

Tackling Library Noise: How can LSE improve student satisfaction with noise level?

Shaochun Shi (Elaine), LSE Change Makers
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Background

In 2022/23, LSE library receive as many as 10 noise complaints from students when the library is at peak times. Despite the efforts having been made to increase staff patrol, no one likes to be shushed. Currently, the noise challenge is still persisting in the silent zones, disturbing lots of students' library experience.

Literature review

To date, noise in the academic libraries have long been a concern in the literature. According to Gayton (2008), the contemporary design of social areas to make students feel comfortable is in conflict with the traditional use of library as a quiet place. This presents a challenge for noise management as libraries are struggling to find a balance between solitary study spaces, collaborative spaces, and social spaces to satisfy different types of user needs (Pierard & Baca, 2019). Yelinek & Bressler's (2013) review identified several prevalent noise management strategies, including zoning, designing signage, and furniture re-arrangement. Some of these are already in place at LSE, however, they can be further improved. Therefore, to tackle the noise problem, it is important to take a closer look at LSE students' needs and their behavioural pattern.

Methodology



- Library tour with staff
- Identified 2nd & 3rd floor as the research focus



- Qualtrics survey
 - Behavioral pattern
 - Noise satisfaction
 - Open-text Feedback
- 84 valid/98 total responses



- Over 10 hours Ethnographic Observation on 2nd + 3rd floor, in 5 separate days

What are the **TOP 3** sources of noise students find annoying?

1. People Talking
2. Phone use
3. People Eating

Findings

Part A: What do students say?

