The Relationship between Anxiety Level and Foreign Language Learners' Reading Comprehension

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Abstract—**This research attempted to examine whether there is any statistically significant relationship between reading anxiety and students in reading comprehension. Additionally, it also analyzed the level of reading anxiety experience among students in reading comprehension among 95 students of second semester of English department of Halu Oleo University. The results revealed that a statistically significant relationship was found between reading anxiety and students reading comprehension and most of students frequently experienced average level of reading anxiety in their reading comprehension.**

Keywords—reading anxiety; level of reading anxiety; reading comprehension

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, research interest has been focused on the examination of student distinction variables for successful language learning [1]. It means that there can be undoubtedly that it is influenced by several factors that may reduce it, like anxiety or by others that may increase it, for example general mental ability, emotional and social maturity. Similarly, both English as Second Language and English as Foreign Language individual dissimilarities divide into three kinds of categories which are: (a) cognitive factors as well as language learning strategies, language learning experiences and etc., (b) affective factors such as learning styles, motivational constructs, self-confidence, language anxiety etc. and (c) other various factors as well as the age of the learners and etc. [2].

Meanwhile, discussing about affective factors in education has a long history since 1970s, with the respect to the awareness in the research field of foreign language learning and teaching has been increased. Suggestions of affective factors have developed into the most important concern in this research field [3]. Indicates affective variables should be considered when creating a solid framework for the language learning process not only in second language but also in foreign language [4].

Anxiety is another affective concept which consider as a prominent factor in foreign language learning [5]. The current era may be said to be an era of anxiety. For many years, researchers have believed anxiety has potential to disrupt learning a foreign language. Anxiety is one of affective

variables both in language acquisition and learning, these variables are considered as everything which interrupts on language learning which is unconnected to cognition [6]. He highlights that anxiety is considered as one of the most well documented psychological constructs. Anxiety has been had synonymous with apprehension, dread and uneasiness [7]. This emotion stems from fear, but it is more a fear of what will happen or what has happened than of a clearly apparent fear provoking situation [8]. Anxiety is individual feeling of tension, apprehension, and worry related to a stimulation of the autonomic nervous system. Because anxiety avoids forming successfully in many people such as in science or mathematics, foreign language learning [9].

A fair number of studies have conducted to identify and define the construct of anxiety, a key individual divergence in language learning achievement for several decades [5,6,10]. Some notable examples find out that perspective of anxiety indicated very inconsistent results relating to the relationship between anxiety and second language achievement [6]. In this regard, he emphasizes facilitating anxiety happens when the difficulty level of the task generates the appropriate amount of anxiety. Nevertheless, even though a definite level of anxiety may be helpful, too much anxiety can guide to a debilitating effect, which may lead to inefficient language performance.

Since then, researches on anxiety construct have been increasing by means of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), or other scales, even other instruments. Scholars commonly agree that certain degree of anxiety may motivate the student and make persuaded to better language achievement. Thus, anxiety is considered as a motive for receiving high language achievement. However, a high anxiety score may be one of the problems to language achievement [8].

Meanwhile, in terms of reading comprehension, in order to comprehend a text, a reader should carry out some of reading capabilities, for example student should make inferences to comprehend a reading passage. Comprehending a reading passage is not simple, reading success depends on some aspects such as the levels of readers' proficiency, types of text, text difficulty, and task demands [11]. Thus, comprehending of a reading text may differ between readers, because they do not only have different level of anxiety, but also they have

dissimilar psychological perspective and their purposes of reading are various [12].

Besides, anxiety as psychological construct also has significant role for students' reading comprehension. A number of researchers have speculated anxiety is unlikely to be a causal variable in terms of reading comprehension both English as Foreign Language and English as Second Language context [13,14]. An obvious example of this is attempt to compare the anxiety level between two groups of students: science and non-science and determining the relationship between reading anxiety and reading performance [13]. The result of this research indicates that anxiety is one form of emotional problem that could affect learners' academic performance. This study shows that the second language reading anxiety level of undergraduates was at high level indicating that these learners experience high anxiety when performing reading in a second language.

