – 2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mild Anxiety</td>
<td>2.7 – 3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate Anxiety</td>
<td>3.6 – 3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severe Anxiety</td>
<td>4.0 – 5.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The score from 0.0 – 2.2 shows that there is no anxiety where 4.0 – 5.0 shows the level of anxiety is severe.
5.4. Instruments and Procedures

For each statement, a response of 1 - denotes strong disagreement, 2- denotes disagree, 3 – undecided, 4 – Agree and whereas response of 5 - denotes strong agreement. Average of all the responses provides a generalized anxiety level for the respondents. Each question is provided with 5 points in maximum (strongly disagree = 1, disagree = 2, undecided = 3, agree = 4, strongly agree = 5). Positively worded items were reversed scored so that all items were scored in the same (strongly disagree = 5, disagree = 4, undecided = 3, agree = 2, strongly agree = 1).

6. Data Analysis and Interpretations

A total of 114 responses were received out of 150 randomly selected respondents, the percentage of response rate is 76% (Figure 1).

Figure 2. Response Rate

The data collected through questionnaires from the respondents of Assam University have been analysed by using the instruments and procedures explained above. The anxiety scores are found out after calculating them and later on interpreted by them with the proposed scores of anxiety. Mean for the response of every question has been calculated in 5 point Likert Scale (Table 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q.No.</th>
<th>Score (number of scores received for each question)</th>
<th>Total (5x114)</th>
<th>Anxiety Score (Score ÷ 570 x 5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>570</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>570</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>570</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>570</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>326</td>
<td>570</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>570</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>570</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>276</td>
<td>570</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>570</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A calculation is involved in the table above which is explained below:

a) **Score**: It is calculated by converting the responses into the number assigned (strongly disagree = 1, disagree = 2, undecided = 3, agree = 4, strongly agree = 5) and positively worded items were reversed scored so that all items were scored in the same (strongly disagree = 5, disagree = 4, undecided = 3, agree = 2, strongly agree = 1).

b) **Total Score**: The total number of score is calculated by multiplying the number assigned to each question (5) with the number of questionnaire (114) received (5×114 = 570). So, 570 denotes the total number of scores.

c) **Anxiety Score**: It has been found out by the following technique:

\[
\text{Anxiety Score} = \frac{\text{Score}}{570} \times 5
\]

Following table represents the Library Anxiety Scores found among the users of Assam University Library.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl.No</th>
<th>QUESTIONS</th>
<th>ANXIETY SCORES OF ASSAM UNIVERSITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>USER KNOWLEDGE</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>I am embarrassed that I don't know how to use the library.</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>I am unsure how to begin my research</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>I want to learn how to do my own research</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>LIBRARY RESOURCES</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>The library never has the materials I need</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>I can never find things in the library</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>The copy machines are usually out of order</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>The computer printers are often out of paper</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>LIBRARY STAFF</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>The library staffs are unapproachable</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>The reference librarians are unhelpful</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>The librarians don't have time to help me because they're always too busy</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>on the telephone.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Library staff don’t have time to help me</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Librarians don’t have time to help me because they are always busy doing</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>something else</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>The reference librarians are unapproachable</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>If I can’t find any book on the shelf, the library will help me</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>I feel like I am bothering the reference librarian if I ask a question</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>I can always ask the librarian if I don’t know how to use a piece of</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>equipment in the library</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>The people who work at the circulation desk are helpful</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>The library staff doesn’t care about students</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>Librarian doesn’t have time to help me</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>The library staff dos not listen to students</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>LIBRARY ENVIRONMENT</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
21. I can’t get help in the library at the times I need it  2.9
22. The library is comfortable place to study  2.3
23. I don’t understand the mechanism of library overdue fines  2.9
24. Good instructions for using the library computers are available  3.2
25. The library rules are too restrictive  3.0
26. The directions for using the Library are not clear  2.7
27. The library won’t let me check out (issue) as many items as I need  2.0
28. I can’t find enough space in the library to study  2.7