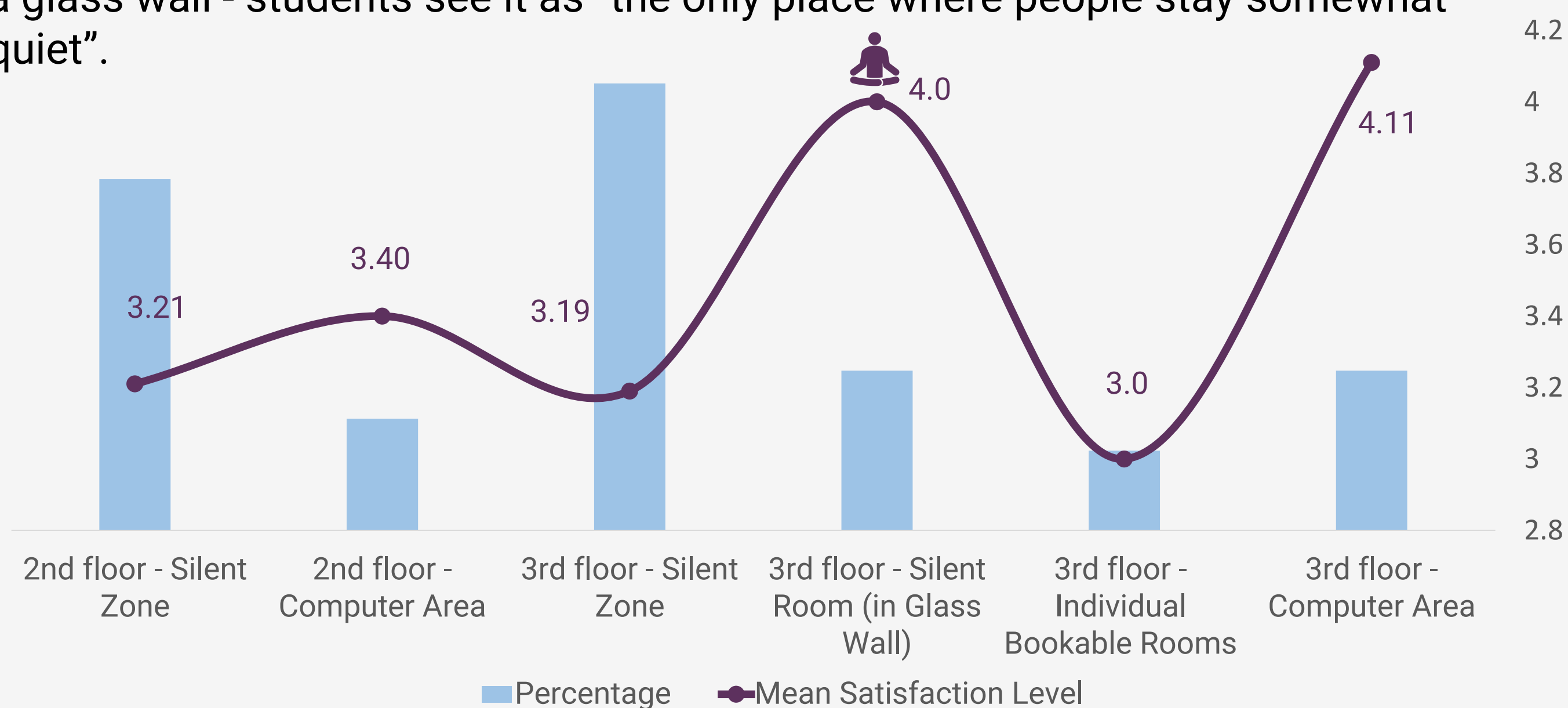
(1) Preferred Study Mode

Students were asked to selected up to two preferred study modes. Out of the 112 choice counts (N=79), solitary study is the most popular way of studying. When studying with others, students prefers quiet conversation over no talking.

	Choice count	Percentage
Study Alone, no Talking	55	49.1%
Study with others, with Quiet Conversation	30	26.8%
Study with others, no Talking	18	16.1%
Study with others, Talk at normal volume	9	8.0%

(2) Popular Areas & Satisfaction Level

Students were asked to choose their go-to places in the library, and subsequently, indicate the level of satisfaction (from 1-5) for their chosen area(s). As shown in the graph below, the 2nd and 3rd floor silent zones are the most popular places amongst students. However, their noise satisfaction level were lower than all other areas, except for bookable rooms. Therefore, 14 students urged for "real silent zone" when asked what types of space they want more in the survey. The highest satisfaction level is seen in the 3rd floor computer area which is used for for relaxation, followed by the silent room with a glass wall - students see it as "the only place where people stay somewhat quiet".



Findings (continued)

Part B: What are the key problems?

