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IMPACT OF LIBRARY ANXIETY ON DIGITAL LIBRARY UTILISATION AMONG UNDERGRADUATES IN A NIGERIAN PRIVATE UNIVERSITY

Rahmon O. Akinbode[1], Taofeek Abiodun Oladokun[2]
Abiola Ajimobi Technical University, Ibadan
rahmon.akinbode@tech-u.edu.ng[1], taofeek.oladokun@tech-u.edu.ng[2]

Corresponding Author[2]:
taofeek.oladokun@tech-u.edu.ng

ABSTRACT

Academic libraries all over the world, especially in Nigeria have invested heavily on the provision of digital resource in order to provide current and relevant information sources for the(ir) users. This is imperative in a dynamic knowledge society where information become obsolete in the twinkle of an eye. However, there are several factors that can affect the effective Utilisation of these digital resources. This study examined the impact of library anxiety on the utilisation of digital library resources by undergraduates in a Nigerian private university. The study adopted a survey research method. The study sample was selected using stratified random sampling to select 165 undergraduate students from four faculties in the university which represents 5% of the total population (n= 3285). The data for the research was collected using a standard scale; the AQAK Library anxiety questionnaire and the analysis was done using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). Findings established that a significant number of the students (n= 67; 70%) experienced more than low anxiety based on the AQAK Scale. It was also revealed that there is a significant negative relationship ($r = -0.13$, $p > 0.1$) between library anxiety and use of digital library resources by the students; an indication that the use of digital library resources increases as library anxiety decreases in the students. The study therefore recommended that user education programs should be intensified and library staff should make more effort to develop a cordial relationship with library users in order to eliminate all forms of library anxiety.

Keywords: Academic Libraries, Digital Library Resources, Information Anxiety, Library anxiety, Resources Utilisation

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Introduction

Library anxiety is a complex, library-specific emotional response that manifests through fear, confusion, and self-defeating thoughts when students encounter library spaces or services. Emerging from perceived incompetence and amplified by intimidating environments or unapproachable staff, it directly impairs academic engagement and information-seeking behaviours. It encompasses a range of emotional and cognitive challenges that arise when students are either physically in the library or merely contemplating using its resources. These challenges include tension, fear, confusion, self-doubt, mental disorganization, and a sense of helplessness, which can severely hinder one's ability to perform research and seek help confidently (Sawe, et al., 2025).

Oladokun et al. (2022) examined library anxiety as a phenomenon associated with the utilization of the physical library. The significant evolution in library operations and services due to technological progress necessitates an expansion of the concept of library anxiety to include additional variables pertinent to the evolving library and information landscape (Hasanah, Mutia, & Salleh, 2024). The academic library has leveraged the rapid technical advancements in digital information networks and electronic services to transition from a print-centric to a networked environment.

Currently, university undergraduates confront the challenges of rapidly evolving technology and increasingly intricate user interfaces when attempting to access electronic resources in the library (Guistwhite, 2024). Despite the implementation of single sign-on systems and federated search protocols, it is common for a single journal article to be accessible across numerous academic databases (e.g., EBSCOHost, Elsevier, Zenodo, DOAJ, etc.). This may be perplexing and daunting for library customers who possess insufficient information search skills. When students experience fear or reluctance to seek assistance from librarians or peers, it can result in library anxiety, ultimately causing them to avoid the library or procrastinate when they need to utilize digital resources.

Adeeko and Adetimirin (2023) observed that undergraduates in underdeveloped nations frequently enter colleges with minimal or no previous exposure to a library. Some individuals also lack proficiency in computer literacy. Consequently, individuals are likely to feel significantly overwhelmed by extensive academic libraries and susceptible to worry when utilizing the digital library. In view of this, it is considered necessary to investigate the

prevalence of library anxiety among undergraduate students of Lead City University, Ibadan, Nigeria and how it affects the use of digital library resources.

Statement of the Problem

Academic libraries have been striving to meet information needs of undergraduates by creating digital libraries to supplement the print collection. Librarians are therefore often disappointed to discover that the Utilisation rate for their expensive, painstakingly organized and highly resourceful digital libraries is still below expectation. Various researchers have blamed the low Utilisation on various factors such as lack of infrastructure, information literacy, ICT skills and many others. One factor that has not been adequately explored especially in Nigeria is library anxiety as a hindrance to the Utilisation of digital libraries. Hence this study examined the impact of Library anxiety on the Utilisation of digital library resources by Undergraduates of Lead City University, Ibadan, Nigeria.

Research questions

In other to achieve the aim of this study the following research questions guided the study:

i. What is the level of library anxiety among the undergraduate students in Lead City University, Ibadan?
ii. What are the factors contributing to library anxiety among undergraduate students in Lead City University, Ibadan?
iii. What influence does library anxiety have on the Utilisation of digital library resources among undergraduate students in Lead City University, Ibadan?

Literature review

Level of Library Anxiety among Undergraduate Students

Over several decades, extensive research has consistently demonstrated that many library users, regardless of their cultural, social, or educational backgrounds, often perceive the library as an intimidating environment (Chutia & Sarmah, 2019). This recurring phenomenon is widely referred to as *library anxiety*. The concept was first articulated in the pioneering work of Mellon (2015), who described library anxiety as the overwhelming and negative emotions students experience when required to use the library to fulfill an information need. Mellon's conceptualization shifted scholarly attention toward library users' subjective experiences,

prompting further empirical investigations. The recognition of her findings marked an important turning point, as it drew sustained interest in understanding the psychological and behavioural dimensions of library use (Chutia & Sarmah, 2019).

The first empirical study on library anxiety among college students in the United States was reported in 1996, establishing an evidence base for subsequent research. Since then, the construct has evolved. Shelmerdine (2018), for instance, defined library anxiety as "an uncomfortable feeling or emotional disposition, experienced in a library setting, which has cognitive, affective, physiological, and behavioural ramifications." Similarly, Agbonavbare, Egbochuku, and Adeleke (2021) described it as a state of intimidation, nervousness, uncertainty, or confusion that emerges when individuals attempt to use the library and its resources to satisfy an information need.

To situate this phenomenon within a broader psychological framework, anxiety more generally has been characterized as a feeling of uneasiness, worry, nervousness, and apprehension when individuals face a task or challenge (Karim & Ab Rashid, 2016). In this context, library anxiety reflects a specific form of state-based anxiety manifesting as discomfort, fear, uncertainty, or nervousness when students are confronted with the task of navigating library systems, services, or resources for academic purposes. Within academic libraries, such anxiety can produce a variety of maladaptive outcomes, including misconceptions about how to use resources effectively, procrastination, and even outright avoidance of library-related tasks.

The symptoms of library anxiety closely mirror those of generalized anxiety, including elevated heart rate, rapid breathing, increased blood pressure, apprehension, and frustration (Naveed, Jan, & Anwar, 2020). Other psychosomatic manifestations such as sweating palms, shaking, negative self-talk, or nausea, are also commonly observed. However, what distinguishes library anxiety is the unique behavioural profile it generates in library settings, where students exhibit patterns of frustration, apprehension, avoidance, and confusion.

A large body of international research affirms the pervasiveness of library anxiety among students in higher education (Fraser & Bartlett, 2018; Naveed et al., 2020; Oladokun et al., 2022). Recent evidence underscores the scale of the problem: Yang and Khan (2023) reported that approximately 40% of surveyed library users admitted to experiencing anxiety whenever they were required to use the library. The consequences of such anxiety are far-reaching. Students experiencing these feelings often avoid or delay engaging with academic libraries,

thereby increasing the likelihood of postponing or incompletely executing assignments that require library resources. Moreover, anxiety-prone students tend to spend less time in the library, rely more heavily on photocopying rather than active research, misinterpret signage or directions while locating books and periodicals, and, crucially, refrain from seeking assistance when needed (Oladokun et al., 2022). Collectively, these behaviours not only hinder students' academic performance but also undermine the library's central role as a site of intellectual growth, discovery, and scholarly engagement.

Factors Responsible for Library Anxiety among Undergraduate Students

Library anxiety has been attributed to multiple interrelated factors that influence students' comfort and confidence when using the library. These factors include the attitudes and behaviours of library staff, the general library environment, students' knowledge of library systems, the adequacy and accessibility of library resources, the effectiveness of user education, as well as affective, mechanical, and technological barriers (Muszkiewicz, 2017). Students may experience anxiety across all or only some of these dimensions depending on their prior experience, personal disposition, and institutional context.

Empirical studies have yielded mixed findings regarding the specific sources of library anxiety. For instance, Popoola and Olajide (2022), in a study involving 125 international students using Bostick's Library Anxiety Scale (LAS), reported that mechanical barriers constituted the greatest source of library anxiety, followed by affective barriers, comfort within the library, barriers with staff, and knowledge of the library. In contrast, other studies have identified mechanical barriers as the least significant source of anxiety, while affective barriers and staff-related issues emerged as the most prominent (Asghar et al., 2021). Research on Iranian medical students further revealed that barriers with staff represented the greatest source of anxiety, while comfort within the library ranked lowest (Asghar et al., 2021). These findings collectively underscore a recurring theme: students are often reluctant or afraid to approach librarians for assistance, even when faced with significant challenges in navigating the library's resources (Fraser & Bartlett, 2018).

