

EXPLORING STUDENTS' ANXIETY IN READING ACADEMIC TEXT

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Abstract

Reading is an important skill for gaining knowledge and academic success, especially for university students at higher levels of education. Reading competence is represented by reading literacy, which is affected by reading amount, intensity, and frequency, which can be hindered by reading anxiety, especially in EFL and academic settings. There are several factors that influence the feeling of anxiety in reading foreign language texts. Therefore, the researcher is interested in studying EFL reading anxiety toward academic texts. This research used descriptive quantitative research to investigate the reading anxiety of the students in terms of reading academic skills. The study was conducted in the 7th semester of the English department of the University of Islam Malang. The instruments used are Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale, while the interview guide is also used to investigate reading anxiety and its causing factors in the form of structured interviews. The data collection in this research was carried out online. The data analysis is done by analyzing the questionnaire using Microsoft Excel and the interview using qualitative analysis methods using data selection, organization, and interpretation. The result indicated 11 students with high anxiety levels. The major factor influencing students' level of anxiety is caused by reading topics that can be solved by finding easier material, social strategies, pre-reading, and skimming. As for fear of making mistakes, it only happens when students are observed during reading caused by anxiety to have a different understanding with the others, and read in a classroom environment. This can be solved by cross-checking with friends and trying to understand the text as best as possible before entering the class. The other minor factors include vocabulary which is mostly caused by unfamiliar scientific terms, and the only confirmed solution mentioned was being familiar with academic texts.

Keywords: Correlation, teaching method, reading comprehension.

INTRODUCTION

Reading is a fundamental skill to gain knowledge and academic success, particularly for higher education students. As Anderson (2004) stated, mastering reading is essential to advance and grow in all academic subjects. Additionally, Clapham (2009) defined reading ability as the capacity to comprehend printed or written symbols, come up with a tenable explanation, and comprehend the writer's point. Reading is a complex activity that may be characterized as a cognitive process at different phases of growth (Khalisa, 2020). There are various methods to get data, but reading stands out because it can help you learn things from any time and place on the globe (Palani, 2012). According to Rahmat (2020), reading develops with practice, as reading involves both comprehension skills and background knowledge to process textual information.

Reading competence is represented by reading literacy, it is regarded as one of the key elements that determine how well individuals can process data as well as how intelligent society is as a whole. The Program for International Student Assessment, or PISA (2018), found that Indonesia's reading literacy currently stands at 371 out of a possible 487 points, which is still considered to be low in comparison to other OECD nations like the US and the UK. According to Liu (2011), in the context of EFL, students frequently exhibit anxiety while reading EFL because they struggle with reading comprehension since reading in a foreign language includes reading new scripts, writing systems, and cultural content. Moreover, anxiety might be influenced by academic

situations, as explained by Aisyah (2017) that reading anxiety happens because, in academic situations, EFL learners are required to read texts in English that sometimes do not fit with their preferences and interest.

The experience of anxiousness when reading texts written in a foreign language can be influenced by several variables. Kurniasih et al. (2022) stated that anxiety drives learners further away from enhancing their English skills. According to Faruq (2019), reading anxiety and foreign language anxiety both contribute to foreign language anxiety when reading. When it comes to learning a language in a classroom, foreign language anxiety is defined as an "individual multifaceted of self-insights, faiths, senses, and behaviors dealing with the person's opinions and actions that developed during learning" (Horwitz, 2001). It is based on Horwitz's (2001) assertion that certain students could become anxious only while using specific linguistic skills. As defined by Jalongo and Hirsh (2010), anxiety about reading is a specific or situational fear of reading that manifests physically as sweating, dizziness, or faintness, as well as cognitively as an overwhelming sense of dread, low self-esteem, a sense of helplessness, and a fear of being humiliated in front of others. Additionally, reading anxiety is a component that "arises between interpreting of the text and the concrete processing of reading text," according to Saito (1999). Faruq (2019) said that when students attempt to read and understand texts written in a foreign language, physical and cognitive response is elicited. For higher education such as university level, students might encounter a greater challenge in coping with reading anxiety, as many reading activities at the university level involve academic text.