Positive affect is good for students' reading comprehension meanwhile negative affect will inevitably obstruct students' reading comprehension. Anxiety is one of the fundamental affective factors in reading process, which assists to decide the level of proficiency achieved by different students. In addition, affective filter hypothesis is one of his five input Hypotheses developed by Krashen. According to him, in affective filter hypothesis theory, anxiety as one of affective factors in language learning has function as a filter which filtrate the amount of input in students' brains. This means that students with high affective filter will lower their intake whereas students with low affective filter allow more input into their language acquisition device. In other words, students with low level of anxiety may comprehend reading text easier compare with students with high level of anxiety [15].

A. Anxiety as Affective Filter Hypothesis

It accentuates the realization that scholars' attentions have been emphasized to the individual variations in language learning since 1970s. Individual variations can be addressed to affective factors of language learning. In this respect, affective factors in language learning include learner's emotion, learner's feeling and learner's attitude. These affective factors may pressure learners' learning process and learners' language output positively or negatively. Ironically, anxiety as psychological factor is consider as one of the most negatively influential affective sides, in this regard it may hinder learners effectively in learning language not only in foreign language but also in second language context. By all means, repeat that in current research in English as Foreign Language, a great deal of effort has been dedicated to discovering the function of psychological factors in the success or failure of the learners, one of these factors is anxiety.

Given this orientation, has been developed a theory relates to anxiety as affective variable, that is Affective Filter Hypothesis [15]. He argues that affective filter is a kind of psychological problem that avoids learners from fascinating available comprehensible input entirely. Affective filter variable divides into three constructs namely motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety [15]. This his theory, these affective filter variables have function as a filter that reduces the amount

of language input the learner is able to understand [15]. It means that several affective factors in language learning that are like a filter which filtrate the amount of language input in learners' brains [16].

Furthermore, language learners with high affective filter will lower their intake. On the contrary, language learners with low affective filter allow more input into their language acquisition device. Anxiety as negative emotion prevents efficient processing of the language input therefore this construct must be reduced. Due to learners with high level of anxiety will obtain little input their language intake. On the contrary, language learners with low level of anxiety will acquire more input into their language acquisition [15]. The Affective Filter Hypothesis indicates that the psychological constructs strongly affect the language learners' input and how much input is changed into language acquisition device [3].

B. Characteristics of Anxious Students

Language research has recognized some characteristics of anxious students. Generally, anxious students are often worried about the impressions that others form of them. In this regard, when these students are confronted in a classroom with a learning condition that makes them uncomfortable, they may choose to leave the activity. Some learners believe they cannot perform in English and thus form negative expectations, which in turn lead to reduced effort and the avoidance of chances to improve their communication skills [17].

Hence, a high level of anxiety may obstruct students' attention on the task due to anxiety basically contributes to narrowing of attention ability, especially when reading a text [18]. Consequently, the student's experiences discrepancies in their performance to comprehend a text and to retain information the prominent points in the text. By contrast, students who have low anxiety, they have high level of self-efficacy which it leads to the lowest level of anxiety. Additionally, student who has low anxiety, it can be considered by having a good concentration in comprehending the texts, less of worry, and his memory working well when read the academic text [19].

C. Concept of Reading Comprehension

By and large, it is considered vital to focus on reading comprehension. In this case, it is critical to make the students realize that reading, and reading with comprehension, is of vital importance not only in school, but in everyday life. Whether it is the necessity for learning something new, increasing knowledge, or searching for information, student has to be able to read with a good comprehension [20].

Comprehension is the purpose of both reading and listening. Successful comprehension allows readers (or listeners) to attain information, to experience and be aware of other worlds (including fictional ones), to communicate effectively, and to reach academic success [21]. Comprehension means making sense of what student reads. In this case, a reader who comprehends text is considered as an active reader. Comprehension is complex, yet reading researchers have increased approaches to teach students to be

active readers through steps good readers receive to make sense of what they read [22].

Reading comprehension is the capability to deeply and actively gather meaning from written text [22]. Reading comprehension is a complicated topic. Predicting success in comprehension needs knowing about the reader, about what kind of the text being read, about the task being undertaken, and about the socio-cultural context in which the reading is taking place. Since reading comprehension shades into learning, creating a worldview, and discipline-specific literacy practices, it is not easy to set up firm boundaries around comprehension; nevertheless, it is clear that more attention to comprehension is needed across the grades [23]. In this case, reading comprehension is the key in long-term reading a text successfully. When it comes to providing all students a chance for the success in life that is made possible by the capability to read, achieving and maintaining improved outcomes in reading comprehension is the important component.

D. Phase of Reading Comprehension

The first phase of reading comprehension is pre-reading. Throughout the pre-reading phase, readers may do several activities for instance offering a lot of time, endeavor, or concentration to the context of the reading text, realizing or comprehending what happens in the content of the text, deciding the excuse and cause of reading, discovering a word to state about the topic, stating their own experiences that are related to the topic, attempting to activate present cultural knowledge, and acquiring familiar with the vocabulary of the reading text. Besides, these activities are also intended to develop readers' concern in the reading topic and allow them to convey their thoughts toward the reading text. In the pre-reading stage there is a chance for the teacher and students not merely to practice various key components of language but also to trigger readers' prior knowledge of the reading topic [24].

Next, while-reading is the second phase of reading comprehension. The while-reading stage helps pupils to be active while they read and facilitates them to pursue the reading text to comprehend the order of ideas and information it comprises. In this phase, pupils make notes by writing some helpful information, ask questions, ensure prior knowledge, and guess predictions about what is going to happen in the next part of the reading text. The teacher may support pupils to write down a few questions about the reading text and in the while-reading phase they endeavor to discover the answers to those questions [24].

Finally, the post-reading phase becomes the last phase of reading comprehension. In this phase, there are a range of activities, but using these activities in the classroom must be directly connected with the reading rationale. Students should use their notes and what they have read importantly. They can discuss the reading text, do role play, increase vocabulary, and answer the post-reading questions.

II. RESEARCH METHODS

This research employed quantitative research, particularly correlational design. It was used to quantify the problem by way of generating numerical data or data that can be transformed into usable statistics [25]. Quantitative selected for this study because the researcher intends to examine the relationship between anxiety and students' reading comprehension. In addition, the researcher also proposed to analyze the level of anxiety was experienced among students in reading comprehension, particularly when they read a reading passage. The study conducted in second semester of English Department of Halu Oleo University who enrolled in academic year 2018. The total numbers of the population are 95 students. The study applied Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale (FLRAS), adopted by Saito et al. to assess students' reading anxiety and reading comprehension test [26]. Inferential analysis aims to test hypothesis using *Pearson* correlation analysis. Pearson correlation analysis applied for the purpose assessing the relationship between one dependent variable and one independent variable [27].

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

A. Correlation between Reading Anxiety and EFL Studens' Reading Comprehension

TABLE I.   CORRELATION BETWEEN READING ANXIETY AND EFL STUDENS' READING COMPREHENSION

		Reading Anxiety	Reading Comp.
Reading Anxiety	Pearson Correlation	1	272
	Sig. (1-tailed)		004
	N	95	95
Reading Comp.	Pearson Correlation	272	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	004	
	N	95	95
	Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed)		

According on the table above, it indicates that p value is less than the alpha value at the level significance (p < 0.05). It displays the result of Pearson correlation analysis is 0.004 (0.004 < 0.05). This means that the null hypothesis (is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. On other words, there is a significant relationship between students' reading anxiety and their reading comprehension. Meanwhile, the strength of correlation between reading anxiety and students' reading comprehension is 0.272.

TABLE II.   READING ANXIETY EXPERIENCE OF EACH LEVEL (N=95)

Anxiety Level	N	Mean	S. D
Low	40	49.65	6.334
Average	48	56.23	4.359
High	7	69.57	2.149
Overall	95	51.31	10.02

In table 2, the most reading anxiety, which is frequently experienced by EFL students who participated in this research, are shown. Accordingly, EFL students experienced average reading anxiety level (M = 56.23, S.D = 4.359).

