AN INVESTIGATION OF READING ANXIETY AMONG EFL YOUNG LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT
Reading anxiety is believed as one of factors under affective domain which influences the successfiveness of students’ reading comprehension. The aims of this study were to identify the level of anxiety experienced by the EFL young learners while reading in the classroom context and to investigate the symptoms of anxiety suffered by young learners as well as their perception towards reading in English and their current reading ability. The design of this study was quantitative research. The research was carried out in the second-grade students of a junior high school in Makassar with age between 13-14 years old. The sample of this study was 30 students and selected using purposive sampling method. The data were collected using questionnaire named Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale (FLRAS) which developed by Saito et al (1999) and consists of 20 items of statement with five-point Likert scale. The data were analyzed with descriptive statistics. The results indicated that the students’ anxiety level was 65.633 which imply that they experienced high level of anxiety although the value is a little bit higher than the limit of moderate level. There are some symptoms of reading anxiety that are commonly recognized by the students. They tend to perceive reading in English as very interesting activity as well as they are satisfied with their ability in reading. The findings of this study might be used as input to teachers and students in an effort to create effective classroom environment.

Keywords: Anxiety, reading comprehension, EFL young learners, students’ perception

INTRODUCTION
Experiencing anxiety is mostly inevitable in learning second language. Anxiety occurs when the students feel the apprehension and pressure to perform well in the foreign language. This anxiety causes a mental block to new information. Anxiety also makes the students worried, hard to concentrate, always feel insecure and become forgetful during learning.
Research about anxiety attracts attention of ELT scholars around the world. They study about the effect of anxiety in language learning. Most of the previous researches come to conclusion that anxiety brings negative effect to language learning and they only consider the negative effect of anxiety (Hui-Ju Wu, 2011; Khodadady & Khajavy, 2013; Lien, 2011; Riasati, 2011; Tsai & Chang, 2013; Zheng & Cheng, 2018). However, many studies also found that anxiety can bring positive effect to language learning (Scovel, 1978; Oxford, 1999; Eysenck, 1979). Abubakar (2020) further contends that anxiety negatively affects learner’s confidence and self-esteem. So, having realized that they are anxious, the students become aware of themselves. The students feel the sense of competitiveness so when they realize that they are anxious, their motivation is high and it improve their reading comprehension. Students who are realize that they are anxious motivate themselves to study and finally they achieve successfulness in study.

The studies on anxiety explore this personality factor based on specific situation. Scovel (1978) and Oxford (1999) for instance classified anxiety according to its effects, that is debilitative anxiety or anxiety that brings negative effect to language learning and facilitative anxiety or anxiety that makes behave positively. Some of scholars divided anxiety based on learning situation, that is classroom and test anxiety. Finally, there is also division of anxiety based on language skills, which are writing, speaking, listening and reading. Among the four skills, reading anxiety is quite interesting to explore in the context of young learners since the portion of reading lesson in English learning in junior high school is quite large. Besides, reading is also tested in final examination every semester.

Many people believed that reading is an easy process since they assume that one has only know the meaning of a discourse word by word, however, in fact it is not only involve the knowledge of vocabularies itself but also the ability to comprehend the interpretation of the text (Rajab, Azizah, et al. 2012). One of the factors is reading anxiety. Reading anxiety is a phenomenon related to, but distinct from, general foreign language anxiety (Saito et al, 1999). Reading anxiety has positive correlation with foreign language anxiety. It means that those who suffer high level of reading anxiety tend to experience high level of foreign language anxiety. In addition, reading anxiety, as well as foreign language anxiety, has negative correlation with students’ performance. It indicates that students with high reading anxiety have lower score in their performance, vice versa.
Saito et al. (1999) stated that two aspects of foreign language reading seem to have great potential for eliciting anxiety. The first is unfamiliar scripts and writing systems. Unfamiliar writing systems deal with certain languages which have different writing systems with the reader’s first language. For instance, Indonesian and English have same writing systems that are Roman alphabet, while Korean has different writing system that is hang-geul. The readers whose L1 and L2 different writing system will experience higher reading anxiety compared with those whose L1 and L2 have same writing system. They will experience anxiety as soon as they attempt to decode the scripts because they will find difficulty in processing the text. According to them, foreign language learners who are more familiar to the scripts of the target language would be less expected to experience anxiety in reading. The second is unfamiliar cultural material. The impact of unfamiliar culture material is not as immediate as unfamiliar writing systems. The readers at first will encounter the symbols, decode them into sounds and associate the sounds with the words, and then attempt to process the meaning of a text. It is at the point when the reader realizes the words he decoded do not constitute a comprehensible or logical message entity that one would expect anxiety to set in. In other words, the readers can decode the words and make meaning of the sentence. However, at some point of reading process, the reader would not make sense of the whole text due to the incomplete knowledge of the culture material underlying the text.