Numerous studies have been conducted to investigate reading anxiety, for example, research by Rahmat (2020) found that background and culture, general reading aptitude, vocabulary, grammar, and instructional methods can all contribute to readers' fears of reading. Faruq (2019) also showed that the fear of making mistakes was a personal issue, with the majority of students identifying anxiety at a medium level and being influenced by material characteristics like new vocabulary and culture. Khansary's (2018) research found a strong association between reading anxiety and the perceived difficulty of a text. Rahmat (2020) also discovered that readers' fears of reading might be influenced by background and culture, general reading skills, vocabulary, grammar, and instructional methods. Apart from that, Faruq (2019) discovered that the majority of students rated their anxiety as medium. The majority of the causes of students' reading anxiety were related to the content's aspects, particularly the new terminology, and culture. In terms of the difficulty level of a text, Anwar and Sailuddin (2022) showed that all the students agreed that reading academic text is difficult, and 43% of the students are still unable to cope with academic text very well. This is because of the difficulties caused by translating difficulties and understanding difficult terms. Yet few previous studies aim to examine academic reading anxiety. Moreover, one of the study stated that reading anxiety is affected by the difficulties of a text, but did not explain what kinds of text that is considered difficult and those that are considered easy. Moreover, a study also explains that academic text is the most difficult text to read, however, did not explain what kinds of academic text were used in the research. The researcher found the gap that these studies cover analysis on reading anxiety levels between gender and the impact of reading anxiety on reading performance. Therefore, the researcher is interested in studying EFL reading anxiety toward academic text.

The aim of this research is to identify the level of university students' reading anxiety when reading academic text, identify the factors causing reading anxiety in university students when reading English academic text, and identify how University students overcome anxiety in reading English academic text.

METHOD

This study implemented using descriptive qualitative research design to analyze the university student's level of reading anxiety towards academic text, the factors causing that anxiety,

and the possible solution used by the students in overcoming reading anxiety when reading academic text. The study will be conducted on students from the English department as this study focuses on English digital reading habits. The participants are from the 7th semester of the English department of the University of Islam Malang. These participants are selected because, in semester seven, university students at the University of Islam Malang have to read more academic materials compared to the newer semester. The participants encompass all 7th-semester students who are all willing to answer the questionnaire. Meanwhile, for the interview, the researcher involves 10 students with the highest anxiety score from the questionnaire. The researcher chooses 10 students as one-third of the target participants so the number can represent the participant's anxiety level because the students are chosen based on the highest anxiety level.

This study aims to examine the digital reading habit as well as its benefits and difficulties, therefore, the researcher will use both questionnaire and interview guidelines to get the data required in answering the research problems. The questionnaire used in this study is adapted from Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale developed by Saito, et al (1999) that involves background information; factors related to reading text, personal factors, and reading strategy use. To suit the problem of the study, the researcher adapted the items by changing every general reading aspect to academic reading as all items in FLRAS focused on reading. The researcher will use Indonesian for the questionnaire to avoid misunderstanding among the students. This questionnaire consisted of 20 items with a 5 Likert scale from Strongly agree to strongly disagree. The researcher followed the study by Muhlis (2017) for the measurement of reading anxiety level, the measurement of reading anxiety is presented in the following table.

Table 1. Levels of Reading Anxiety

Level	Range
Low	< 49
Medium	49-63
High	> 63

Source: Muhlis (2017)

The interview guide is used to investigate reading anxiety and its causing factors that allow the researcher to get detailed data to be analyzed in a descriptive qualitative way. The interview is in the form of a structured interview to avoid bias in the information, because the items are based on the items in the questionnaire. The interview consisted of 10 questions, the first four questions is to indicate the reading anxiety aspects based on FLRAS that include unknown vocabulary which is covered in number 1 for identifying reading anxiety and number 5 for identifying factors, an unfamiliar topic that is covered in number 2 for identifying anxiety and number 6 for identifying causing factors, an unfamiliar culture that is included in number 3 for identifying anxiety and number 7 for identifying factors and fear of making an error that is covers number 4 for identifying reading anxiety and number 8 for identifying causing factors of reading anxiety. Other than that, the last 2 numbers identified the solution and strategies used by students to overcome reading anxiety.

