



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

The Journal of Academic Librarianship

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jacalib

Emotions Management Skills and Barriers with Library Staff: A Correlational Survey of Agriculture Students

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Library anxiety
 Barriers with library staff
 Emotions management
 Emotional intelligence
 University students
 Agriculture
 Pakistan

ABSTRACT

The literature has identified *barriers with library staff* as one of the important barriers affecting academic activities of students and also recognized the relationship of various academic and demographic characteristics of students with it. The *emotions management* skills of students may be one of the possible correlates of the *barriers with library staff*. This study was designed to investigate the levels of *barriers with library staff* and *emotions management* skills as well as their possible correlation using two standardized scales. The data were collected from the final year undergraduate agriculture students. The results confirmed the existence of *barriers with library staff* among the participants of both genders experiencing the same level of *anxiety*. The participants scored 3.75 (average) on the *emotions management* scale. The results also revealed significantly negative correlation between *emotions management* skills and *barriers with library staff* among these students. These results have many practical implications in the sphere of academic librarianship.

Introduction

The library staff provides assistance to its users and provides answers to their questions concerning the use of library resources and services. Some library users feel hesitation, worry and nervousness when asking library staff for help. Such anxious feelings are often traced to students' negative perceptions of library staff (Abusin, Zainab, & Noor Harun, 2011; Anwar, Al-Kandari, & Al-Qallaf, 2004; Jiao & Onwuegbuzie, 1999; Van Kampen, 2004). This hesitant behavior of library users is an important barrier to an effective use of staff services. This attitude was identified early in the literature during the 1970s and 1980s, when researchers were mainly concerned with identifying the reasons associated with it. For example, Swope and Katzer (1972), using a random sample of students at Syracuse University's Carnegie library tried to identify the users, who for one reason or another, were reluctant to seek the assistance of library staff. They found out that although 41% of the respondents had questions, a majority (65%) of those would not ask a librarian for help. Their findings also revealed that *dissatisfaction with the past service of the librarian* and *not wanting to bother the librarian* were the main reasons for this hesitancy on the part of students. Similarly, Kosa (1982) found that *fear of appearing ignorant* was the most common reason for students' decision not to ask library staff for help. Hatchard and Toy (1986) concluded that some students experienced emotional problems when approaching library staff for

assistance. After a detailed two-year qualitative study, Mellon (1986) concluded that some students felt that their own library use skills were weaker than those of other students and their incompetence would be revealed by asking questions from librarians. She noted that students, due to some reasons, felt scared, fearful, helpless, and confused when using the library. She named this phenomenon *library anxiety*.

As a result, several researchers explored the factors associated with library anxiety and tried to develop quantitative tools for measuring it. They found that the library staff itself was often a reason why students avoided use of the library or did not fully utilize library resources and services (Anwar, Al-Qallaf, Al-Kandari, & Al-Ansari, 2012; Bostick, 1992; Van Kampen, 2004). The library staff was perceived by the users as intimidating, unfriendly, careless about users' needs, unapproachable, or too busy to provide help. Researchers have called these negative feelings of nervousness and uncertainty associated with library staff at the time of using the library *barriers with staff* (Bostick, 1992). The earlier literature used such expressions as *barriers with staff*, *barriers with service providers*, etc. (Ansari, 2009; Bostick, 1992). Anxiety associated with *barriers with library staff* was a very serious issue because it discouraged users from asking questions or approaching library staff for help. This type of anxiety might involve many reasons such as: users' past experience with library staff and their negative perceptions regarding staff's approachability, professional knowledge, and attention given to users, etc. (Anwar et al., 2012; Bostick, 1992; Van Kampen,

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E-mail address: Sajjad_Jan83@yahoo.com (S.U. Jan).<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2017.12.006>Received 17 April 2017; Received in revised form 11 December 2017; Accepted 13 December 2017
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2004).

Previous research has also acknowledged that *barriers with library staff* are induced by emotional factors (Hatchard & Toy, 1986; Kosa, 1982). Emotions, on the other hand, are important sources of information and have an influential role in the actions and reactions of an individual. If one possesses the ability of regulating emotions, one generally also has good social skills (Lopes, Salovey, & Straus, 2003). The *regulation of emotions* or *emotions management* skills are the abilities to stay open to pleasant and unpleasant emotions, manage one's own emotions as well as those of others (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Schutte et al., 1998). *Managing one's own emotions* involves the ability to control own emotions, expecting good things to happen, and seeking activities for happiness, etc. The second component of *managing others' emotions* involves the abilities of sharing emotions with others, arranging events others enjoy, helping other people feel better when they are down, etc. (Schutte, Malouff, & Bhullar, 2009).

Considering the important role of *emotions management* skills in social interaction, it can be assumed that students with better emotions management skills are better able to manage anxiety resulting from interacting with library staff and suffer fewer negative results from this anxiety. That is, the students with higher *emotions management* skills would have lesser anxiety associated with library staff and vice versa. A recent study attempted to investigate the relationship between general library anxiety and emotional intelligence (SeyyedHosseini, Khosravi, & BasirianJahromi, 2014). However, an extensive literature search did not reveal any study that has empirically investigated the relationship between *emotions management* skills and *barriers with library staff* among students. Therefore, this research was designed to discover a possible relationship between these two phenomena among students. Hopefully, this will be a contribution to the literature on this topic and provide important indications for future research. The findings of this study will have practical implications for reducing students' anxiety associated with library staff.