USER EDUCATION
29. I get confused trying to find my way around the library  2.2
30. I don’t know what to do next when the book I need is not on the shelf  2.9
31. I don’t know what are the resources available in the library  2.8

Data interpretations have been worked out by considering five important factors shown above such as - Library resources, Library staff, User knowledge, Library environment, and User education. Every statement under each factor is interpreted by measuring with proposed anxiety scores discussed above. Following are the interpretations of library anxiety scores of library users in Assam University:

6.1 User Knowledge

1) Anxiety score of the statement “I am embarrassed that I don't know how to use the library” is 1.7. It means that there is no anxiety.
2) The anxiety level of the statement “I am unsure how to begin my research” is 2.4 that means low anxiety.
3) In the statement, “I want to learn how to do my own research” anxiety level is 3.5, which denotes mild anxiety.

6.2 Library Resources

1) Anxiety level of the statement “The library never has the materials I need” is 2.9. That means mild anxiety.
2) It is found in the statement “I can never find things in the library” that anxiety level is 2.7 which means mild anxiety.
3) The anxiety score of the statement “The copy machines are usually out of order” is 3.4, that means mild anxiety.
4) The anxiety score of the statement “The computer printers are often out of paper” is 3.1, that means mild anxiety.
6.3 Library Staff

1) The score for “The library staffs are unapproachable” is 2.5, which means low anxiety.
2) The anxiety score of the statement “The reference librarians are unhelpful” is 2.4, which is low anxiety.
3) In anxiety score in the statement “The librarians don't have time to help me because they're always too busy on the telephone” is found out to be 2.2, that means there is no anxiety.
4) The anxiety score for the statement “Library staff don't have time to help me” is 2.2, that means no anxiety.
5) The statement “Librarians don’t have time to help me because they are always busy doing something else” has anxiety score of 2.5, that means low anxiety.
6) The score found out from the statement “The reference librarians are unapproachable” is 2.4, that is low anxiety.
7) The anxiety score of the statement “If I can’t find any book on the shelf, the library will help me” is 2.6, that is low anxiety.
8) Anxiety score of the statement “I feel like I am bothering the reference librarian if I ask a question” is 3.0, that means mild anxiety.
9) Anxiety score of the statement “I can always ask the librarian if I don’t know how to use a piece of equipment in the library” is 2.7, that is mild anxiety.
10) The anxiety score of the statement “The people who work at the circulation desk are helpful” is 2.3, that means there is low anxiety.
11) Anxiety score of the statement “The library staff doesn’t care about students” is 2.5, that means there is low anxiety.
12) The anxiety score of the statement “Librarian doesn’t have time to help me” is 2.6, that is low anxiety.
13) The anxiety score of the statement “The library staff does not listen to students” is 2.4, that is low anxiety.

6.4 Library Environment

1) The anxiety score of the statement “I can’t get help in the library at the times I need it” is 2.9, that is mild anxiety.
2) The anxiety score of the statement “The library is comfortable place to study” is 2.3, which means low anxiety.
3) The anxiety score of the statement “I don’t understand the mechanism of library overdue fines” is 2.9, that means mild anxiety.
4) The anxiety score of the statement “Good instructions for using the library computers are available” is 3.2, that means mild anxiety.
5) The anxiety score of the statement “The library rules are too restrictive” is 3.0, which is mild anxiety.
6) Anxiety score of the statement “The directions for using the Library are not clear” is 2.7, which means mild anxiety.
7) Anxiety score of the statement “The library won’t let me check out (issue) as many items as I need” is 2.0, That means there is no anxiety.
8) Anxiety score of the statement “I can’t find enough space in the library to study” is 2.7, that means mild anxiety.
6.5 User Education

1) Anxiety score of the statement “I get confused trying to find my way around the library” is 2.2, that means there is no anxiety.