The data collection in this research will be carried out using an online questionnaire as well as interviews. The questionnaire was delivered online using a Google form, this decision is made with the consideration that the location, the University of Islam Malang still undergoing online learning where the possible respondents are not present at one location which results in difficulties to conduct the research directly. Moreover, the interview was also conducted online using the recording of one student at a time with one session that might last about 30 minutes. The researcher will conduct additional interview after the researcher analyze the result of the first interview to make sure the data covers the information needed for the study. The interview will be conducted with 10 students with the highest score on the reading anxiety questionnaire.

To answers the research questions, the researcher analyzes the data by using qualitative data analysis. The questionnaire is analyzed by the total points of the Likert scale using Microsoft Excel.

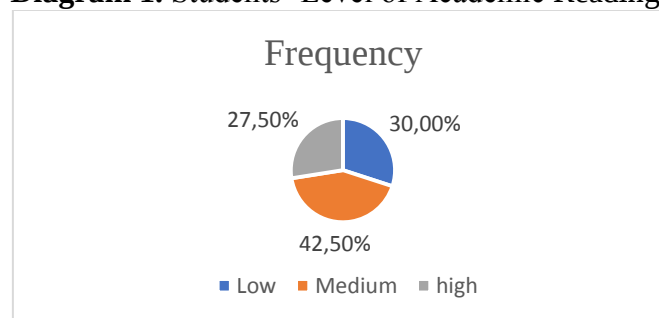
The calculation will use the total scores of the Likert scale, as the questionnaire by Saito, et al (1990) have 20 items and 5 scales so the total number will be 100. To determine the level of anxiety, the researcher divided it into 3 categories based on scores, including low < 49, medium with the range of 49 to 63, and high with > 63 scores. Meanwhile, the interview analysis is done by qualitative analysis method based on Creswell and Clark (2018), qualitative analysis aimed to present the whole data as one meaningful conclusion, by using data selection, organization, and interpretation. In this study, the researcher selected the data that is relevant to the interview question and statements of the problems ignoring other unrelated conversations that happens during the interview. The data was then organized based on the research question and what kinds of responses given by the participants. After the data is organized, the researcher synthesizes the result and descriptively provides interpretation.

RESULTS

To answer the research question, the researcher divided the finding section based on the research questions. The first is to identify the level of students' academic reading anxiety. The second is to identify the factors causing academic reading anxiety. The third is to identify how the students overcome their academic reading anxiety.

In answering the first research question, they measured students' anxiety levels using the foreign language reading anxiety scale (FLRAS) developed by researchers Saito, et al (1999). The students' reading anxiety level is divided into low to high anxiety levels. Here is the distribution of students' anxiety levels.

Diagram 1. Students' Level of Academic Reading Anxiety



Based on the data above, the majority of the students are at medium level of anxiety has the highest percentage with 42.5%, and followed by low levels at 30%, while the Students with high anxiety levels whom this study focused on have a percentage of 27.5%. This indicated that many of the students had a medium level of academic reading anxiety. However, this study is focused on students with high anxiety levels, thus the researcher takes 10 of 11 students with high anxiety levels.

The study revealed that only two students encountered difficulties in reading academic texts based on vocabulary caused by difficult scientific terms and not English vocabulary. It is also found that they also encounter difficulties in understanding difficult scientific terms that are not familiar to them. The study also revealed that all students encountered anxiety regarding the material and topics. There are five students stated that the anxiety is caused by difficult topics. It is confirmed that because seeing that the topic in the title is difficult, the students are reluctant to read. More than that, the length of the title also influences students' anxiety in reading academic texts. The factor causing anxiety in reading academic texts in terms of vocabulary is difficult scientific terms in academic texts. For this kind of factor, unfortunately, students who encounter this difficulty have no solution on how to overcome it at the same time. One of the students stated that to overcome this problem, the student must be familiar with academic texts, while the other one stated that interest in reading academic texts is necessary.

