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# Reading Anxiety Among Junior High School Students in Mataram: A Survey Study

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| Article Info | Abstract |
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| | This study aims to identify reading anxiety among junior high school students. The research design employed a quantitative approach in the form of a survey study. There were 80 respondents who were willing to participate in this study. The respondents were students from one of junior high schools in Mataram, Indonesia. All respondents were students from grades 8 and 9. To collect the data, this study adapted a questionnaire from Ahmad et.al. (2013) which consists of five domains of reading anxiety, i.e., (1) lack of vocabulary, (2) unfamiliar topic, (3) unfamiliar culture, (4) afraid of making errors, and (5) worry about reading effects. