Investigating EFL Students' Psychological Anxiety in Reading Performance

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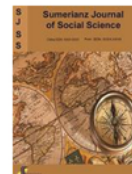

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Investigating EFL Students' Psychological Anxiety in Reading Performance

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Abstract

Reading is one of English skills that emphasizes on how students pronouncing the word well and how they comprehend the text. Although, most of people think that reading is the easiest skill learned than other skills but in fact reading has its own difficulties part as other skills. The parts are comprehension process and the relationship between reader's ability and interpretation of the text. It will be hard to achieve those parts while students get an anxiety in reading process. Sometime, they are reluctant to read each words, just they will do by soundless. Moreover, they also will start to read if a teacher commands them to read and otherwise. Hence, reading sometime brings learner not confident as psychological problem, due to it needs the ability of good pronunciation and interpretation which not many people can easily do it. By knowing the problem above, this study aims to know what are the factors of anxiety emerged in reading practice and what strategy that can reduce the impact of anxiety. Therefore, to reach the answer researcher uses Library design as a research method. By finding relevant literatures and analyze inductively until deductively, the researcher can accomplish this problem in ELT for reading comprehension as the main point discussion. The finding found that the factors of reading anxiety are unfamiliar vocabulary, unfamiliar topic, personal factor and long text structure, and gender. Meanwhile, the strategies to cope those factor are; increasing teacher performance and competence, using teaching method, using local culture as theme or material topic. After all, it can be concluded that anxiety actually can emerge in reading skill and it is proved by some factors appearance. In addition, for English teacher should be more realize the need of students before determining the class activity especially reading practice.
Keywords: anxiety, factor, reading performance, strategy

1. Introduction

Learning English emphasizes learner to be independent to improve some skills involvement as language element. This is such kind of requirement that generally EFL learner must through it. One of the skill meant here is Reading. Reading is one of language skill which focuses on understanding the text and its element related with the text. In order to fully understand the text, an individual must face new spelling patterns, sentence structure, syntax, lexicons, and other complex semantic relationships. Often, individuals still find difficulty in giving meaning to a text that basically has different rhetoric and text which requires knowledge of cultural background. (Rajab et al, 2012: 363).

While comprehending the text, students must also concern on how they pronounce well toward every single word shown in the text. As skill, reading is often considered as the easiest skill after listening, writing, and speaking. Whereas, it is not totally true. For sure, not many know that reading process is not just one person understanding of each word and the surface structure represented in the reading text, but it also involves the comprehension process and the ability of the reader to actually interact with the reading text by making its own interpretation on the meaning of the text (Rajab et al, 2012: 362). Therefore, become good reader is not only good in reading but also how the reader can interpret the meaning contained from the text.

One of the age that assume has major anxiety is in teen age. In case of Junior High School has been considered that most of students feel unconfident to read even to find the interpretation of the text. It is still found because they are anxious to read by showing soundless voice in reading activity. Even, the students are reluctant to read without any command and guidance from their teacher. These problems commonly happened to any level of learner. The factor of age on students tends to the basic knowledge of students on how deep they learning English especially reading. Especially, in the level of Junior High School students, they are in age of transition from children to be teenagers, means need more adaptation and so sensitive in act. Brown (2001: 92) states that the period of teens which is between the childhood and adulthood, is age of transition, confusion, self-awareness, growing and changing bodies and minds. The perception toward phisical and emotional are ultrasensitif.

The factor of gender sometime can be the indicator why students are reluctant to improve reading skill. According to Behroozina and Jafarigohar (2012: 163) state that female learners are more concerned about language difficulties than males, and women tend to be more anxious and worry-oriented than men. On the other hand, there are still other factors which affect reading skills for learners of foreign languages, namely language skills, motivation, anxiety, and cultural backgrounds of the learners (Sellers, 2000: 515). Those points can be said that reading can be a hard situation in learning second language just based on the genders and the internal factors that must be realized by the students themselves.

