

A Portrait of Students' Anxiety in Reading English Texts

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Abstract. Reading is a very important thing to learn because it will determine success in school, university, and everyday life (Ntereke & Ramoroka, 2017). When the reading process takes place, many factors influence it such as affective, cognitive, and linguistic factors. However, most studies focus on cognitive and linguistic factors (Ismail, 2015; Zhou, 2017; Ashohbani, 2018; Madronero, 2019; Sharon & Parilah, 2020). In other words, there are very few studies examining the affective aspects of reading such as reading anxiety (Katzier et.al, 2018). The purpose of this research was to determine reading anxiety and the factors that influence it. This research used a qualitative approach with a case study research design. The population in this research was the eighth grade students of Islamic junior high school in Riau province, Indonesia. They consisted of 4 classes with a total of 110 students. 56 students were samples taken by using the purposive sampling technique. This research was conducted in August 2021. In collecting data, the researcher used two questionnaires and interviews to determine the level of students' anxiety when reading and the factors that influence it. Descriptive analysis through SPSS 21.00 was used in this research to analyze the questionnaire data, while the interview data were analyzed using qualitative data analysis from Cresswell (2012). The results showed that the students' reading anxiety level is at a moderate level (68% of students admitted). In addition, two factors that affect students' anxiety when reading English texts are text features and personal factors. Under the concept of text features, there are three sources of reading anxiety which include unknown vocabulary (63.7% of students agree), unfamiliar culture (54% of students agree), and unfamiliar topics 8(59.9% of students agree). On the other hand, in the concept of personal factors, there are two sources of reading anxiety, namely fear of making mistakes (57.9% of students agree) and worries about the effect of reading (41.3% of students agree).

Keywords: Anxiety; Reading.



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INTRODUCTION

Reading is a very crucial thing in second or foreign language learning. It can increase a learner's literacy. It is necessary to learn to read in English because it is the primary language of business, government, education, news, and information in the world (Navarro, Garbin, Avena, & Garcia, 2015). Moreover, the capability to read and to comprehend English textbooks and other assigned materials are critical components of success in school, university, and in everyday life (Ntereke & Ramoroka, 2017). Furthermore, reading is an inherently effortful activity that requires focused attention and concentration, affective variables significantly influencing reading processes (Hayashi, 2015). These affective variables consist of attitudes, motivation, language anxiety, personality and learning style (Al-Shboul, Ahmad, Nordin, & Rahman, 2013). Among these affective factors, anxiety is the most potent predictor of the students reading performance (Subasi, 2016). According to Krashen (1982), anxiety as an affective variable plays a crucial role in language learning. He claims that anxiety plays a negative role in preventing a learner from adopting effective learning practices. In addition, Kitano (2001) and Horner & Redmond (2002) argued that a second or foreign language class can evoke anxiety among learners more than other courses.

Reading anxiety is a situational phobia that is characterized by unpleasant, disturbing emotional reaction experienced by students in reading (Piccolo *et.al*, 2017). Specially, foreign language reading anxiety pertains to the feeling of apprehension, worry, and fear when students have to read in a non-native language like English. Regarding student's reading anxiety Saito and Sammy (1996) stated that whatever the cause, whatever the level of anxiety, we can be sure of one thing: anxiety will affect students' performance negatively. Based on the explanation above, reading anxiety could give lot of disadvantages to the students. They will lose concentrate to remember the ideas, and to learn anything new from the texts.



Some students have some problems while reading English texts. There are some students who are anxious when they see the English texts in front of them. They think that the topic of the text is too hard and difficult to understand. It is because they do not know all the meanings of the words. On the other hand, some students refuse if the teacher asks them to read an English text in the classroom. They feel unease, fearful concern accompanied by palpitations, sweat to perform successfully in reading English texts. Based on the explanation above, it clearly shows that anxiety is one of the problems that students mostly experience in EFL reading.

