

STUDENTS' READING ANXIETY IN ENGLISH FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

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Abstract

This research was conducted to investigate students' reading anxiety in an EFL classroom in a junior high school. There were 33 students of a junior high school in Bandung who participated in this research. Utilizing qualitative descriptive method, this research investigated the levels of students' anxiety and the causes of students' anxiety in English reading class. The data were collected using Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale (designed by Saito et al., 1999), a set of questionnaire (adopted from Ahmad et al. (2013)) and an interview to clarify the developed questionnaire. The research found that most of the students perceived anxiety in medium level (51,5%). The causes of students' reading anxiety were based on then text feature including unknown vocabulary, which becomes the first rank of the causes anxiety followed by the unfamiliar topic, and the last is unfamiliar culture. From personal factor it was found that fear of making error is the first rank followed by worry about reading.

Keywords: anxiety; causes of reading anxiety

INTRODUCTION

English is a foreign language for Indonesian students that must be learnt in school since Junior high school level until University level. English may be considered as a difficult subject for the Indonesian students, because English may be completely different from Indonesian language viewed from the system of structure, pronunciation and vocabulary. There are four language skills should be achieved in studying English as a foreign language, they are Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. Furthermore, in learning for each skill has some difficulties, including in learning reading to students in foreign language classroom. Hence, reading as a foreign language in Indonesia, reading skill is the most important skill in order to achieve the modern-day knowledge and it is an important fundamental receptive skill student relies much on for the academic purposes in higher education (Ahmad et al, 2013).

However, beginner foreign language learners often express a feeling of stress, nervousness or anxiety in learning a foreign language in general (Horwitz et al., 1986) and in reading skill as a specific skill as well

(Saito, Horwitz, & Garza, 1999). Liu (2011) said that it is caused by foreign language learners are faced with difficulty in developing the needed reading ability and skills in the target language because foreign language reading is affected by multiple factors, such as unfamiliar scripts and writing system and unfamiliar cultural material. Based on the researcher's observation during PPL (Teaching Practice) at a junior high school in Bandung, the students have some problems during learning reading. For instance, during reading activity, when the teacher asked student to read a text, some of them refused to read aloud the text in front of their friends because he/she afraid to make a mistake and their friend will laugh it, and the other lost their focus or talked to their friends for other businesses. Moreover, some students cut the class in the reading section with asked permission to the teacher to go to toilet, but they did not come back to the class until they turn to read the text was over, so they missed the reading section.

The problem above is because the anxiety of student in learning foreign language. According to Hortwitz et al, (1986) said that Foreign language learner is the

subjective feelings, psycho-physiological symptoms, and behavioral responses of the anxious foreign language learner are essentially the same as for any specific anxiety. And according to MacIntyre (1995 as cited in Gonen, 2007) claim that foreign language anxiety has negative effects on the cognitive processing and behavior, it is because both of them is influencing each other.

“For example, a demand to answer a question in a foreign language class may cause a student to become anxious, then anxiety leads to worry and frustration.”

Therefore, we have argued that the anxieties, fears, and phobias precipitated by reading task are a major challenging to reading progress (Jalongo & Hirsh, 2010).

Concerning the issue above, the researcher want to know what are the levels of anxiety experienced by the students and what are the causes of student's anxiety in reading class as a foreign language. Those are related to the scope of the this present study and to what extent this study is conducted. And then, the majority of participants recruited in the previous reading anxiety studies will actually from junior high school level. Therefore, the present study attempts to fill the gap and explore this kind of phenomenon in junior high school level, especially in Indonesia setting, where English is considered as a foreign language and is learned and used primarily in classroom context.

Literature Review

Anxiety

Anxiety is feelings of tension, apprehension, nervousness and worry about potential negative outcomes or events (Spielberger, 1983, as cited in Seinfeld et al, 2016). Shri (2010) also stated that Anxiety is a subjective feeling of unease, discomfort, apprehension or fearful concern accompanied by a host of autonomic and somatic manifestations. End then, Horwitz et al. (1986) said that anxiety is the subjective feeling of apprehension worry, even dread that make the learner have difficulty in concentrating, become forgetful, sweat, and have palpitations. Based on the definition anxiety above, it is show students' reaction toward learning something. So, an anxiety reaction have big impedes at students

to perform successfully in a foreign language class Horwitz et al. (1986). However, anxiety is a normal, emotional, reasonable and expected response to real or potential danger (Shri, 2010).

Moreover, anxiety could happen when it is linked to academic situation, in exam time, even bright students feel threatened (Sarason, 1978). Thus situation make the individual sees himself/ herself as incapable to handle task, and also the individual anxiety and fear of being lost their concentration. In other words, Anxiety in people is varied in level, and it is associated with “the anticipating situation, experiencing it, and recovering from it” (Sarason, 1978).

According to MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) said that there are three perspectives of anxiety in general as: trait anxiety, state anxiety, and situation specific anxiety. The Trait and state anxiety was introduced by Catell and Scheier (1958 as cited in Grillon et al, 1993), they had been define trait anxiety as a kind of anxiety that seems to be stable and permanent which doesn't easily change over time, it will happen for every situations. It is depends on the personality of that person point of view. So, the Individuals with this kind of anxiety tend to be more nervous and more likely become anxious than those who don't have this kind of anxiety.

The next type of anxiety that will happen is state anxiety, this kind of anxiety is also known as “here-and-now” experience of anxiety as an emotional state. The Individuals with this kind of anxiety will undergo anxious feeling during different occasions unlike trait anxiety which occurs almost every time Muhlis (2014). The state anxiety occurs only under some certain and specific situations with ability to differentiate accurately threatening or non-threatening situations (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994).

The last is anxiety situation-specific . It is separated from the two types of anxiety before by Hortwitz et al (1986) as anxiety that happens only in a set of time where the learners feel anxious during their language learning situation.

Foreign Language Reading Anxiety

Foreign language learner is the subjective feelings, psycho-physiological symptoms, and behavioral responses of the anxious foreign language learner are essentially the same as

for any specific anxiety (Hortwitz et al, 1986). And according to MacIntyre (1995 as cited in Gonen, 2007) claim that foreign language anxiety has negative effects on the cognitive processing and behavior; in fact, the relations among anxiety, cognition, and behavior are cyclical in the language class, each influencing the other.

So, foreign language reading anxiety is refers to feeling of worry and apprehension when students try to read and comprehend foreign language text Muhlis (2014). Meanwhile, Zhornik (2001 as cited in Jalongo & Hirsh, 2010) defines reading anxiety is a specific, situational phobia toward the act of reading that has physical and cognitive reactions. He further said that the Physical reactions to anxiety include the release of adrenaline ("fight or flight reaction") and physical symptoms, such as sweating, feeling shaky or faint, a pounding heart, rapid breathing, "butterflies" in the stomach, a tension headache, a stomachache, or even throwing up. Cognitive reactions to anxiety include an overwhelming sense of dread, low self-esteem, feelings of helpless, and expectations of public humiliation.

Furthermore, reading anxiety is a distinct phenomenon from foreign language anxiety in general Muhlis (2014). In other word, reading also belongs to as oral performance because the learners show their individual act to interact with a text. So, we have argued that the anxieties, fears, and phobias precipitated by reading task are a major challenging to reading progress (Jalongo & Hirsh, 2010). Like speaking, student will feel anxious when they interact with others. But, in reading process, the phenomenon of anxiety exist among the learner, so most the learners do not realize that during the progress of reading, anxiety has been stated as one of factors which can impede the reading process. And this anxiety happens when the learners try to decode or interpret a non-native language text (Saito et al, 1999).

The Causes of Foreign Language Reading Anxiety

There two aspect of foreign language reading have a great potencial for eliciting anxiety according to Saito et al. (1999) are unfamiliar writing system and unfamiliar culuture. The reader would experience anxiety as soon as he

or she attempts to decode the script because the reader would immediately experience difficulty in processing the text and the unfamiliar cultural concepts would seem to have an impact at a point in the reading process that is less immediate than that of unfamiliar scripts and writing systems. Meanwhile, Ahmat et al. (2013) stated that there are two kinds factor that elicite foreign language reading anxiety, there are personal factors including worry about reading effect and fear of making error and then text features including unfamiliar culture, unfamiliar topic, and unknown vocabulary.