Another case emerges within the proposition of the text. The text which is considered as long text can make students feel difficult because mostly the text present a lot of dictions which those are never known by students yet. As what Anggra (2016: 511) studied about reading anxiety states that this anxious state provides significant influence in foreign language learning in both the formal and informal learning. In its connection with reading skills, anxiety in foreign language generates special difficulty that the learners should be able to understand dictions they had never read before, so in the end learners experienced frustration or give up on understanding the content of that reading text and encounter anxiety. It can be said that the obstacle of students can be found from internal factor. The factor here refers to background knowledge of students facing reading skill. Without any attention to motivate them, directly can influence the desire of students to stay learn reading or even avoid it at all.

By knowing those problems in reading skill, consequently the position of teacher in Junior High School is very significant to help students reducing the anxiety and increasing the desire to read even to improve reading skill ability. However, teacher's role sometime only gives command and no feedback if students do false in reading. These can be able to make students easily feel frustrated. Whereas the power of feedback can influence students to be more engaged to learn something. If no feedback, worriedly students will stuck on boring situation and have no any motivation to read or even to comprehend the text. Hence, teacher should provide various teaching strategies to maintain students' motivation in reading.

There were several previous researches that had been studied about anxiety and skills in ELT. First, the research done by Anuariza and Hendriyani (2016) who had studied on University students and state that in speaking skill the causes of the students' anxiety were: fear of mistake, fear of being laughed at or mocked, lack of ability, lack of preparation, lack of practice, lack of vocabulary, lack of self-confidence, lack of conviction, lack of motivation, shyness, not liking the speaking subject, the teacher's teaching method, and teachers' attitude and behavior. Second, in listening skill, Xu (2013) had studied in College students about the relationship between anxiety and students' listening comprehension ted that listening anxiety was negatively correlated with use of listening learning strategies implied that may play an important role in lowering listening anxiety. Hence teachers should put strategy instruction into regular classroom activities in an explicit way. Third, in writing skill, Shang (2018) had studied on University students that generally appeared to be anxious when writing in English; anxiety was quite pervasive in EFL writing classrooms no matter how many years students have learned English writing in the past. Male students who felt more anxious score higher on the writing test than female students. Low anxious students self-estimate to have higher writing efficacy and actual writing competence than high apprehensive students.

Hence, based on the problems emerged and compare with previous studies about speaking, listening and writing skill, then writer is curious to know some cases about anxiety which particularly in reading practice by considering some questions below:

1. What are the factors of anxiety emerged in reading practice?
2. What are strategies that can reduce the impact of anxiety?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Literature Review

Anxiety defines as one of psychological condition that commonly emerged in teaching and learning process while students especially are uncertain toward what they are facing to learn. Anxiety, as one of the affective factors that have a great impact on foreign language learners has been studied since 1970s. Anxiety is described by psychologists as a "state of apprehension, a vague fear that is only indirectly associated with an object" (Hilgard, Atkinson, & Atkinson, 1971 cited in Sabbah, 2018). By feeling fear to make a mistake makes anxiety seems like a black bold that gapping students' confidence.

Regarding with the definition of anxiety, there are some opinions based on previous researcher. According to Spieberger (1983) cited in Xu (2013: 1375) describes anxiety from a neurobiological perspective, defining anxiety as "the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness and worry associated with an arousal of the

automatic nervous systems". Meanwhile, anxiety for foreign language or called as FLA mostly done in speaking practice. In line with FLA term, Tsiplakides and Keramida (2009: 39) add that foreign language anxiety consists of "self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process". Hence, it can be said that anxiety is feeling of worriedness, apprehension even self-perceptions toward behavior of learner and that mostly occur in speaking to study foreign language.

2.2 Anxiety and Reading English

Reading as one of skill in English as second language emphasizes students to be aware on how to comprehend the text at last of the section or practice in language class. The area of foreign or second language learning, reading is seen as being a more demanding task. In order to fully understand a text, the learner has to deal with unfamiliar spelling patterns, sentence structure, syntax, lexicons and other complex semantic relations (Rajab et al, 2012: 363). Hence, it cannot be separated that students only feel unconfident to read because of some factors.