Some previous research have discussed about the influencing factors on foreign language (FL) reading anxiety include gender, experience with the target language country and course level (e.g. Joo & Damron, 2015; Zhou, 2017; Ashohbani, 2018; Al-Showat, 2016; Ismail, 2015; Kilinc & Emin Tamer Yenen, 2016; Capan & Karaca, 2013; Lu & Liu, 2015), personal perception of reading proficiency (e.g. Lien, 2016), grade and gender (e.g. Elaldi, 2016), factors of reading anxiety (e.g. Tsai and Lee, 2018; Tien, 2017; Al-Tunkaya, 2018), reading anxiety and oral reading fluency (e.g. Madronero, 2019), anxiety and reading comprehension (e.g. Wu, 2013; Guimba and Alico, 2015), reading anxiety, reading fluency, reading motivation, and reading comprehension (e.g. Yamaç and Sezgin, 2018), reading anxiety, reading strategies and language competence (e.g. Sharon and Parilah, 2020), source of reading anxiety among undergraduate Saudi female EFL students (e.g. Bahea and Yasser, 2020). In conclusion, it can be assumed that most of the previous research aims to find out the relationship, differences and effects towards students reading anxiety in other countries. In addition, most studies in the field of reading have focused on the linguistic and cognitive factors. Less is known about the affective aspects of reading in young readers like reading anxiety (Katzir *et al.*, 2018). Because only few studies focused on the affective aspects of students' anxiety in reading activities, the researcher is interested in conducting a study that focused on affective aspects of reading anxiety.



The objectives of this research were to describe the students' reading anxiety level and to explore what factors influence students' reading anxiety. The findings of this research are expected to be able to give contributions to other researchers, teachers and students in order to enjoy in the classroom activities especially in reading practice.

METHOD

This is qualitative research by using a case study research design. The population in this research were 110 students where 56 students were used as samples taken by purposive sampling. This research was conducted at one of Islamic junior high school in Pekanbaru, Riau Province, Indonesia in August 2021. In collecting data, the researcher used two questionnaires adopted from Saito et.al (1999), and Ahmad *et al.*, (2013) and interview to determine the level of students' anxiety when reading and the factors that influence it. Descriptive analysis through SPSS 21.00 was used in this research to analyze the questionnaire data, while the interview data were analyzed by using qualitative data analysis cited from Cresswell (2012).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the aims of the research, the researcher needs to describe how the students' foreign language reading anxiety level is and what factors influence students' reading anxiety in reading English texts .

To describe the distributions of the foreign language reading anxiety levels, the frequency of the scores of reading anxiety falling within each category was calculated. The score can be seen in the following table:



Table 1. The Frequency of the Students' Reading Anxiety Scores

Category	Frequency	Percent
Low level	9	16 %
Medium level	38	68%
High level	9	16%
Total	56	100%

Based on the table above, there were 9 participants fell in the low level, 38 participants fell in the medium level, and 9 participants fell in the high level. The distribution showed that over half of the students were at the medium level of reading anxiety with a percentage of 68% (38 students).

This research finding is line with another research finding conducted by Aisyah (2017). It was the same study that investigated students' anxiety in reading and comprehending English texts. She found that most of the students (51% of the participants) fell in medium level of reading anxiety. This study indicated that anxiety inhabited the students' reading and comprehending English texts

To describe the factors that influence students reading anxiety The data analysis of questionnaire and interview indicated that there were two factors that influenced of foreign language reading anxiety such as text features and personal factors. The concept of text features consisted of unfamiliar vocabulary, unfamiliar topics and unfamiliar cultures, while the concept of personal factors consisted of being worried about the reading effect and fear of making errors.

Based on the research findings, it was found that 63 % of the students agreed that unfamiliar vocabulary was the most cause of anxiety in reading and comprehending English text. Unfamiliar vocabulary became the first rank because of students' anxiety in reading and comprehending English text. Based on the developed questionnaire by Ahmad et al. (2013), and the interview with the students, the



researcher found that the anxious students expressed serious concern about various kinds of situation where they dealt with some problems about vocabulary such as translating words, lots of difficult words in a text and unknown meaning of the words. It was caused by the lack of vocabulary in target language. The result of this research is in accordance with the study conducted by Saito et al.(1999) who found that a student's level of reading anxiety is very much related to the writing systems, including unfamiliar vocabulary.

