

The Sources of Foreign Language Reading Anxiety in an Indonesian EFL Context

Eva Meidi Kulsum^{1,2}, Widodo Dwi Islamil Azis¹, Tuti Hayati¹ and Agus Salim Mansyur¹

¹UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung

²English Education Departement, School of Postgraduate, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Bandung
meydiqulsum@gmail.com, {widododwiismailazis, thayati}@uinsgd.ac.id

Keywords: Reading Anxiety, EFL Context.

Abstract: Numerous students experienced anxiety in reading a foreign language particularly when they were asked to read unfamiliar text. This study examined the sources of FL reading anxiety in an Indonesian EFL context, it was a qualitative descriptive method by distributing Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale and taking a semi-structured interview of which this research highlighted explicitly about the potential sources of students' reading anxiety which occurred naturally to the students who learned EFL reading in an English dormitory and considered as a case study. The data from FLRAS was analyzed qualitatively by calculating manually the percentages and mean scores of the student responses to infer the data findings. While the interview data was analyzed to corroborate and confirm the data from questionnaire. It was found that, in an Indonesian EFL context, > 50% students considered text features were more caused them anxious in reading, while the rest recognized that personal factors also have a negative impact on their reading performances. However, choosing an appropriate text will be better to be considered for teachers in teaching EFL reading in order to decrease the students' anxiety and increase the students' interest in reading.

1 INTRODUCTION

It is well known that the quality of reading interest of both children and adults in Indonesia is very low. It has been reported by several international and national surveys, one of them is reported by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 2012. It was found that reading interest index in Indonesia only reached 0.001. This means that in every 1,000 people, there is only one person who has an interest in reading. While the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) released that the literacy rate of Indonesian adults only reached 65.5 percent, while Malaysia reached 86.4 percent (Hazliansyah, 2012). Based on a survey conducted by the International Education Achievement (IEA) in early 2000 showed that the reading quality of Indonesian children ranked 29 out of 31 countries studied in Asia, Africa, Europe and America. Thus, it is not surprising that the Human Development Index (HDI) in Indonesia is also low. This is in line with a survey conducted by UNDP in 2005 that HDI in Indonesia is ranked 117 out of 175 countries (Bimba, 2013). Based on the above evidence, educators and teachers must wonder why it

could happen to Indonesian especially students. Why is students' reading interest in Indonesia low? What are the factors of the low interest of reading in Indonesia? Why are they reluctance in reading? Are they anxious? What are the factors of students' reading anxiety?

In relation to reading skill, Sellers (2000) defined reading as a cognitively demanding process which involves the organization of memory, attention, perception, and the process of comprehension. Therefore, reading is considered as a sophisticated skill by students for several reasons. First, the lack of motivation in reading. This problem is mostly experienced by students at the university level when they have to read a thick text book that is uninteresting to them as it is known that motivation supports their concentration and helps them in comprehending the text both logically and emotionally, reading problem is possibly experienced by them. Another consideration is that worried and anxiety in comprehending the text. Numerous students experience anxiety in reading particularly when they are asked to read unfamiliar text. They think that the topic of the text is too hard and difficult to be comprehended. The process of reading then

becomes more complicated when students have to read a foreign language text. There are some additional factors that must be taken into account such as text's cultural background, the ability of the language being read, unfamiliar scripts, and writing systems of the text Saito et al., (1999). Thus, anxiety may cause students avoid reading.

Based on the phenomenon, this study investigated the sources of Foreign Language Reading Anxiety (FLRA) in EFL classroom. Since it is considered as the most powerful predictor on students' reading performance, it is necessary to identify the students who experience anxiety in EFL reading.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Anxiety plays an important role in learning a foreign language. It is considered as one of the affective variables that contribute to the individual differences. This is in line with (Brown, 2007) statement, saying that among the affective variables, anxiety is the main affective role in second or foreign language acquisition. In relation to language learning, (Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope, 1986) defined that FLA is "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the (foreign) language learning process". Many researchers have proven that anxiety has a negative relationship with language performance, for example: Steinberg and Horwitz (1986); Phillips (1992); Elkhafafi (2005). Moreover, another study indicated that it can be a predictor of success in learning the foreign language (Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope, 1986). Supported by Liu and Huang (2011) who noted that among the affective factors anxiety is the most powerful predictor that contribute to the students' performance.

In an attempt to understand why some students have difficulties in learning a new language, investigating the foreign language anxiety has increasingly attracted many researchers' attention in the field of foreign language learning. For example: Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986); Bailey, Onwuegbuzie and Daley (2000); Horwitz (2001); Burden (2004). The result of those studies indicated that speaking is the most provoking skill causing anxiety among the four skills. On the other hands, recent study Al-Shboul et al. (2013) revealed that each skill has its own anxiety including foreign language reading anxiety (FLRA). As acknowledged by Wu (2011) saying that reading is one of the anxiety provoking skills to the students who learn a foreign or

second language. However, the phenomenon of anxiety in reading does exist and is researchable.

Abu-Rabia (2004) and Brantmeier (2005) cited in Zhao, Guo and Dynia (2013) conducted research in the field of foreign language anxiety. The result of those studies indicated that among the four skills (speaking, listening, writing and reading) reading is the least skill caused anxiety in a foreign language learning since reading strategies are often used by students to comprehend a text and considered as helpful and effective tools. Therefore, recent research tried to investigate a specific skill caused anxiety such as Saito, Horwitz and Garza (1999) and Sellers (2000). They reported that the existence of reading anxiety is real and it has negative effects on the students' performance, especially on the students' cognitive abilities. Jafarigohar and Behrooznia (2012) proposed in his research that foreign language reading caused anxiety and insufficient attainment of language performance.

Saito, Horwitz and Garza (1999) as the first researcher who analyzed anxiety in EFL reading found that it is a distinguishable phenomenon from anxiety in general but they are related to each other. They develop a tool to measure students reading anxiety in EFL learning, namely Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale (EFLRAI) consisting 20 statements in Likert Scale start from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree". To test reliability and validity, they used two instruments, (Foreign Language Anxiety Scale) FLCAS and EFLRAI. The result of the study revealed that students who have a high level of FL anxiety in general also tend to experience reading anxiety. A correlation coefficient was .64 which indicated that it was the sufficient result to confirm that the existence of reading anxiety is fairly different phenomenon from the general type of foreign language anxiety.

Considering the existence of reading anxiety, Ahmad et al. (2013) postulated that foreign language reading anxiety is influenced by two factors, those are: personal factors and text features. For more explanation, it will be covered below:

2.1 Personal Factors

Personal factors are the first source of reading anxiety, in this concept, there are two sub-factors divided which are worry about reading effects and afraid of making errors, more explanation covers below:

- a. Worry about Reading Effects: Numerous students experience anxiety in a foreign language reading moreover when they are pointed by their teacher

to read a text in front of their classmates. They tend to be more focus on their reading performance in front of class rather than their comprehension of the text they read. However, when their teacher then asked them to convey the idea of the text they read in front of their classmates, they would have no idea what to say as their comprehension lose. Consequently, it might cause students experience anxiety during the whole process of reading whether it is during or after reading which disturbs students on their reading comprehension and performance at the same time. This has been proven by some researchers that worry about reading effect is considered as one of foreign language reading anxiety sources such as Zhao, Guo and Dynia (2013), they examined the factors influenced anxiety in reading a foreign language, he found that worrying about reading effect might be a potential source of reading anxiety in a foreign language.

- b. **Afraid of Making Errors:** Second sub-factors of the concept of personal factor is afraid of making errors. As we know that students who have no self-confidence are seldom participate in reading task since they are afraid of making errors. However, avoidance in reading participation cannot be denied. This condition causes students become anxious in reading a foreign language. Therefore, the students' language proficiency and their reading ability show an abnormality since their performance in reading decreases. This is in line with Miyana (2007), saying that lack of reading self-confidence was indicated as a source of foreign language reading anxiety. Thus, other studies about the sources of foreign language anxiety revealed that afraid of making mistakes is included to be one of the potential sources.

2.2 Text Features

Second underlying factors contribute to foreign language anxiety is text features. It is found that three factors are considered to be the sub categories of this concept which are: unfamiliar culture, unfamiliar topic and unknown vocabulary.

- a. **Unfamiliar Culture:** This sub-factor relates to the reading task which is not only acknowledged as an interaction between the reader and the author thoughts, it is also considered as an interaction between the reader and the cultural knowledge of the text. This cultural content often disturbs students' understanding of the text if the culture of the text is unfamiliar to them. Furthermore,

(Kuru-Gonen, 2009) in his study found that unknown cultural background of the text blocks the students' understanding of foreign language script.

- b. **Unfamiliar Topic:** Topics becomes one of the things that often become the focus of the students' in reading since it is believed that students prefer to read a topic of the text which they considered easy and enjoyable. When the topic gets hard or difficult even it is felt not interesting for them, it may lead students to experience anxiety and avoid reading that unfamiliar topic. However, Kuru-Gonen (2009) conducted a research related to it, the result of the study indicated that uninteresting topics caused students avoid reading and experience anxiety in EFL reading. Thus, it is identified as a source of foreign language reading anxiety which has a negative effect on students' reading comprehension.
- c. **Unknown Vocabulary:** This subfactor related to the words students found during reading in a foreign language, when the words are strange or difficult to be understood it may automatically impact to their comprehension which creates the sense of anxiety in EFL reading. Therefore, it has been found that unknown vocabulary is classified as another source of anxiety in EFL reading. In a study of Kuru-Gonen (2009), in reading a foreign language text, unknown vocabulary considered to be another factor influenced anxious students.

3 METHOD

This research employed qualitative descriptive method by distributing questionnaires and taking a semi-structured interview of which this research highlighted explicitly about the potential sources of students' reading anxiety which occurred naturally to the students who learned EFL reading in an English dormitory and considered as a case study. The study was carried out in an English Dormitory of State University in Bandung. English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Learning is the preeminent program of the dormitory. 23 students who were from different majors were selected as a subject of this study using purposive sampling technique. This study used 26 statements of FLRAS (Al-Shboul et al., 2013) which reflected two sources of reading anxiety, namely personal factors, and text features. Those were divided into five: unknown vocabulary (items 1-6), unfamiliar topic (items 7-10), unfamiliar culture (items 11-15), worry about reading effects (items 16-20), and afraid of making errors (items 21-26). After

the result from FLRAS gained, it was categorized into three level of reading anxiety started from high, moderate and low. Finally, it was then divided into two categories of reading anxiety sources from Ahmad et al. (2013). The data from FLRAS was analyzed qualitatively by calculating manually the percentages and mean scores of the student responses to infer the data findings. The result from FLRAS then was used to select students who were involved in the interview session; those were students who categorized into a high level of reading anxiety. While the interview data was analyzed to corroborate and confirm the data from questionnaires.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to know the sources of EFL reading anxiety, the FLRAS was used not only to see the sources of students' reading anxiety but also the students' reading anxiety level as it was considered important to prove that reading anxiety does exist among students in EFL learning and to select students who were involved in the interview session; those were students who categorized into a high level of reading anxiety. However, descriptive statistics were used to present the result, it was found that the overall analysis for the 26 items of FFLRAS portrayed in table 1 below. It highlighted the percentages of students' reading anxiety level.

Table 1: Reading anxiety level.

Level	Range	Mean	F	Percentage
Low	55-71	2.6	3	13%
Moderate	72-93	3.4	15	65%
High	94-113	4.4	5	22%

From the table above, it can be seen that 13% (3 out of 23 students) experience a low level of reading anxiety, 65% students got mean scores above 3 which mean that 15 students are slightly anxious students, and 5 students were considered as students who experience a high level of reading anxiety as they got the mean scores above 4; the 5 high anxious students were selected as students who were involved in the interview session. Thus, the table shows that as a whole, students experienced anxiety in EFL reading which means that this study is reasonably conducted. As acknowledged by Wu (2011) saying that reading is one of the anxiety provoking skills to the students who learn a foreign or second language. However, the phenomenon of anxiety in reading does exist and is researchable. Research about the existence of reading

anxiety has been conducted by many researchers, the pioneer of this research was Saito, Horwitz and Garza (1999). It examined the anxiety in a foreign or second language reading. The participants of the study were 383 students of French, Japanese and Russian courses. They were in the first semester of the study. FLCAS and Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale (FLRAS) were used as the instruments. FLCAS was previously developed by Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986). While FLRAS was developed by the researcher to measure the anxiety related to reading in a foreign language. The result of the study found that EFL reading can be considered as a skill causing anxiety to some students. Whereas FLA, in general, has been identified as a distinct phenomenon. However, students' perceptions of the difficulty of EFL reading impact to the higher levels of their reading anxiety consequently their grades decreased in conjunction with their levels of reading anxiety and general FL anxiety. The researcher suggested the other researchers who were interesting in the field of anxiety in relation to EFL reading to conduct more research related to it. Since it is believed that the research about reading anxiety is still open inquiry and are needed to be more comprehended.

4.1 The Sources of Reading Anxiety

To answer the question, the FLRAS was supported by semi-structured interview sessions in order to provide triangulated findings and analysis on the sources of reading anxiety among students in EFL learning. Table 2 elaborated the sources of FL reading anxiety obtained from FLRAS.

Table 2: The sources of reading anxiety.