According to Rajab et al (2012: 363) state that foreign language reading anxiety refers to the feeling of apprehension and worry when learners have to read in non-native language (L2. If these feeling come to students as reader, they will automatically lack in motivation to practice reading for sure. By far, the number of research studies dealing with affect and L2 reading is limited. Reading in a foreign language ends in anxiety and finally poor language achievement "in conjunction of students' levels of reading anxiety and general foreign language anxiety" (Saito, Thomas, & Horwitz, 1998: 202). It has been clear enough that anxiety in reading can reduce students' academic achievement. In line with above statement, Zhang (2000) and Adams (1996) cited in Januariza and Hendriyani (2016: 160) believe that low language proficiency and teacher diversity may cause reading comprehension test anxiety. It can be concluded that anxiety in reading is such a problem, therefore English teacher should provide teaching strategy to overcome it.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study uses the library research design to obtain the data related with answering research question. According to Hadi (1981: 42) library research method is a method of data collection by reviewing several library works that are relevant and related based on existing problems. This is intended to collect data and various other information that have relevant to this problem. Research on the results of this kind of literature study contains a topic which contains some ideas and or information obtained from literature sources. From above definition, writer in this research find and analyze the factor influenced anxiety in reading practice by synthesizes from some related theories.

3.2 Data Source

The data source refers to any kinds of literature either from book, journal, article and others that showing the theme or case about anxiety and reading practice in EFL activities. By knowing that, the primary data source tends to article or journal about anxiety that related with previous study. While, secondary data can be from relevant book and internet as necessary and as long as discuss about anxiety and reading practice.

3.3 Data Collection

After getting those relevant literatures, writer finds the similarity or difference between or among the data sources. Sometime, it is formed in point. Then, the data will be analyzed. Briefly, the step on how to collect the data can be done as follow:

a. Read some literatures based on each research question either anxiety and reading practice
b. Distinguish the finding of each literature based on factor that emerge anxiety and strategy to overcome anxiety
c. Find similarity and difference to get one conclusion
d. Give original explanation to collected point as data based on related literature

3.4   Data Analysis

After getting data, the next step is doing analyzing. Analyzed method is the way used to get such scientific knowledge with the detail toward object studied, or it can be defined as the way to choose and considering toward one definition toward several definition else to obtain the clearness of the case that has been formed (Sudarto, 1996: 59).

In analyzing collected data, writer uses two methods, deductive and inductive. Deductive analysis defines as the way of thinking to get the conclusion which is started from general statement into specific questions by using logical reason. In addition, Hadi (1981: 36-42) adds that if someone can prove certain event includes the right view, it means logically and automatically he can make the conclusion that the truth in the problem becomes the truth of specific event. Inductive analysis is the way of thinking in getting the conclusion that is started from statement or specific facts into general conclusion. Inductive analysis is making conclusion which started from specific definition becomes general definition.

4. Finding

This section presents and analyzes the collected information which is about factors of reading anxiety that mostly appear based on several relevant previous research and strategy used as optional to cope those factor. By doing some analysis and synthesizing, the writer showed the result and discussion as below in the points.

4.1 Factors of Anxiety in Reading
4.1.1 Unfamiliar Vocabulary

Vocabulary has been considered as the most important language element to learn Second language especially English. In reading skill, learner is emphasized to know or to be familiar on each word shown onto the text. Vocabulary knowledge is often viewed as a critical tool for second language learners because a limited vocabulary in a second language impedes successful communication (Al Qahtani, 2015: 22). However, it is such a lack if a reader has very limited amount of vocabulary. They will easily get unfamiliar vocabulary while reading a text which is able to be caused of "anxiety". As Rajab et al (2012: 364) found that in term of unfamiliar vocabulary might impede learners' comprehension and cause difficulty which in turn leads to anxiousness.