B. Discussion

In this discussion, the researcher will explore and expand the findings in before subsection. The purpose of the present study examined the relationship between reading anxiety and students'reading comprehension. Furthermore, it also examined the most frequent level of reading anxiety experience among students in their reading comprehension in the second semester students of English Department of Halu Oleo University.

To answer the first question concerned the relationship between reading anxiety and students' reading comprehension. In other words, it examined whether a highly anxious students was anxious in their reading comprehension as well or vice versa. The correlation analysis revealed any significant relationship, as the literature indicated a significant relationship between the two variables [28]. In this regard, investigating the relationship between reading anxiety and students' reading comprehension, the correlation coefficient of reading anxiety scores and students' reading anxiety was calculated according to Pearson correlation analysis. The results indicated that these two variables had a positive relationship (r= 0.004) which is statistically significant at $p < 0.05$ or $(0.004 < 0.05)$.

The positive relationship between reading anxiety and reading comprehension is consistent with most of the previous studies [29,30]. Although, previous researches revealed that reading anxiety was not related to reading comprehension [31,32]. However, the present results were again in contrast with existing literature. The reason for discrepancy between the results of the present research and other studies considering the relationship between reading anxiety and students' reading comprehension might be due to using different statistical procedures (factor analysis vs. correlation coefficient).

To address the last research question, which dealt with analyze the most frequent level of anxiety experience among EFL students in reading comprehension, particularly when they read an English reading passage. To gather the information about the students' reading anxiety level when encounter English reading text, Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale (FLRAS) was administrated to the students. It was a questionnaire which consisted of 17 items. Additionally, level of reading anxiety in the present study categorized into three levels, namely low level, average level, and high level.

With regard to each level of the reading anxiety, the most frequent level of reading anxiety experienced by EFL students was average level (M = 56.23, S.D. = 4.359), in this regard as much as 48 students experienced average level of reading anxiety. Followed by low level (M = 49.65, S.D. = 6.334), in this case as much as 40 students experienced low level of reading anxiety. Also, high level (M = 69.57, S.D. = 2.149), in this regard as much as 7 students experienced high level of reading anxiety in their reading comprehension. Meanwhile, as mentioned previously, this study involved 95 students, therefore the average mean score of the overall level of reading anxiety was (M = 51.31, S.D = 10.02). This result is reasonable by recognizing students' reading anxiety might engage in their processing capacity and decrease the concentration they could have when they read the reading text, and hence negatively manipulate their reading comprehension. As the more anxious students have less concentration on the reading text. In this regard, they might need more time to interpret meanings of the unfamiliar vocabularies, collecting prior knowledge related to unknown topic even gathering information dealt with unfamiliar culture in the reading text. Therefore, the students with higher reading anxiety might comprehend less in reading passage.

C. Pedagogical Implications

A short review of the literature indicated that not only reading anxiety a worldwide issue in language classes, but also much consideration has been given to the other affective factors of each students in English as Foreign Language classes. The aforementioned findings and discussion had pedagogical implications for language learning as well as English teachers or lecturers. Moreover, for English teachers or lecturers, it needed to be taken into consideration when dealing with students who have low and high reading anxiety, particularly, when teaching reading comprehension.

In this case, it was not only English teachers, but also English lectures should make an effort to decrease students' reading anxiety due to it is considered as debilitative factor in reading comprehension. Therefore, English teachers and lecturers are expected to facilitate language learning through giving an encouraging and pleasant learning environment, using communicative teaching methods and making use of interesting reading topics and cultures which are relevant to the students' daily lives [31].

IV. Conclusion

Based on the findings, data analysis, and discussion of this research, it could be drawn that a statistically significant relationship was found between reading anxiety and students' reading comprehension, $p < 0.05$ or $(0.004 < 0.05)$. However, the strength of correlation between reading anxiety and students' reading comprehension was 0.272 (r = 0.272). It considered as "low" correlation between these two variables. It might be the fact that most of students frequently experienced average level of reading anxiety in their reading comprehension. Furthermore, it is also worth to note that the findings of this research proved that the lower reading anxiety, the higher scores students obtained in the reading comprehension test. sum up, this research revealed that reading anxiety was positively related to students' reading ability.

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