Foreign Language Reading anxiety Caused by Personal Factors

There are two sub-factors under the concept of personal factors, there are:

Worry about Reading Effect

Reading text in a foreign language are joined with anxiety, it is because reading aloud is paired with anxious unconditioned stimulus, which brings a negative reaction (Jalongo & Hirsh, 2010, as cited in Ahmat et al., 2013). Reading aloud as a matter which causes foreign language reading anxiety of the students. This is because most students cannot deny their anxious feeling when they are asked to read aloud a foreign language text. In addition, foreign language is still frightened by the students as the most difficult lesson to be mastered. They worried about performance nad disrupt their concentration in comprehending a text. If they fail to control their anxious feeling, it is difficult for them to demonstrate their idea about a text. Moreover, they will foreget what has been read. The anxious feeling will happen during and after reading task. It will disturb both reading comprehension and performance (Ahmad et al., 2013).

Fear of Making Error

Feeling afraid is essentially related with a matter of self-confidence (Muhlis, 2014). Thus, it can be concluedd that fear of making error can be considered as factor of reading anxiety. It is supported by several studies which stated that language anxiety can influences students' self-confidence though later is determined as a positive component (Brwon, 2007, as cited in Ahmad et al., 2013).

In considering the lack of self-confidence among foreign language learner. Ahmad et al., (2013) point out that the lack of self confidence has significant role which causes fear of making error. Thus, between the lack of self-confidence and fear of making error are intertwined each other. In addition, several studies conclude the lack of self-confidence as a source of foreign language reading anxiety (Gonen, 2007). Furthermore, the other studies have established fear of making error as a source of foreign language reading anxiety (Celeby, 2009; Cubucku, 2007; MacIntyre, 1995; Yan & Horwitz, 2008; as cited in Ahmad et al., 2013).

Foreign Language Reading anxiety caused by Text Features

There are three factors under the concept of the text features which is make students be anxiety in reading session, it is like unfamiliar culture, unfamiliar topic, and unfamiliar vocabulary (Ahmad et al., 2013).

Unfamiliar culture

Reading task is not only an interaction between the reader and the thoughts of the author, it is also incidentally interaction between the reader and the shared knowledge of the cultural history in the printed materials (In Tomasello, 1999; as cited in confirmed Miyamoto, & Della-Chiesa, 2008, as cited in Ahmad et al., 2013). Unfamiliar English or other foreign language cultures would hamper students' reading comprehension process and cause anxiety as the culture represented in the text is foreign to them (Rajab et al., 2012). In addition, Saito et al. (1999) also reveal that unfamiliar culture were considered as a great aspect that elicits foreign language reading anxiety. And Gonen (2007) also finds that unknown cultural content made students difficult to understand foreign language script. In this sense, being familiar with the culture represented in the text will help the learners to make sense of the text or they will misunderstand the text.

Unfamiliar topic

The next factor of text features is unfamiliar topic. According to Wallace (2001, as cited in Gonen, 2007), said that if the topic of a text is not interesting to a learner it is almost impossible for this learner to read for pleasure and consequently to become and effective

reader. In other word, topics which are of high interest to a reader help him to have a flexible and appropriate response to a reading text. Gonen (2007) also stated that uninteresting topic in reading text is considered as a sources of foreign language reading anxiety.

Unfamiliar vocabulary

Unknown vocabulary has been found to be another source of foreign language reading anxiety (Ahmad et al., 2013). it is difficult for foreign language learners to understand and make sense of the foreign if they don't know the vocabulary. According to Rajab et al. (2012) said that unfamiliar vocabulary might impede learner's comprehension and cause difficulty which in turn leads to anxiousness. In Gonen (2007) study was conducted, unknown vocabulary in reading a foreign language text appeared to be another source of anxiety. 20% of the communication units which related to text category fit to the students' statement of anxiety about new words through reading English language text.

METHOD

In this research the researcher used qualitative descriptive method in order to answer the questions proposed. The qualitative descriptive method is coherent with the objective of the study. This qualitative descriptive method is offer a deep insight to the phenomenon and valuable information that provides a way to see the issue from the view of the subject (Alwasilah, 2008). It helps to describe the students' levels of students anxiety in English reading class and the causes of student's reading anxiety in English class.

Participants

The participant of this study is a Junior High School in Bandung. This school was chosen for reasons such as the researcher had ever conducted a teaching practice in that school. Besides, for many reasons it was found that many of students were very anxious to read English. This condition pushed the researcher to conduct a research about how and why students' anxiety really matters to read proficiency. The respondents from second grade junior high school students that consist

of thirty three students were chosen as the respondents of this research.

Data Collection Procedure

The data collection that used in this research is using two different kinds of questionnaire. The first instrument is using questionnaire FLRAS (Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale) which is developed by Saito et al. (1999). It is used to identify students' reading anxiety level. The second questionnaire is a developed questionnaire to measure the causes of students' reading anxiety which is proposed by Ahmad et al. (2013). After that, some students were selected to be interviewed based on their level of anxiety that was conducted from the FLRAS questionnaire.

Data Analysis

The data about reading anxiety level were collected from Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale (FLARS) questionnaires that were distributed to 33 respondents and also developed questionnaire to know the causes of students' reading anxiety in English foreign language classroom at the same time. While the Interview will be conducted from selected students after the researcher know about the level of students reading anxiety in English class.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Students' Reading Anxiety Level

There are three levels of anxiety in this research which are; 'low level', 'medium level', and 'high level' of students' anxiety in reading class. The levels of anxiety perceived by students were gained from FLRAS questionnaire. From thirty three respondents, it was found that there are thirteen participants (39,4%) fell in the low level of anxiety, seventeen participants (51,5%) that fell in medium level of anxiety, and three participants (9,1%) fell in the high level of anxiety. The research show that the most of the students were in medium level of anxiety with percentage of 51,5% of the students fell in this level. Meanwhile, the prevalent of lowest reading anxiety level are thirteen of students (39,4%) from this research.

The result of FLRAS questionnaire show that anxious students have difficulties in participating in the classroom reading activities. Three students at high anxiety level

(9,1%) felt uncertain when reading English text as all of them agreed with item 1 "I get upset when I'm not sure whether I understand what I am reading in English." and disagreed with item 11 "I feel confident when I am reading in English" while thirteen students at low anxiety level (39,4%) gave the opposite response. The high anxious students did not confident and feel sure of themselves in reading with English text. Most of students the students (54,5%) agree that reading is the hardest part in learning English (item 13), so the result shows that most of students had anxiety problem in many reading activities in English class.

Several studies that investigate students' anxiety in reading English text almost similar result. For example, Koru-Gonen (2007 and Wu, 2011) found most of their participants were in the medium level of anxiety. For example, Wu (2011) found out 60 out of 91 participants fell in "medium" level of reading anxiety (69,2%). These studies indicate that anxiety inhabited students who learn English especially when they attempt to comprehend English text. Therefore, this study must agree to what Wu (2011) said that in spite of students' anxiety level, these anxious language learners should get serious attention from the teachers EFL teacher should cope with students' anxiety in order to improve reading comprehension performance of the students.

The Causes of Foreign Language Reading Anxiety

From thirty three students, it was found that 46% of the participants agree with unknown vocabulary is the most causes of reading anxiety. It can be concluded that unknown vocabulary as the first ranked causes of students' reading anxiety in the classroom as a foreign language.

Based on the developed questionnaire by Ahmad et al. (2013), and interview claims that the anxious students expressed serious concern about various kinds of situation where they have to deal with some problems about vocabulary such as strange vocabulary, terms in English, series of strange words, translating word, lots of difficult words in a text, and unknown meaning of word. It is caused by the lack of vocabulary in the target language is causes of reading anxiety. The sixth interviewed students from various level

of anxiety convinced if unknown vocabulary was the most problem when they had to read. The responding of the participants to the sixth question in the interview which ask about the the causes of students' reading anxiety when dealing with foreign language text, the participant #4 said that "*Yang membuat saya cemas adalah ketika menemukan kosakata yang saya tidak mengerti, dan kosakata itu harus dbacakan didepan kelas*". (There is something make me anxious when I found the word I cannot understand it, and then I have read it in front of the class). From this interview, it can be concluded that the participants of this interview supported a statement in the FLRAS questionnaire for item 7 and 8. "When reading English, I get nervous and confuesd when I don't understand every word (item 7) and the the statement "It bothers me to encounter words I can't pronounce when reading English (item 8).

The result of this study it related with the study conducted by Saito et al. (1999) who found that students' level of anxiety is correlated with writing system, incluing unknown vocabulary. In addition, Koru-Gonen (2009) said that the unknown vocabulary was considered as one of five factors of reading anxiety among Turkish students who were learning English as a foreign language. It can be concluded that Unknown vocabulary has been a main problem among foreign language learner in different context. Moreover, the unknown vocabulary might impede learners' comprehension and the causes difficulty which is turn into anxiousness (Rajab et al., 2009).