The extent of library anxiety experienced by students is also shaped by both personal and institutional factors. On the personal side, students often bring inhibitions or limitations that hinder their effective use of the library (Chutia & Sarmah, 2019). These include inadequate

knowledge of library resources, lack of prior experience, ignorance of the capabilities of information retrieval systems, low self-confidence in conducting research, and insufficient information literacy skills. A frequent source of anxiety is confusion during the information search process, particularly when using computerized catalogues and databases. This difficulty is compounded by the variety of online public access catalogues (OPACs) and database interfaces, which often require specialized knowledge to navigate effectively. For example, students frequently struggle to differentiate between subject and keyword searches or to employ Boolean logic to broaden or narrow search results (Shelmerdine, 2018).

Evidence from Nigeria further illustrates these challenges. A study conducted among medical students at the University of Jos revealed widespread difficulty in using catalogues and journal indexes, highlighting the persistent gap in user education and information literacy (Popoola & Olajide, 2022). Such findings suggest that library anxiety is not merely a transient feeling but a complex construct shaped by systemic barriers, personal competencies, and institutional practices that together determine the degree to which students can effectively access and use library resources.

Methodology

The present study adopts a survey research design, which is considered appropriate for investigating psychological and behavioural constructs such as library anxiety. This design enables the researcher to systematically collect and analyse data from a defined population with the goal of identifying patterns, relationships, and variations in students' experiences and perceptions.

The population of the study comprises 3,285 undergraduate students drawn from the four faculties of Lead City University, Ibadan. Given the heterogeneous nature of this population, a stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure adequate representation across faculties. In line with this approach, 5% of the population from each faculty was randomly selected to constitute the study sample. This sampling proportion aligns with Aina's (2004) assertion that a sample size of 10% is considered sufficient for populations exceeding 1,000. Thus, the 5% allocation provides both a manageable and statistically acceptable sample size while ensuring diversity across faculties.

To measure the construct of library anxiety, the study employed the AQAK Library Anxiety Scale developed by Charlene L. Al-Qallaf, Noriah M. Al-Kandari, and Husain A. Al-Ansari

(2012). This instrument was selected due to its demonstrated relevance in capturing library anxiety within modern academic environments characterized by digital resources and online access to information (Jan et al., 2016). The AQAK scale is comprehensive, consisting of 40 statements grouped into five key factors: Library Resources, Library Staff, User Knowledge, Library Environment, and User Education. Each factor addresses critical dimensions of students' interactions and experiences within the library context.

The AQAK scale has been shown to be highly reliable, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.90, indicating excellent internal consistency (Jan et al., 2016). Responses to the instrument are measured on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), allowing for nuanced capture of the intensity of students' perceptions and feelings. This robust methodological framework positions the study to make reliable inferences about library anxiety among undergraduate students at Lead City University.

Results and discussion

Demographic characteristics of respondents

Table 1: Frequency distribution of gender, level of study and faculty of respondents

Demographics	Frequency	Percent
Sex		
Female	56	60.2
Male	37	39.8
Total	93	100.0
Level:		
100	6	6.5
200	12	12.9
300	21	22.6
400	45	48.4

500	9	9.7
Total	93	100.0

FACULTY	Frequency	Percent
Environmental and Management Sciences	35	37.6
Arts and Education	25	26.9
Basic and Applied Sciences	24	25.8
Law	9	9.7
Total	93	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2020.

Table 1 presents the demographic distribution of the respondents. Out of the 93 undergraduate students surveyed, 56 (60.2%) were female, while 37 (39.8%) were male, indicating that female students formed the majority of the study sample. This gender distribution reflects a slightly higher participation of female undergraduates in the study. With respect to academic level, the findings reveal that 6 (6.5%) of the respondents were in 100 level, 12 (12.9%) were in 200 level, 21 (22.6%) were in 300 level, 45 (48.4%) were in 400 level, and 9 (9.7%) were in 500 level. Clearly, 400-level students constituted the largest proportion of the respondents, while 100-level students represented the smallest proportion. This pattern may suggest that senior students were more accessible and more willing to participate in the study compared to their junior counterparts.