2) The anxiety score of the statement “I don’t know what to do next when the book I need is not on the shelf” is 2.9, that is mild anxiety.

3) Anxiety score of the statement “I don’t know what are the resources available in the library” is 2.8, which means mild anxiety.

7. Major Findings

Following major findings are worked out and presented by taking the five aspects of library into consideration:

- It has been understood that users think that they are familiar with the library and they are not embarrassed of using the library but the score for uncertainty of starting the research is in higher side and also they are eager to learn how to do research or make a search for required information.

- All the statements given in for the library resources resulted in mild anxiety. Resources are very limited and could not be found out in the library. The photocopy machines and printers are usually out of order. Therefore, the anxiety score is in mild level, which is needed to be rectified.

- Most of the statements in questionnaire are in context of library staff and it is found out that anxiety score is higher in the case of the behaviour of library staff. The statement “I feel like I am bothering the reference librarian if I ask a question” got the highest anxiety score (3.0), it means that users hesitate to approach the librarian and in other aspects of the staff also the answer is negative. Human behaviour is one of the reasons for increasing the anxiety among the users.

- Library anxiety is mild in the aspect of environment in Assam University Library. Scores from all the statements related to library environment represents anxiety in Library Anxiety Scale. Just the score of one statement “The library won’t let me check out (issue) as many items as I need” is (2.0) which means there is no anxiety but the score is very near to mild anxiety. It will not take time to reach to mild level. Proper instruction for using ICT is also not mentioned and even the environment is very restrictive.

- It is revealed from the statements that library anxiety is prevailing under user education and it is growing rapidly. Among the three statements, the scores are (2.2), (2.9) and (2.8).

8. Suggestions

Library anxiety of different levels exists among the users in some areas of Assam University Library and it is needed to be controlled by applying some effective measures. In regard to make the Assam university library free from anxiety or to minimise it some preventive measures are suggested below:

- Users are needed to be trained up properly in the area of information search and research. It should be done in the respective departments or in the library. Library
staff should themselves go for attending training programmes and adopt them to better serve the users community particular and society as whole in general.

- Library resources should be acquired and maintained by keeping the needs of users in mind. Adequate number of resources should be procured so that users do not have to return back empty hand from the library.
- Reprography is also an important resource provided by the libraries, so the Assam university library should specially take care of the photocopiers.
- Library staff should maintain good behaviour and should be friendly and approachable as well. They should be well mannered and should take care of the users’ needs.
- Use of the phones inside the library is strictly prohibited for the users but library staff should also follow this nature for setting up an example for the users.
- Librarian should be accessible to the users, he should try to make a good rapport with the users, and he should always try to collect feedback from the user’s time to time.
- Arrangement of the books and racks should be done in an appropriate manner so that these are easily found by the users whatever they need.
- Library should be spacious and have a pleasant environment. Proper ventilation and enough light should be maintained.
- “Silence Please” should be seriously followed by the users and the library staff should also maintain it.
- Library should follow a “Least restrictive environment”. Too many rules and regulations should be avoided.
- The library staff should properly explain the need of collecting library overdue fines and transparency should be maintained.
- Emphasis should be given on user education. Library should organise training and workshops for the users for better understanding of the library and different services.
- Proper orientation program should be designed for the new users. It should not leave out anything important about the library.

9. Conclusion

In a way it can be concluded that library anxiety level among users in some areas of Assam University Library is exist which in mid-level, i.e. neither high nor low. However, that will not be a right way to conclude the paper because it has been revealed that users are suffering with library anxiety and library needs to take a call in this matter. It has been found that out of 31 statements most of them are resulted to be in anxiety level after measured in Library Anxiety Scale. Whether it is users’ knowledge or the behaviour of library staff or library resourses, every aspects of library studied resulted in different levels of library anxiety. The suggestions given may be considered for minimising the library anxiety. It can also be predicted that anxiety could increase and reach to the extreme level which if preventive measures are not taken.
References