The second causes of students' reading anxiety is unfamiliar topic. From thirty three of students, it was found that 39% of students agree that they felt anxious in dealing with text. Furthermore, the responding of students toward interview said that "*karena banyaknya kosakata yang sulit, membuat saya merasa cemas*" (Because of in the text have so many difficult word, it was made me anxious with it) based on the participant #3 from item number 7 is the the causes of students' reading anxiety when dealing with the unfamiliar topic of the text. It can be concluded that unfamiliar topic would impede the students interest in reading a text, it is because they got the anxiety from reading the text that have so many difficult word. According to Koru-Gonen (2009) said

that, when the students tried to avoid reading English text, anxiety will gorw within ther self. He further said that, if the topics is not interesting to a learner it is almost impossible for this learner to read for pleasure and consequently to become an effective reader.

The third causes of students' reading anxiety is unfamiliar topic based on the developed questionnaire by Ahmad et al. (2013). It was found that 44% of students agree that unfamiliar culture is the causes of anxiety. For the students respond to the interview said that "*Saya merasa cemas ketika menemukan kosa kata yang tidak familiar atau baru pertama kali mendengar/membacanya*" (I feel anxious when I found the vocabulary was not familiar or for the first time I hear/read it) based on the participant #2 which is reflect to quetstion of interview number 7. From that statements showed if some students consider unfamiliar culture can bother their interest in reading who make the student anxious. So, it make the student lazy to read and they were not curios to read a text. This result related with Rajab et al. (2009) theory claims that not being familiar with English or other cultures might inhibit students' reading comprehension process and cause anxiety. Unfamiliar topic in this context is the less frequent of causes students' reading anxiety from the aspect of text features.

Furthermore, The causes of students reading anxiety based on Ahmad et.al (2013) is fear of making error from the personal factor. It was found 37% from showed that the students agree fear of making error is the causes of reading anxiety. The responding of the participants in the interview like participant #5 said that "*Saya merasa cemas ketika saya maju kedepan, karena saya takut membut kesalahan dalam membacanya*". (I feel anxious when I come forward to read text, it is because I anxious when I made a mistake in reading it). It is from item no 6. From this statement, it make the students to be fear of making error. So, the confidence of the student will be less as Koru-Gonen (2009) said that the lack of self-confidence is the causes that elicit foreign language reading anxiety.

Finally, tha last causes of reading anxiety from the personal factor according to Ahmat et al. (2013) is worry about reading effect and it was prove from the percentage. It was found 36% of students agree that worry about

reading effect is the causes of students' reading anxiety in the classroom. This statement also accordance with the respondent of student's interview like participant #3 said that "*Saya takut melakukan kesalahan dalam membaca, jadi ketika saya maju kedepan saya lebih suka membacanya dengan pelan*" (I am anxious when do the mistake in the reading of text, so when I come forward I read a text with a soft sound) item number 7. Based on the questionnaire and interview result, it can be concluded that the participants showed a great concern of what their and teacher would react over their mistake in reading aloud. It is like Utami (2007) said that a prejudice comes to their mind. such as, "I can read, but you can make me... and this can be a form of significance other disapproval (Zhornik, 2001).

CONCLUSIONS

The result of this result show that most of the students perceived anxiety in medium level. from this research, it can be concluded that students' level of anxiety in reading are varied. The result of this research show that there are three levels of anxiety in this research which are; 'low level', 'medium level', and 'high level' of students' anxiety in reading class. Many students fell in medium level of anxiety it is sixteen participants (51,%). Therefore, it is important for the English teacher to be aware of anxiety among their students.

The causes of students' reading anxiety are from personal factors including worry about reading effect and fear of making error and then text features including unfamiliar culture, unfamiliar topic, and unknown vocabulary (Ahmad et al., 2013). From thirty three students, it was found that 46% of the participants agree with unknown vocabulary is the most causes of reading anxiety for text feature. Meanwhile, from personal factor it was found fear of making error is the first rank.

SUGGESTIONS

In helping their students to reduce their reading anxiety, English teacher should be aware of the existence of anxiety among their students from the beginning. They need to be more sensitive to their students' behaviour

and attitude towards the lesson and try to interpret them as the manifestation of students' difficulties in their language learning. Teacher should take this as an important issue in their classes and need to find solutions to help their students.

Furthermore, it is useful for English teacher to apply some strategies in teaching reading English in the classroom. This strategies will make the students be relaxe in the classroom and encourage their curiosity to read a text.

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