Furthermore, the distribution by faculty shows that 35 respondents (37.6%) were from the Faculty of Environmental, Management, and Social Sciences, 25 (26.9%) were from the Faculty of Arts and Education, and 24 (25.8%) were from the Faculty of Basic and Applied Sciences. Meanwhile, the Faculty of Law accounted for only 9 respondents, representing just 9.7% of the sample. This uneven distribution across faculties could reflect differences in student population sizes, class structures, or availability during the survey administration. Overall, the demographic distribution provides a balanced representation across faculties and levels of study, although with a noticeable concentration of respondents in the 400 level.

RQ1: What is the level of library anxiety among the undergraduate students in Lead City University, Ibadan?

Table 2: Proposed levels and frequency of the respondents' library anxiety score

Levels of LA	Ranges of mean scores	Frequency	(%)
No anxiety	0.00-2.11	12	12.9
Low anxiety	2.12-2.52	14	15.1
Mild anxiety	2.53-3.35	37	39.7
Moderate anxiety	3.36-3.76	14	15.1
Severe anxiety	3.77-5.00	16	17.2
Total	-	93	100

Mean =2.96; SD = 0.74 Source: Fieldwork, 2020.

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics of the overall library anxiety scores. This study utilized the five categories of library anxiety established by Jan et al. (2020) in their investigation of the correlation between emotional intelligence, library anxiety, and academic performance among university students. The findings indicate that a majority of respondents, 37 (37.9%), exhibited mild anxiety on the AQAK Library Anxiety Scale. Furthermore, 16 respondents (17.2%) exhibited severe library anxiety, and 14 respondents (15.1%) expressed both low and moderate anxiety, respectively. Merely 12 respondents (12.9%) indicated the absence of library anxiety. The data indicate that library anxiety is a common experience among the respondents, but with differing degrees of intensity.

This study further validates findings from global contexts. In a pertinent study including Pakistani students, Jan et al. (2020) found that 84.69% of undergraduates had library anxiety beyond minimal limits. This comparison underscores the universality of library anxiety as a phenomenon that transcends geographical and cultural boundaries, while its strength may fluctuate based on the learning environment and institutional context.

The average library anxiety score for the 93 students was 2.96, with a standard deviation of 0.74. This mean score roughly corresponds with prior findings in the literature. Jan et al. (2016) reported a mean score of 2.94 and a standard deviation of 0.41 in their survey, indicating that the level of library anxiety among students in the current study aligns with recognized trends in prior studies. Collectively, these findings underscore that although library anxiety may not consistently attain severe levels, it persists as a notable obstacle that might possibly influence students' utilization of library services and their overall academic achievement.

RQ2: What are the factors contributing to library anxiety among undergraduate students in Lead City University, Ibadan?

Table 3: Descriptive statistics for the sub-factors of library anxiety

	User Knowledge	Library Environment	User Education	Library Resources	Library Staff
Mean	2.80	3.20	3.03	2.82	3.00
Median	2.60	3.14	3.00	2.80	2.91
Std. Dev	1.071	.740	1.181	1.009	.749
Minimum	1.00	1.14	1.00	1.00	1.00
Maximum	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00

Source: Fieldwork, 2020.

Subfactors of library anxiety, including information resources, user knowledge, library environment, personnel, and user education, are described statistically in Table 3. The respondents ranked the library's atmosphere as the most important element causing library anxiety, with a mean score of 3.20. The next two categories, user education and library personnel, both had mean scores of 3.03 and 3.00, respectively. A mean score of 2.81 was recorded for library resources, while the lowest score was 2.82 for user knowledge. This finding indicates that respondents' library anxiety was most affected by the library's surroundings, while user knowledge had the least impact**.**

RQ3: What influence does library anxiety have on the Utilisation of digital library resources among undergraduate students in Lead City University, Ibadan?

Table 4 Correlation between undergraduates' Level of Library Anxiety and the use of Use of Digital Resources

		Use of Digital Resources	Level of Library Anxiety
Use of Digital Resources	Pearson Correlation	1	-.013
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.901
Level of Library Anxiety	Pearson Correlation	-.013	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.901	

Source: Fieldwork, 2020.

Table 4 shows that students' anxiety about using library resources was significantly correlated with their usage of digital library resources ($r = -0.13$, $p > 0.1$). To put it another way, when the other variable rises, the first one falls. That is, students are more likely to utilize digital library resources if they have a low level of library anxiety. Conversely, digital library resources will be underutilized if library fear is high. Given the correlation between library anxiety and digital resource utilization, it stands to reason that students experiencing lower levels of anxiety would have made more use of these tools than their more anxious counterparts.