(1) Mixed-purpose Infrastructure Design – 3rd Floor



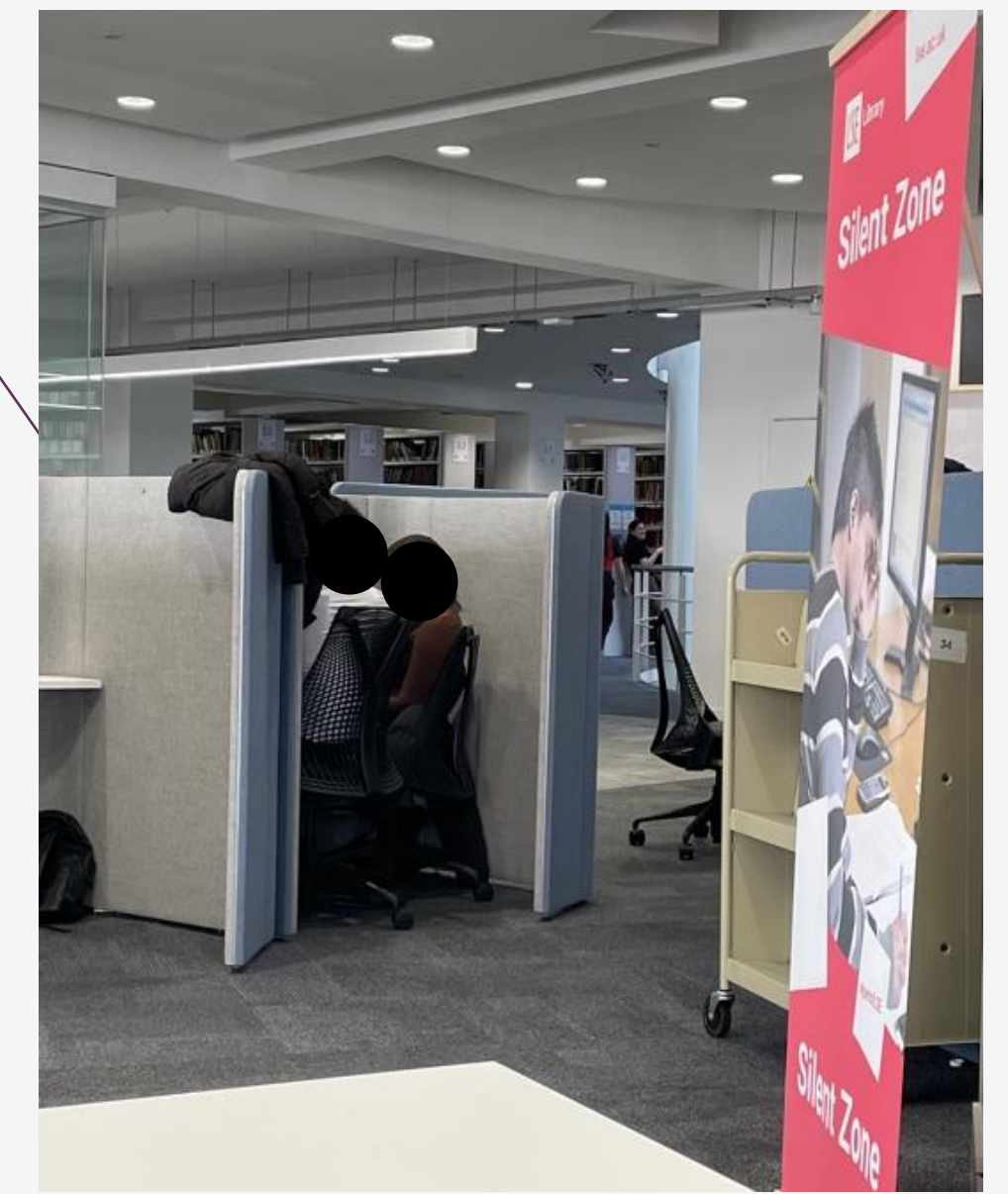
Based on the ethnographic observation, the white table surrounded by blue pods on 3rd floor is a place where conversation usually happens. Students often use it as a collaborative place for discussion, intruding the quietness of the silent zone.

(2) Filter-through Effect – 2nd, 3rd Floor

- Evidenced by both observation and students' feedback, the full-volume conversation often carries from the "chatting spots" outside the silent zone, including staircase + lift + computer areas. This not only affects but also "incentivizes talking in the silent zone".

(3) Desensitized to Signage and Surroundings – 2nd and 3rd Floor

Even though over 60% of the respondents believed the current signage is effective in regulating their behavior, the ethnographic data however contradicts this as people talking right beside the signage were observed multiple times.



"Their 'whispering' are **screaming** to me."
 — 1 respondent

Recommendations

Quick Fixes

- Remove the mixed purpose furniture in silent zone (white table on 3rd floor)
- Establish an online system that facilitates student surveillance – attach QR code on each desk to allow instant report of noise makers
- Use behavioral Nudges to tackle the problematic lift area, done by
 - Designing an audio reminder to increase mindful behavior – students can hear "2nd floor – you're now entering the silent zone" before they come out of the lift; and
 - Trying out different signage, for example, use floor stickers to remind people that they're leaving the transitional space and entering the silent zone (see example Figure on the right)
- Design more solitary study space (5 students asked for more blue pods)
- Consider staffing strategy – 6 students mentioned they would like to see more staff patrol for noise monitor and control



Long-term Solutions

- LSE Library could try dedicating closed functional space for food/chat/cell phone use - located near the lift area and scattered across different floors, can uses behavioral Nudge (see Footprints on the right) to guide walking into these rooms when students need to be non-silent
- Consider creating physical barriers to make silent zone more closed off (e.g., glass wall)
- Launch awareness campaign about being considerate to others, including educational information about people with different needs (e.g., ADHD, Misophonia)



Acknowledgements

The project would like to thank my supervisor Maria-Christina Vogkli for guiding me every step of the way, the Change Maker team, and the LSE Library team for providing their generous support when I needed it.

References

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