Furthermore, Al-Shboul et al. (2013) listed five underlying factors that provoke reading anxiety. The five underlying factors are divided into two types: text features and personal factors. Text features refer to factors that the text itself which makes the readers anxious; while the personal factors refer to the personality of the reader which makes the reading anxiety occurs. The reading anxiety factors based on text features are unknown vocabulary, unfamiliar topic and unfamiliar culture; while the personal factors are afraid of making errors and worry about reading effects.

Potential factors provoking reading anxiety in Indonesian senior high school context have been explored by Muchlis (2017). He found that reading aloud tends to make students feel anxious compared than silent reading. Being afraid of reading effect when they read aloud lead the students prefer focusing on their performance rather than comprehending the content of the text since they perceive reading aloud as a kind of public speaking. Fear of negative evaluation from peers and teachers is still the key issue in this situation.
Referring to the above explanation, reading anxiety’s symptoms are still important issue to be explored. There are very little researchers examine reading anxiety symptoms among young learners, especially students of junior high school most of them only explored the anxiety phenomena suffered by university and adult learners since anxiety is related with self-esteem which commonly known just experienced by adult learners. Students’ perception towards reading is also important to study as perception can affect their attitude towards the issued.

Thus, this study aims at identifying the level of anxiety experienced by the EFL young learners while reading in the classroom context and to investigate the symptoms of anxiety suffered by young learners as well as their perception towards reading in English and their current reading ability. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the study of affective domain studies. It might also serve beneficial inputs for practitioners for classroom interaction especially English teachers and students in order to create effective EFL classroom environment.

**METHOD**

The design of this study was quantitative research. The research was carried out in the second-grade students of a junior high school in Makassar with age between 13-14 years old. The sample of this study was 30 students which consisted of which it consisted of 30 students who were 16 males and 14 females, and selected using purposive sampling method. The data were collected using questionnaire named Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale (FLRAS) which which was translated into Bahasa Indonesia and developed by Saito et al (1999) and consists of 20 items of statement with five-point Likert scale. The reliability of this test has been investigated and it shows that acceptable level of reliability with an internal consistency coefficient of 0.86 (n=383). The data were analyzed with descriptive statistics. The questionnaire was analyzed based on the percentage of each answer. To find out the level of anxiety, the result of FLARS was converted into score. Then, based on score, students’ anxiety level was classified into very low, low, average, high and very high.

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The result of data analysis is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Descriptive statistics of reading anxiety level experienced by the students</th>
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Table 1 showed anxiety level that experienced by the students. The mean score of the data was 65.633. Based on the mean score, it can be concluded that the students experienced “high” level of anxiety under study although the value is a little bit higher than the limit of moderate level which is 60.0.

The detailed result of the questionnaire is elaborated in order to find out the symptoms of anxiety and what students feel when they experiencing reading anxiety. The questionnaire was analyzed based on the percentage of each answer.