In line with Rajab et al, within similar case of comprehension, Zhang (2000) and Adams (1996) cited in Behroozina and Jafarigohar (2012: 160) believe that low language proficiency and teacher diversity may cause reading test anxiety. Moreover, vocabulary and grammar as two important elements of second language proficiency affect more than first language reading on second or foreign language reading comprehension (Bernhardt and Kamil, 1995; Bossers, 1991; 1992; Brisbois, 1995; Yamashita, 2004; and Nassaji 2004 cited in Rajab and Hassani (2012). Hence, it can be said that the position of vocabulary is very significant mastery by every learner to comprehend the text. Furthermore, the grammar also follows in developing reading skill, because every word and its combination will influence the meaning of the text. If those cannot be overcome by students, automatically they will be anxious in participating reading class.

4.1.2 Unfamiliar Topics

Reading anxiety can be found while students as readers do not feel interested on the topic of text or even it is considered as unfamiliar topic which beyond of their cognitive knowledge. According to Tsai and Lee (2018: 129) agreed that unfamiliar vocabularies, unknown topics, long and complicated text structure as well as the fear of making mistakes were identified as the major factors of FL reading anxiety. In line with Tsai and Lee, in similar case Ahmad et al (2013: 89)add that there were three main sources of foreign language reading anxiety under the concept of text features; unknown vocabulary, unfamiliar topic, and unfamiliar culture. Implications to the study and recommendations for further research were considered.

Meanwhile, according to Saito et al. (1999) cited in Ahmad et al (2013: 90) there are only two main aspects that elicit foreign language reading anxiety were found: unfamiliar writing system and unfamiliar culture. Topics which are not interesting or difficult for reader may lead to reading anxiety. In addition, Kuru-Gonen (2009) cited in Ahmad et al (2013: 92) supported that uninteresting topics a source of foreign language reading anxiety caused by reading text. Actually, familiar topic can ease students to comprehend the text while reading and otherwise. As what Wutun et al (2018: 51) found that the learning topics that closely connect to learners' world life bring enthusiasm for learners to learn a new language in classroom. Here, it can be stated that the theme or topic of reading in text must be really considered by educator or teacher. Those due to the influence pre-middle and after students reading activity will easily impede their interesting to follow the language classroom activity.

4.1.3 Personal Factor and Long Text Structure

In reading activity toward second language, anxiety may emerge due to personal factor and text feature. According to Rahman et al (2013) cited in Sabbah (2018: 18-19) found that under concept of personal factor toward foreign language reading anxiety; fear of making errors and worry about reading effects. On the other hand, there were three main sources of text feature; unknown vocabulary, unfamiliar topic, unfamiliar culture. To support Rahman et al, in case of fear to make a mistake, Tsai and Lee (2018: 129) added that complicated text structure as well as the fear of making mistake was identified as the major factors of foreign Language reading anxiety. In similar case, Januariza and Hendriyani (2016: 471) support that one of the causes of the students' anxiety is: the students' fear of mistake.

Moreover, Ahmad et al (2013: 91) also agreed that for students who lack self-confidence are often afraid of participation in reading tasks in order to avoid making errors. Hence, this sense of feeling leads students to escalate the anxiety in foreign language reading. Therefore, by way of anxiety increase, their reading performance decreases, which ultimately shows an abnormality of their reading ability and unconstructive influences on language proficiency. It is clearer if a students still are worried to practice reading due to fear of making mistake, easily they will be slow in improving reading skill.

4.1.4 Gender

Beyond of academic skill and personal factor, gender can be as the factor of anxiety. First, Sabbah (2018: 17) support that one of the causes of anxiety is gender. Gender, social status, job positions may also cause anxiety. In some countries, the co-educational classes may cause female students to be anxious. In addition, Zhang (2000) cited in Zarei (2014: 15) shown his finding that with respect to the FLRAS questionnaire and the three added items also shown that "female and male students experience different degrees of anxiety in study-abroad context".