Meanwhile, there are 3 students stated that their anxiety was caused by unfamiliar topics. It is mentioned that the unfamiliarity of the topic determined by students' knowledge might cause reading difficulties and influence anxiety in reading academic texts. Other than that, 2 students stated that anxiety was caused by a lack of interest in reading academic texts. It is stated that a lack of interest might cause the students to read raucously or not read completely. This lack of interest also causes laziness to read academic texts. This indicated that most students are unaffected by different writing cultures, this is because writing culture is usually not present in academic writing and all academic writing is written using formal language that is intended for wider audiences, not the writer's native environment. The factors causing reading anxiety about academic text based on the topics include topic difficulties, students' prior knowledge, and inability to choose preferred prior knowledge, inability to choose favored topics, unusual topics, the size of the text, not being used to academic texts, and lack of interest. In terms of anxiety caused by language and culture, only one student mentioned being anxious. However, this is not about the English language, but the scientific language that is hard to understand according to this particular student. Therefore, students tend to find text easier with language that is easier to understand as a solution.

The reason for encountering anxiety in terms of being afraid of mistakes depends on the environment. The students tend to have no anxiety when reading alone and have anxiety if observed. The students also mentioned that reading in front of the class also influenced their anxiety. Students' anxiety is also influenced by the different understandings of others in terms of the academic text they are reading. There are three factors of anxiety due to being afraid of making mistakes mentioned by students. Those who lack confidence, are observed by others and are afraid of having different understandings with others. For lacking confidence, the students overcome it by checking their understanding with friends. This method is also used by students who are afraid to have different understandings with the other. For the anxiety of being observed, the solution is by understanding the text well enough to reduce anxiety.

In terms of solutions, the students have different solutions including finding an easier text which is not possible if the students do not choose their material. The students also use discussions with friends but this is only possible if the students are working in groups or the class has similar texts to discuss. Other than that, the students might also ask other students who can understand more about the text they are taking or do more personal methods like reading the abstract and conclusion of the text.

DISCUSSION

Based on the findings of this study, the majority of students are at medium levels of academic reading anxiety. From the total of 40 students, there are 11 students with a high level of academic reading anxiety which has the lowest level of anxiety compared to the other anxiety levels. This result is in line with the study conducted by Setiawan (2020) which indicated that most of the students were at medium levels of reading anxiety. Moreover, similar results were also shown by Muhlis (2017) who indicated that medium-level anxiety had the highest number with 71.9%.

In answering the second research question, the researcher aims to identify the factors of anxiety in reading academic texts. The data indicated that the most frequent anxiety in reading academic texts is the topics. This factor of anxiety is also a major issue that hinders the student from even reading the content. The findings explained that the students often feel anxious just by reading the title, if the students determine that the title is too difficult for them, they tend to be discouraged from reading further. Another study conducted by Tsai and Lee (2018) also confirmed consistent results about reading anxiety due to the topics, it is found that most EFL learners feel anxious about difficult texts in foreign languages. Moreover, this kind of anxiety is also confirmed in the study by Setiawan (2020), it is found that students often feel afraid due to the difficult topics assigned to them to read. This phenomenon explains that reading anxiety in terms of reading topics happens not only in academic texts but also in other kinds of texts. As stated by Rajab et al. (2012) that it is

comprehensible that readers might find reading an anxiety-provoking chore since they not only deal with unfamiliar words, structure, syntax, lexicons, and complex semantic relations but also background and cultural knowledge in comprehending the text.

Students' anxiety in reading academic texts in terms of the topic is also influenced by their lack of interest in the subject. For example, the students mentioned that the lack of interest made it difficult for them to understand difficult topics, and they felt laziness when dealing with difficult topics due to the lack of interest in certain subjects that did not fit their background knowledge and interest. This phenomenon is described by Zoghi (2012) as top-down reading anxiety that is related to reader-specific related anxiety. Furthermore, it is explained by Guimba and Alico (2015) that top-down reading anxiety is associated with readers' background and cultural knowledge as well as their overall reading skills which happens when there are culturally unclear ideas or unfamiliar titles where they are lacking knowledge of the messages stated in the text. Furthermore, the study by Rahmat (2020) also confirms that unfamiliar topics and background knowledge are the leading factors influencing reading anxiety in academic texts.

Regarding the reading anxiety caused by reading topics, there are several methods used by students to overcome their anxiety. The most common method used by students is finding topics easier, however, this method can only work if students can choose their academic text. This method is also used by the students in Somro et al (2019) study, here the students likely resolved to find lighter topics or subjects of interest.