**Symptoms of Reading Anxiety**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(SRA1) I get upset when I am not sure whether I understand what I am reading in English.</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(SRA2) When reading English, I often understand the words but still can’t quite understand what the author is saying.</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(SRA3) When I am reading English, I get so confused I can’t remember what I am reading.</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(SRA4) I feel intimidated whenever I see a whole page of English in front of me.</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(SRA5) I am nervous when I am reading a passage in English when I am not familiar with the topic.</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(SRA6) I get upset whenever I encounter unknown grammar when reading English.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(SRA7) When reading English, I get nervous and confused when I don’t understand every word.</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(SRA8) It bothers me to encounter words I can’t pronounce while reading English.</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(SRA9) I usually end up translating word by word when I am reading English</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(SRA10) By the time you get past the funny letters and symbols in English, it’s hard to remember what you are</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
reading about. (SRA11) I am worried about all new symbols I have to learn in order to read in English. 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>7%</th>
<th>27%</th>
<th>20%</th>
<th>40%</th>
<th>7%</th>
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</thead>
</table>

Table 2 illustrates symptoms of reading anxiety experienced by young learners. Overall, the students experienced several symptoms of reading anxiety even though they are not extremely dominant. It proves by the result of questionnaire in which the students tend to choose “agree” and “disagree” rather than “strongly agree” and “strongly disagree”. It was also found that many students did not decide their arguments and only choose “neutral”.

Based on the data from Table 2, there are some symptoms of reading anxiety experienced by young learners as mentioned in items SRA1, SRA2, SRA5, SRA7, SRA9 and SRA10. Firstly, item SRA1 indicates that the students feel upset when they are not sure whether they understand what they are reading. Secondly, item SRA2 implies that when they are reading English, they often understand the meaning of the words but they still cannot understand what the author intends to say. Thirdly, item SRA5 mentions that the students feel nervous when they are reading a passage in English in which the topic is not familiar with them. Fourthly, item SRA7 indicates that the students feel nervous when they do not understand their reading. Fifthly, item SRA9 implies that the students always translate word by word when they are reading English. Finally, item SRA10 mentions that by the time they get past the funny letters and symbols, it is hard to remember what they are reading about.

On the other hand, there are also some items of the questionnaire that do not experienced by the students while they are anxious, they are SRA3, SRA4, SRA6 and SRA11. First, item SRA3 indicates students’ disagreement with the statement and implies that when they are reading English, they do not feel confused and still can remember what they are reading. Moreover, item SRA4 implies their disagreement with the statement and implies that they do not feel intimated whenever they see a whole page of English. Furthermore, item SRA6 mentions their disagreement with the statement and implies that the reading anxiety experienced by the students does not been provoked by unknown grammar. Even though they encounter unknown grammar, they still feel comfortable to read. Besides, item SRA8 indicates their disagreement and implies that difficulty in pronouncing the words in English does not prove reading anxiety. At last, item SRA11 indicates that they are not worried about all new symbols they have to learn in order to read in English and it cannot provoke reading anxiety.
Table 3. Students’ Perception on Reading English

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(SPRE1) I enjoy reading English.</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(SPRE2) Once I get used to it, reading English is not so difficult.</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(SPRE3) The hardest part of learning English is learning to read.</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(SPRE4) I would be happy just to learn to speak English rather than having to learn to read as well.</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(SPRE5) I don’t mind reading to myself, but I feel very uncomfortable when I have to read English.</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(SPRE6) English culture and ideas seems very foreign to me.</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(SPRE7) I have to know so much about English history and culture in order to read English.</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 illustrates the result of questionnaire in term of students’ perception on reading English. Overall, the students have positive perception on reading English. They enjoy reading for themselves; however, they do not like if they must read for studying purposes. Besides, compared to other skills in language learning, they prefer speaking to reading. They further considered that reading is the hardest part of language learning. In Indonesia, junior high school students only learn 3 skills; they are speaking, writing and reading. Listening is only taught in senior high school.

Students’ positive perception is showed in some items of questionnaire. Firstly, item SPRE1 indicates that the students enjoy reading in English. Next, item SPRE2 mentions that they find that reading is not difficult when they are accustomed to reading. So, in order to keep their interest, students are suggested to read more frequently. When they are stop reading in certain period of time, they will become lazy which leads they perceived reading not positive anymore. Finally, item SPRE5 implies that the students actually like reading, however they do not like if they are obliged to read. So, the students like reading in their spare time in which they themselves decide what to read.

However, if compared with other skills, the students perceive that reading is not preferred. Item SPRE3 indicates that the hardest part of learning English is learning to read and item SPRE4 indicates that the students prefer speaking English than reading English. The
two items imply that the students prefer productive skills to receptive skills. In Indonesian junior high school, the receptive skill that is taught is only reading; while listening is studied in senior high school level.

Next, item SPRE6 mentions that the English culture and ideas felt very foreign to the students and SPRE7 indicates that in order to read English, the students have to know so much about English culture and history. These last two items imply students’ perception of the importance of learning culture and history in order to understand the language. It can be concluded that the students are still lack of exposure to the culture and history of English.

Students’ Perception on Their Ability in Reading English

Table 4. Students’ Perception on Their Ability in Reading English

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(SPRE1) I am satisfied with the level of reading ability in English</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>that I have achieved so far.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(SPRE2) I feel confident when I am reading in English.</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, the students feel satisfied with their ability in reading English. It is proved by their response on the questionnaire in items SPRE1 and SPRE2. Item SPRE1 indicates that the students are satisfied with the level of reading ability which they achieved so far; while item SPRE2 implies that they feel confident when they are reading in English. The perception of their own ability is believed closely related with their perception on reading English itself.

Based on the analysis result, not all of the symptoms generally experienced by people also felt by EFL young learners in Indonesia context. There are some features that do not experienced by the students while they are anxious, such as when they are reading English, they do not feel confused and still can remember what they are reading. It may happen since the level of anxiety is a little bit higher than average level. Furthermore, they do not feel intimidated whenever they see a whole page of English. It is assumed that the students are fond of reading, so it does not make them feel intimidated if they see a very long passage. Moreover, reading anxiety experienced by the students does not been provoked by unknown grammar, even though they encounter unknown grammar, they still feel comfortable to read. The second-grade students of junior high school still do not learn various kinds of grammar. They still learn basic grammar and their learning still focus on enriching vocabularies and comprehending the text. Besides, difficulty in pronouncing the words in English does not
prove reading anxiety and they are not worried about all new symbols they have to learn in order to read in English and it cannot provoke reading anxiety. It is because Indonesian and English have similar writing system, so the students do not exposed by new symbols.

Besides, due to the student’s level is junior high school, so they study the vocabularies which are used commonly in daily discourse. So, it was quite easy for them to guess the meaning. Furthermore, the topic of the text is also very familiar, that is concerning daily life; thus, they did not encounter any obstacles in comprehending the texts and answering the questions followed. It does not support the findings of Al-Shboul et al. (2013) which reveal that reading anxiety is provoked by text features, they are unknown vocabulary and unfamiliar culture. The result may be different if the sample is student of higher education since they encounter various topics. In addition, the personal factors, such as afraid of making errors and worry about reading effects seem to not to be any problems in this context since they just learn reading in silent mode, and not reading aloud.

The finding of this study goes in line with Saito et al. (1999) that the students will not comprehend the whole text if they are not familiar with the culture of the target language. The students realize that culture plays important part in language learning.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that the students experience high level of anxiety while studying even though the number is a little bit higher than the limit of average level. There are some symptoms of reading anxiety that are commonly recognized by the students, they are the students feel upset when they are not sure whether they understand what they are reading, when they are reading English, they often understand the meaning of the words but they still cannot understand what the author intends to say, the students feel nervous when they are reading a passage in English in which the topic is not familiar with them, the students feel nervous when they do not understand their reading, the students always translate word by word when they are reading English and by the time they get past the funny letters and symbols, it is hard to remember what they are reading about. They tend to perceive reading in English as very interesting activity as well as they are satisfied with their ability in reading. The findings of this study might be used as input to teachers and students in an effort to create effective classroom environment.
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