Discussion of findings

The analysis of the level of library anxiety among the respondents revealed that a majority of them seen clearly show that a majority of the respondents (n= 67; 70.2 per cent) experienced more than low anxiety on the AQAK Scale while only 12.9% of the respondents experienced no anxiety at all. The findings of this study are consistent with similar studies of undergraduates in developing countries. For instance, a related study found that 72 per cent of the Kuwaiti students experienced mild anxiety; 13 per cent, low anxiety; and 10 per cent, moderate anxiety. On the whole, 85.4 per cent of their respondents experienced more than low anxiety (Jan et al., 2020).

Similar trend was also noticed in another study of Malaysian undergraduate students (Karim & Ansari, 2013). Researchers have attributed these results to factors such as; lack of exposure to library services at the primary and secondary school level, inadequate library orientation (Oladokun et al., 2022) and cultural background. Indeed several researchers have reported that cultural differences play a significant role in library anxiety among students (Naveed et al., 2020).

However, since the AQAK library anxiety scale outlined five constructs of library anxiety (Library Resources, Users Knowledge, Library Staff, Library environment and User Education), it is pertinent to understand which of these constructs is significant among any given group of library users. With a mean of 3.20, respondents reported that library environment is the highest factor contributing to library anxiety. This is followed by user education with a mean score of 3.03 and library staff with a mean score of 3.00. The resources available in the library and the user knowledge are less significant to the respondent as contributing factors to library anxiety. Other studies have also reported that users often feel intimidated by large and complex library buildings (Platt & Platt, 2013; Asghar et al., 2021) Other studies also observed that when the library hall is too noisy or rowdy, some users may not feel comfortable to study there. (Chimah, Nwajei, & Akpom, 2015). It is also instructive to note that there are studies which have emphasized the role of user education in alleviating library anxiety among various user groups (Still, 2015; Shelmerdine, 2018). A common theory among researchers is that students experience library anxiety due to a generalized dread of the unknown. Respondents' anxiety about using the library was also found to be significantly impacted by their experiences with staff. Findings from the study by Asghar et al. (2021) support this idea, as students reported feeling too timid to ask librarians for assistance when they were stuck with library materials or services. Librarians may be adding to their students' library anxiety without realizing it, according to studies. After all, librarians were once clueless about how libraries worked. This information is from Shelmerdine (2018).

The other two factors that were deemed less important are user knowledge and library resources. Academic library collections have grown more responsive and dynamic as a result of digital resource integration, according to research (Aladeniyi, & Owokole, 2018). The question of whether the library contains the user's required information resources may now remain unanswered, as this may have alleviated concerns about the library's collection. Based on the respondents' high ratings of library knowledge, it does not seem to be a major source of library

anxiety for them. This contradicts the results of multiple studies that looked at how undergraduates used digital library resources (Olajide & Otunla, 2015; Lavanya & Santharooban, 2018). According to these studies, undergraduates' inability to effectively retrieve information significantly hinders their use of digital library resources.

The goal is to find out how library anxiety affects people's usage of digital libraries.

There was a robust inverse association between respondents' library anxiety and their utilization of digital library resources, as shown by the correlation analysis ($r = -0.13$, $p > 0.1$). This suggests that the usage of digital library resources is inversely related to library anxiety. What this means is that people who aren't afraid of libraries are more likely to make use of the library's digital resources than those who are. The evidence supporting this observation is available in literature. It has been observed that one of the key signs of library anxiety is procrastination (Mellon, 2015). Students with library anxiety often put off visiting the library until it is absolutely necessary and when they do visit the library they are often paralysed by fear and bewilderment which may not let them make an effective use of the available resources (Platt & Platt, 2013)

Conclusions and Recommendations

The study's results suggest that undergraduates at Lead City University suffer from library anxiety, which has a major impact on how they use the library's electronic resources. Student anxiety about library use is caused by a number of factors. These include an unwelcoming library environment (particularly noisy reading rooms and a lack of comforts like air conditioning), a lack of awareness and education about how to use the library's resources (particularly its digital ones), an inadequate understanding of those resources, and poor information retrieval abilities. Also, it's clear that students had a hard time approaching library professionals for assistance with digital library resources, even if they lacked the necessary knowledge and abilities to truly benefit from them.

Because of this, user education programs need a serious overhaul if we want students to fully grasp the significance of digital resources to library collections and leave with the skills to effectively utilize these resources. In addition, it is important to take advantage of each chance to make library patrons feel comfortable so that they can make the most of the digital resources available to them. By providing facilities like air conditioning, enough lighting, comfortable

furniture, and the preservation of order among library users, the library building can also be made conducive and comfortable for the users.

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