Chapter 4

Library Anxiety: A Barrier to Effective Use of Information Resources

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ABSTRACT

Recent surveys on usage of library services reveal that nearly one third of the user population uses the library resources effectively to fulfill their information requirements. The remaining two thirds are either under-utilizing or using at minimal level. The reasons for non-usage of library resources include the anxiety towards the information system. Library anxiety is a kind of psychological fear experienced by the users while using information services or accessing the ICT-based information resources in a library. Library anxiety is characterized by negative emotions including tension, fear, feelings of uncertainty and helplessness, negative self-defeating thoughts, and mental disorganization that are experienced in the library setting. It is a kind of psychological barrier that hinders the effective usage of library-based information resources. It is more prevalent among the beginners than others. This chapter highlights anxiety, types of anxiety, different types of library users, causes of library anxiety, and the remedial measures to overcome library anxiety.

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INTRODUCTION

Academic libraries play a vital role in the academic process of the parent institution by supplementing the academic process of teaching and learning of the academic community consisting of students and teachers at any level. It acts as hub for the academic community consisting of students and teachers for knowledge sharing and interacts with print and non-print materials to fulfill their day-to-day information requirements and update knowledge in the emerging field of their interest.

Knowledge explosion, proliferation of information and ICT based library services in academic libraries in general and in particular among the higher educational institution poses several problems and hindrances to the user while accessing library resources. These hindrances are called barriers in library. The feeling of anxiety when approaching library is one of the barriers. It is a kind of psychological barrier hindering users’ access to information, which may be described in the broader term, information barriers (Swigon, 2006, 2010). Library anxiety is undoubtedly an important issue. It is the common phenomenon occurring among the majority of students (Mellon, 1986; Onwuegbuzie, Jiao, & Bostick, 2004).

In academic library set up, librarians and library professionals have observed that some students feel more comfortable while utilizing libraries than do others. Library anxiety has been defined as an unpleasant or uncomfortable emotion characterized by worry, confusion, tension and helplessness which occurs when a student is in the library setting. Library anxious students exhibits some characteristics, behavioral disorders, poor study habits, library avoidance, and negative attitude towards library, its collections and library professionals. It was also characterized by feelings that one’s library skills are inadequate compared to those of one’s peers that this inadequacy is shameful and should be hidden. There are very few selected researchers namely Onwuegbuzie and Jiao conducted a series of studies on various aspects of library anxiety in different context list out characteristics of characterized by negative emotions including tension, fear, feelings of uncertainty and helplessness, negative self-defeating thoughts, and mental disorganization.

TYPES OF ANXieties

There are mainly two types of anxieties, namely, trait anxiety and state anxiety. Trait anxiety is an individual’s inherent tendency to view the world as threatening or dangerous (Battle, 2004). State anxiety refers to specific to a particular situation or stimulus that can vary in intensity depending on situation (Mech & Brooks, 1995). The specific situations such as taking an examination, facing an interview, visiting a strange place, first visit to a library, operating automated machines and so on. Scientific and educational environments may give students the experience of frustration, fear, stress and anxiety called ‘academic-related anxiety’ (Onwuegbuzie, Jiao & Bostick, 2004). Fear felt by the students in an academic set up are generally classified as state anxiety. Therefore, academic anxieties are state anxieties as they appear in relation to specific stimuli. Common academic anxieties include math anxiety, test anxiety, computer anxiety, information anxiety and library anxiety (Battle, 2004). Thus, library anxiety is a state-based anxiety (Onwuegbuzie, Jiao, & Bostick, 2004) in which students experience uncomfortable feelings or emotions while in a library setting (Jiao, Onwuegbuzie, & Lichtenstein, 1996).