Female in most of finding has been considered as the most anxious gender than male in learning reading second language. In line with these statements, Behroozina and Jafarigohar (2012: 163) supported that their findings show the female learners are more concerned about language difficulties than males, and women tend to be more anxious and worried oriented than men. Similar finding has been found by Lien (2011: 200) agrees that females tended to be slightly more anxious than males in reading. Furthermore, Machia (2001) cited in Kiya (2015: 57) examined foreign language anxiety in a Japanese-learning class based on gender, nationality, first language and prior foreign language experience. She found significant differences for gender, i.e. female language- learners were more anxious than males. Here, gender can be a consideration for teacher to be more attention to female to motivate her and so that her anxiety can be reduced.

4.2 Strategies to Reduce Anxiety in Reading
4.2.1 Teachers' performance and competence

Teacher as the only guidance directly in classroom has main big role to maintain students' activities and their motivation in class. Hence, teacher must have good performance and competence toward his teaching area. According to, Sabbah (2018: 28) states that teachers should create a stress-free learning context by making the language classroom environment less formal and more-friendly. This can be implemented by using communicative activities as role-play, drama, multimedia, motivation-provoking strategies, arousal of sense of achievement and success, and reinforcement strategies. They should also instill self-confidence I their students by stopping any action of sarcasm in the class.

In another cases, for reducing anxiety in form of fear making mistake, teacher should be friendly and provide such opportunities to students to practice more but still warm guided by him so that students do not feel scary at the class. Behroozina and Jafarigohar (2012: 163) support that teachers should be warm and friendly in their relationships with students. Besides they should value effort, risk-taking and successful communication and also they should take it for granted that errors and mistakes are a natural part of learning. Consequently, in such an atmosphere students seek to have more opportunities to interact positively with each other and act in a cooperative rather than a competitive manner; as a result, they focus on communication rather than being worried and afraid of negative evaluation

4.2.2 Reading Method Used

Actually, reading strategy is a lot in term of its variety and purposes. Reading strategies are techniques or conscious actions taken to improve understanding and solve difficulties encountered in reading. Reading strategies include reading aloud, paraphrasing, guessing, re-reading the text, visualizing the information, asking oneself questions, translating, and using a dictionary. The successful use of reading strategies benefits learners' reading comprehension (Huang, Chern, & Lin, 2009 cited in Lien, 2011: 200). In line with Huang, Chern, & Lin, relate with comprehension, several studies have shown reading strategy use is also positively correlated with reading comprehension (Al-Nujaidi, 2003; Darabie, 2000; Song, 1999 cited in Lien, 2011: 200).

In most of cases, Lien (2011: 206) mentions strategies most used in reading to reduce anxiety, that it seems essential for EFL teachers to teach more top-down reading strategies such as critically analyzing the texts, guessing the meaning of unknown words, using context clues, background knowledge, taking notes and asking oneself questions. Moreover, reading strategies have been defined as plans and behaviors for solving problems when faced in constructing meaning. Janzen believes that these strategies range from bottom-up strategies to more comprehensive ones like top-down strategies. Bottom-up strategies are defined as making use of information, which is already present in the data such as understanding the text by analyzing the words and sentences in the text itself, or looking up an unfamiliar word in the dictionary. On the other hand, top down strategies make use of previous knowledge such as connecting what is being read to readers background knowledge (Janzen, 2003 cited in Marashi & Rahmati, 2017: 43-44).

4.2.3 Local Content Reading

Local culture as the theme of material taught will be easier understanding than something that is not close with students' cognitive and social environment. According to Wutun et al (2018: 54) state that the local culture encourages the language learners become more creative and productive in target language by involving their existing knowledge and modality that they have in their first language and culture. In addition this study revealed that integrating local culture reduces learners' cognitive load in ELT since some linguistic input has been already known. In this case the complexity is reduced. Regarding with reading material and practice, promoting local culture can be good idea. Reading material is one of the medium to promote local culture (Ningtyas et al, 2016: 1249).