Another factor that frequently affects students' anxiety in reading academic texts is the fear of making mistakes. In this study, the fear of making mistakes is only present when the students are observed by others in reading. As it was clearly stated by students that they experience no fear of mistakes while reading alone. The students are often afraid of making mistakes during discussions, reading in the classroom, and assignment situations. This is in line with the statement of Zbornik (2001) who defines reading anxiety as an unpleasant feeling toward reading which causes significant other disapproval in the reading process. Significant other is explained as a person or people who have a significant emotional influence over the student's behavior or belief system.

This means that reading anxiety is mostly present when the students consider what others would expect them about their reading. This is supported by the fact that students read academic texts, mostly due to assignments or academic purposes where they are expected to reach the reading standards set by others such as lecturers and peers. A similar phenomenon is stated by Muhlis (2017) that the forms of disapproval are in the form of peer or teacher pressure on the significant others. These may trigger a sense of worry about the reading effect among the students, which is influenced by their peers and teacher's attitude regarding their reading performance. There are several examples of the cases experienced by the students in this study. For example, students might have a different understanding of the text they are reading which makes them anxious in reading academic text. As a result, some students feel insecure about their understanding of the text. The students also fear when they have to read in the classroom. These findings are also in line with the example provided by Muhlis (2017) that the students have made mistakes in pronunciation while reading and getting laughed at by their peers and the teacher's manner in correcting their mistakes, which seems to inhibit the chance of the students to perform their reading.

There are also other factors such as language and culture as well as difficult terms, but these factors are less frequently mentioned than reading topics and fear of making mistakes. For both language and vocabulary, the problems tend to be directed to the scientific nature of the text itself like scientific terms, scientific language, and writing styles. There are no students who mentioned having English language difficulties. Several students also mentioned that they are already familiar with the English language, so their anxieties are related to scientific texts. This finding is in line with Saito, et al (1999) as the pioneer in measuring reading anxiety, with participants from different countries, they found that the levels of reading anxiety vary by the target language, and seem to be related to writing systems. Consistently, the findings of Muhlis (2017) indicated foreign language

anxiety differs from reading anxiety where background knowledge, reading skills, and cognitive skills are involved to process the idea from the text. In terms of different cultures, this study indicates that in academic writing, cultural differences are not present as academic texts are intended for wider audiences and utilize a similar scientific style of writing. This is inconsistent with the findings of Rahmat (2020) who found that scientific writing style is considered a frequent factor that contributes to reading anxiety in academic texts compared to foreign language anxiety.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The result concluded that most of the students are at medium academic anxiety levels, and 11 students have high anxiety levels. The major factor influencing students' level of anxiety is caused by reading topics. The students found topics that were difficult and unfamiliar led to a feeling of laziness or discouragement. The strategies used by students to overcome academic reading anxiety in terms of topics include finding easier material, social strategies such as discussion and peer review, starting reading to determine if the text is difficult or not, and finding summarized points of the text in abstracts and conclusions. The second frequent factor following reading topics is the fear of making mistakes, this study indicates that the fear of making mistakes only happens when students are observed during reading. The case is mostly caused by anxiety to have different understandings with others and read in a classroom environment. The solution used by students to overcome the fear of making mistakes is cross-checking with friends and trying to understand the text as best as possible before entering the class. There are other minor factors such as vocabulary which is mostly caused by unfamiliar scientific terms, and the only confirmed solution mentioned was being familiar with academic texts. The other minor factor is language and culture, here the students stated that they have minor problems with the English language, but their problems mostly come from scientific writing styles, scientific terms, and scientific languages. The only solution mentioned based on the student who encountered this problem was finding an academic text that was easier and more comprehensive.

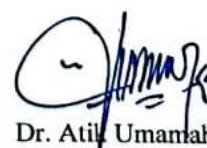
Based on the conclusion above, the researcher provided suggestions to the students, lecturers, and the next researcher as follows. (1) For students, it is advisable to start reading an academic text before determining its difficulty, because the title might not reflect the difficulty of the entire content of the text. (2) For the lecturer, it is important to guide the students in terms of how to find good sources of academic reading material. Moreover, it is important to direct courses about academic material by considering students' interests. (3) For the next researcher, it is suggested to study academic reading anxiety that is focused on the students who are undertaking a thesis, as they are more involved with academic texts.

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