Literature review

Previous research has identified *barriers with library staff* as a major source of students' overall library anxiety. Mellon (1986) and Bostick (1992) mainly intended to identify the relationship of various demographic and academic variables with the different factors of *library anxiety* (library staff, library resources, user knowledge, etc.). Later, researchers have established significant relations between the factor *barriers with library staff* and various academic variables (e.g. communication and foreign language anxiety; computer anxiety; reading ability) among students (Janaki & Noor Harun, 2014a, 2014b; Jiao & Onwuegbuzie, 1997; Jiao & Onwuegbuzie, 2003; Jiao, Onwuegbuzie, & Bostick, 2004; Mizarchi & Shoham, 2004). The factor '*barriers with library staff*' has been found to be related with various variables of students. Jiao and Onwuegbuzie (1997), utilizing a sample of 522 American students, found that library visits of students significantly contributed to the prediction of their anxiety associated with library staff. These researchers tested the relationship between academic procrastination and library anxiety using Bostick's LAS and Procrastination Assessment Scale-Students (PASS) on 135 graduate students enrolled in a research methodology course. They found that academic procrastination resulted from *fear of failure* and *task aversiveness* which appeared to be related significantly to *barriers with library staff* (Onwuegbuzie & Jiao, 2000).

The students' gender and race seems to have an impact on their anxiety associated with library staff. Shoham and Mizarchi (2001) used a modified version of Bostick's LAS on Israeli students and found that females were more anxious about library staff than males. However, a study of Kuwaiti students, also using a modified version of Bostick's LAS, found that males were more anxious than females in approaching library staff (Anwar et al., 2004). The reason was that almost all the librarians were female and male students, due to cultural reasons, felt

hesitant to seek help from females. Jiao et al. (2004); Jiao, Onwuegbuzie, and Bostick (2006) examined the racial differences in library anxiety and found that Caucasian-American students were more anxious due to *barriers with library staff* than African-American students. Thus, the gender and culture of students plays an important role in their library-related anxieties, particularly those associated with library staff.

Mizarchi and Shoham (2004) investigated the relationship between library anxiety and computer anxiety using the modified version of Bostick's LAS and the Computer Attitude Scale (CAS). The CAS consisted of three aspects which were: *anxiety or fear of computers*, *liking computers or enjoying working with computers*, and *confidence in the ability to use or learn about computers*. These instruments were administered to 664 Israeli students. The results found a very strong relationship between *barriers with library staff* and the three factors related to computer attitude. Similarly, Jiao and Onwuegbuzie (2004) found a strong multivariate relationship between *computer liking* and *computer usefulness* with *barriers with library staff* among African-American graduates. Abusin et al. (2011), who analyzed the contents of the diaries of 51 Sudanese undergraduate students, found that *negative perceptions towards library staff* were one of the main sources of students' library anxiety. Anwar et al. (2012), in a two-year research project, found that 'library staff' was a major source of library anxiety among Kuwaiti undergraduates. Lu and Adkins (2012) tried to examine the level of overall library anxiety among the international graduate students in United States. They administered a modified version of Bostick's LAS and discovered that the *barriers with library staff* factor was the greatest source of library anxiety among these students. In an Iranian study, Ashrafi-rizi, Sajad, Rahmani, Bahrami, and Papi (2014) studied library anxiety among the students of two medical universities using a modified version of Bostick's LAS and found that the students of both universities were highly anxious regarding library staff. Ansari (2009) explored the relationship between 'Perceived Size of Library Collection' and 'Library Anxiety' among a randomly selected sample of undergraduate students at International Islamic University Malaysia. She found a significant positive relationship between *perceived size of library collection of books* and the *barriers with service providers*, meaning library staff.

The earlier research has also revealed an association between *barriers with library staff* and various types of other academic anxieties. For example; Jiao and Onwuegbuzie (2003) examined the relationship between *reading comprehension*, *reading vocabulary*, and *barriers with library staff* among 45 African-American students of a research methodology course. The correlation analysis revealed that both dimensions of reading ability, *reading comprehension* and *reading vocabulary*, were significantly related to *barriers with library staff*. Similarly, Janaki and Noor Harun (2014a, 2014b) found that *communication anxiety* and *speaking anxiety* dimension of *foreign language anxiety* were significantly correlated with *barriers with library staff* among the undergraduate students. The students' performance on the assignments of *writing articles' critique* and *writing research proposal* has also been found to be related with the *barriers with library staff* (Jiao, Collins, & Onwuegbuzie, 2008).

Research on the relationship of *barriers with library staff* with *emotions management* was scarce. Some related studies will be presented here. Ciarrochi, Deane, and Anderson (2002) established a negative and significant relationship between *managing one's own emotions* and *depression* and between *managing others emotions* and *Hopelessness*. They concluded that higher *emotions regulation* skills (i.e. managing own emotions and managing others' emotions) were associated with lower depression. Bai (2011), who investigated anxiety proneness and emotional intelligence among pre-university students, suggested that better educational outcomes could be achieved by improving *emotions management* skills. Similarly, previous studies have recognized the relationship of various academic factors with *barriers with library staff* among students (Jiao et al., 2008; Jiao & Onwuegbuzie, 1997; Jiao & Onwuegbuzie, 2003) but lack evidence about its association with

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