No	Sources	Mean
1	Text Features	3.3
2	Personal Factors	3.1

It was found that > 50% students considered text features were more caused students anxious in reading, while the rest recognized that personal factors also have a negative impact on their reading performance. For the sake of clarity, the explanation of each source is covered below.

4.1.1 Text Features

These factors were divided into three broad categories, namely unknown vocabulary, unfamiliar culture topic and unfamiliar culture. The students were given FLRAS which could reflect the sources of reading anxiety experienced by them in EFL learning. 6 statements (items 1-6) reflected unknown

vocabulary as one of the reading anxiety sources followed by 4 statements (items 7-10) for unfamiliar topic and 5 statements (items 11-15) for unfamiliar culture.

The result of this research showed that students were considered unfamiliar topic as the hardest problem mostly experienced by them in EFL reading as they felt anxious when they found a topic that they have no idea about which automatically impact on their reluctance in reading. This is in line with a study conducted by Kuru-Gonen (2009), the result of the study indicated that uninteresting topics caused students avoid reading and experience anxiety in EFL reading. Unknown vocabulary was also considered as another source of FL reading anxiety. In this case, students focused on recognizing the words more as they thought that a large of word recognition helped them in understanding the text. On the other hands, they would encounter anxiety when they found strange vocabularies and series of strange words. In a study of Kuru-Gonen (2009), in reading a foreign language text, unknown vocabulary considered to be another factor influenced anxious students.

Besides that, students also were frustrating when they could not understand the text even though they know each word of the sentences as they translate the text word by word without considering the culture of the language of the text they read and they still got difficulty when they tried to relate a word to another word but the meaning of those two words seemed changing, these conditions were associated with unknown culture. Supported by Al-Shboul et al. (2013) saying that numerous students still found difficulty in considering the aspect of cultural familiarity of foreign language text in the act of reading although English as a foreign language is recognized as a universal language. The above explanations were shown by the mean scores of unknown vocabularies were 3.36, unfamiliar topic reached 3.45, and unfamiliar culture got 3.11, see table 3 below.

Table 3: Sub-factors of text features.

Sources	Items	Mean
Unknown Vocabulary	1,2,3,4,5,6	3.36
Unfamiliar Topic	7,8,9,10	3.45
Unfamiliar Culture	11,12,13,14,15	3.11

The data gained from FLRAS was supported by the interview session conducted to 5 students which were selected based the FLRAS result. They were students who are the most anxious among others as they got the mean scores above 4 which indicated that

they experienced a high level of reading anxiety. 3 out of 5 students thought that unfamiliar topic is the source caused them anxious, it can be seen below:

Students 1: *“I lost my concentration when I have to read a text which I don’t know what the text is about, I only think that I don’t want to read it for more”.*

Students 4: *“Before deciding to read, I have to make sure that the topic is interesting. If it is not, I will not read it. If I have to, I will not get the point what I read”.*

Students 5: *“You know that strange topic always consists of many strange vocabularies, so I just feel irritated if the teacher asks me to read it”.*

5 PERSONAL FACTORS

Personal factors have been identified as another source of reading anxiety encountered by students in EFL learning, this concept was proposed by Al-Shboul et al. (2013). In the concept of personal factors, there were two sub-factors divided which were worry about reading effects and afraid of making errors. 5 statements of FLRAS (items 16-20) were associated with afraid of making errors, and 6 statements (items 21-26) referred to worry about reading effects. The result of this study indicated that afraid of making errors were more caused students anxious rather than worry about reading effect. The mean score of afraid of making errors was 3.23 and worry about reading effect was 3.04. This means that their anxieties attached to “afraid of being evaluated negatively by others” as their performances in reading are low. This is in line with Miyana (2007), saying that the lack of reading self-confidence was indicated as a source of foreign language reading anxiety. It is portrayed in the following table. It highlighted the mean scores of personal factors in each subfactor.

Table 4: Sub-factors of personal factors.

Sources	Items	M
Afraid of Making Errors	16,17,18,19,20	3.23
Worry about Reading Effects	21,22,23,24,25,26	3.04

It was supported by the data collected from 5 students who were involved in the semi-structured interview sessions (Table 4). 2 students identified afraid of making errors distracted their reading performances.

Students 2: *“I don’t know what really happened to me, I have already tried to ignore what other think about me but I still have a lack of confidence when reading.”*

Students 4: “No, I don’t like reading aloud particularly reading an English text. I mostly do reading in a silent way.”