Another factor that caused reading anxiety was unfamiliar topics. From fifty six students, it was found that 59,9% of the students agreed that they felt anxious and worried when they read a text with unfamiliar topics. Furthermore, the data from the interview showed that the students felt anxious when they find a difficult word in a topic of a text. It can be concluded that unfamiliar topics impede the students' interest in reading an English text because they get the anxiety from reading the text that has difficult words to pronounce and understand. From the explanation above the researcher concluded that this factor maybe correlated with an unfamiliar vocabulary factor. As the unfamiliarity of the text increases, the unknown vocabulary will become more difficult to decipher, which may lead to even more anxiety. The result of this research is also relevant with the theory from Wallace (2001) as Cited in Kuru-Gonen (2009), that if the topic is unfamiliar for the reader, it will make the students uncomfortable in the reading process and hard to be an effective reader.

The next factor that influenced students' reading anxiety was unfamiliar cultures. Based on the research finding, 54,3 % of the students agreed that they felt anxious and nervous when they could not understand the idea or what the author said in the text. Unfamiliar culture can lose students' curiosity of the text and make the students lazy to read. When the students are too lazy to read, it could be anxiety provoking to some students. The result of this research is the same as the theory proposed by Rajab et al. (2012), that unfamiliar culture in the text can cause students anxiety since the text seems foreign to them.



Then, related to the concept of personal factor, 57,1% of the students agreed that fear of making errors was the most frequent that caused anxiety while they were reading and comprehending an English text. The students expressed how they felt uncomfortable when they tried to comprehend a text and pronounced the word in a text. The result of this research is in accordance with the theory proposed by Jalongo and Hirsh (2010) who argued that fears and phobias precipitated by reading tasks are a major impediment.

Last, 41,3% of students were anxious because of worry about reading effect. The result from the interview also found that after they finished reading English texts, they worried they did not remember and understand the meaning of the text. The result of this research is in accordance with the research conducted by Zhao (2009) that worrying about reading effects is a source of foreign language reading anxiety.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings and discussion above, the researcher concluded that the level of students' reading anxiety is at medium level (68%). The physical reactions of the students that have medium level of reading anxiety are, they feel rapid breathing and the hands are shaking. Then, the cognitive reactions to the medium level of students reading anxiety include low self-esteem and they feel embarrass when the teacher ask to read. They are worried to make mistake when reading an English text and the others classmate are laugh.

There are two factors that influence of reading anxiety such as text features and personal factors. In the concept of text features, 63 % students agree with unfamiliar vocabulary. The students are difficult to pronounce the words, difficult to interact and decode the meaning of the text as well. Then, 59,9 % students agree with unfamiliar topic as the second rank that influences students anxiety in reading and comprehending English text. Unfamiliar topics would impede the students' interest in



reading an English text. The last, 54,3 % students agree with unfamiliar culture was considered as the least factor that contributes to students anxiety in reading and comprehending English text. The students feel confused to read an English text. Knowing the all vocabulary in the text, it cannot guarantee the comprehension of the text. In the concept of personal factors that they are worried about the reading effect and fear of making errors. 51,3 % students agree with fear of making errors has become the most frequent cause of students anxiety in reading and comprehending English text. They feel worried when they cannot read the text well and to perform successfully in reading English texts. Then, 41,3 % students agree with worrying about the reading effect becomes the last factor that can cause students' anxiety in reading and comprehending English texts. The students are worried when they read an English text. So, they cannot understand and remember what the text is about.

Based on the research findings, the researcher suggests that English teachers should aware that students experience anxiety in reading texts and there are some factors that can cause students' anxiety in reading English texts. Furthermore, it is necessary for the teachers to apply some strategies that make students feel relaxed and encourage their curiosity to read English texts.

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