Due to this, learning becomes a personal experience by exploring cultural facts and practices that act as a bridge to less familiar cultural content associated with the target language and cultures of English. Wutun et al also add that learners were introduced with the familiar things in English they had emotional reactions such as laughing, giving comments. This happened since they had emotional relationship with teaching materials. Some learners expressed that learning English using the surrounding was fun and easier. They did not get bored since they had to play and talk on something that they experienced it. The learners were actively involved since they were the source of culture. Therefore, beyond strategy to be implemented, teacher should consider in the point of what the most suitable theme to put into the material and by purpose to engage students' enthusiastic in learning activities.

5. Discussion

Based on those finding above, writer compares what has been obtained toward the main reading anxiety theory and previous studies related with anxiety on other skills in English. First, According to Rajab et al (2012: 363) state that foreign language reading anxiety refers to the feeling of apprehension and worry when learners have to read in non-native language (L2). This theory is accepted based on the finding that has been found in term of factor "unfamiliar vocabulary, unfamiliar topic, and gender". Second, the previous studies which done in speaking, skill by stating "the causes of the students' anxiety were: fear of mistake, fear of being laughed at or mocked, lack of ability, lack of preparation, lack of practice, lack of vocabulary, lack of self-confidence, lack of conviction, lack of motivation, shyness, not liking the speaking subject, the teacher's teaching method, and the teachers' attitude and behavior". Anxiety has main role in term of fear to make a mistake and it is also occurred while students do reading activity.

Third, previous study in listening skill found that there is relationship between anxiety and students' listening comprehension. In Reading, term of comprehension is also important toward the text and if anxiety involves in comprehension activity automatically, students will be not confident to read and understand the message

of the text. It can also result low achievement in reading outcomes. Fourth, in writing, male students who felt more anxious, score higher on the writing test than female students. In reading is different, the more anxious in reading refers mostly done by female.

From those all, it can be concluded that anxiety is still such a problem faced by students especially they are who standing in teen age. Although, most of anxiety done in speaking activity but in this case reading must be also considered. The way how to consider can be done by wisely choose a topic as reading material related with students interest, close with students background knowledge, the content of the text should be balance with students level which is not too short and not too long. The last, these material points must be followed with strategy used appropriately in the class and teacher performance should be attractive so that students can be feel comfortable to follow reading practice.

6. Conclusion

Reading as skill to comprehend the text and how to interpret the message within the text is not easy as people think for especially EFL students. Learning second language cannot judge the easiness and the hardness reading but those depend on some related factors that commonly influence the students' skill to learn and automatically their motivation to follow English class. In this case, if no motivation and trigger, students in young age level will get easily fear and anxiety toward reading practice.

Regarding to factors that are able to influence until reduce students' enthusiastic to read the text among others; they find unfamiliar vocabulary in reading, the topic of the text is not interesting which is beyond of their background knowledge, personal factor and long text structure, and gender. Those factors are mostly occurred in reading anxiety after analyzing several related literature. In addition, most of previous researchers are agreed with the similar factors emerged toward reading anxiety.

Furthermore, answering what strategy that can be an option for teacher to teach reading and help students' difficulties, this writing has found some and most finding by previous researchers. Firstly, considering to teacher performance and competence; secondly, reading strategy such as reading aloud, paraphrasing, guessing, re-reading the text, visualizing the information, asking oneself questions, translating, and using a dictionary and so on; thirdly, the use of local culture as theme or material topic of reading so that students can be easily catch the message of the text and to engage students enthusiastic due to material close with their environment. By implementing those options, writer believes that students' anxiety will be decreased. As result, they will be more motivated and interested to participate in reading class. Moreover, they will be also more brave to practice either they will make a mistake or otherwise. While the main point is the students have desire to improve their reading skill for sure and better.

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