According to the transcript of the interview transcribe, students who have no self-confidence seldom participate in reading task since they were afraid of making errors. However, avoidance in reading participation could not be denied. This condition caused students become anxious in reading a foreign language. Therefore, the students’ language proficiency and their reading ability showed an abnormality since their performance in reading decreased. Correspondingly, a similar study conducted by Liu and Huang (2011), it examined anxiety among Chinese students in an oral English classroom. It was found that fear of making mistakes and being laughed by others were the two situations causing anxiety

6 CONCLUSION

Based on the above findings, it can be concluded that there are two potential sources of reading anxiety among Indonesian students in EFL learning context, those are: text features and personal factors which are divided into 5 sources, namely: unknown vocabulary, unfamiliar topic, unfamiliar culture, afraid of making errors, and worry about reading effect. Among those sources, unfamiliar topic is considered as the most difficult factors experienced by students. In other words, anxiety is mostly derived from the text, however, choosing an appropriate text will be better to be considered for teachers in teaching reading in order to decrease the students’ anxiety and increase the students’ interest in reading.

REFERENCES

- Abu-Rabia, S., 2004. Teachers’ Role, Learners’ Gender Differences, and FL Anxiety Among Seventh-Grade Students Studying English as a FL. *Educational Psychology*, 24(5), pp. 711–721.
- Ahmad, I. S., 2013. The potential sources of foreign language reading anxiety in a Jordanian EFL context: A theoretical framework, *English Language Teaching*, 6(11), pp. 89–110.
- Al-Shboul, M. M., 2013. Foreign language reading anxiety in a Jordanian EFL context: A qualitative study, *English Language Teaching*, 6(6), pp. 38–56.
- Bailey, P., Onwuegbuzie, A. J., Daley, C. E., 2000. Correlates of Anxiety at Three Stages of the Foreign Language Learning Process, *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 19(4), pp. 474–490.
- Bimba, B., 2013. Kenapa Minat Baca di Indonesia Rendah? Homeschooling dan Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini biMBA-AIUEO Bimbingan MINAT Baca dan Belajar Anak 3-6 Tahun. Available at: <http://www.bimba-aiueo.com/kenapa-minat-baca-di-indonesia-rendah/>.
- Brown, H. D., 2007. Principles of language learning and teaching, *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*. doi: 10.2307/327571.
- Burden, P., 2004. The teacher as facilitator: Reducing anxiety in the EFL university classroom, *JALT Hokkaido Journal*, 8, pp. 3–18.
- Elkhafaifi, H., 2005. Listening Comprehension and Anxiety in the Arabic Language Classroom, *The Modern Language Journal*, 89(ii), pp. 206–219.
- Hazliansyah, H., 2012. Perpusnas: Minat Baca Masyarakat Indonesia Rendah., News Republika.
- Horwitz, E. K., 2001. Language anxiety and achievement, *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 21, pp. 112–126.
- Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., Cope, J., 1986. Foreign language classroom anxiety, *The Modern Language Journal*, 70(2), pp. 125–132.
- Jafarigohar, M., Behrooznia, S., 2012. The effect of anxiety on reading comprehension among distance EFL learners, *International Education Studies*, 5(2), pp. 159–174.
- Kuru-Gonen, I., 2009. The sources of foreign language reading anxiety of students in a Turkish EFL context, in *International Conference on Educational Technologies*, pp. 50–55.
- Liu, M., Huang, W., 2011. An Exploration of Foreign Language Anxiety and English Learning Motivation, *Education Research International*, 2011, pp. 1–8.
- Miyana, C., 2007. Anxiety, strategies, motivation, and reading proficiency in Japanese university EFL learners, *Dissertation Abstracts International Section A: Humanities and Social Sciences*, p. 2305.
- Phillips, E. M., 1992. The effects of language anxiety on students’ oral test performance and attitudes, *The Modern Language Journal*, 76(1), pp. 14–26.
- Saito, Y., Horwitz, E. K., Garza, T. J., 1999. Foreign Language Reading Anxiety, *The Modern Language Journal*, 83(2), pp. 202–218.
- Sellers, V., 2000. Anxiety and reading comprehension in Spanish as a foreign language, *Foreign Language Annals*, 33, pp. 512–521.
- Steinberg, F. S., Horwitz, E. K., 1986. The effect of induced anxiety on the denotative and interpretative content of second language speech, *TESOL Quarterly*, 20(1), pp. 131–136.
- Wu, H. J., 2011. Anxiety and reading comprehension performance in english as a foreign language, *Asian EFL Journal*, 13(2), pp. 273–306.
- Zhao, A., Guo, Y., Dynia, J., 2013. Foreign language reading anxiety: Chinese as a foreign language in the United States, *The Modern Language Journal*, 97(3), pp. 764–778.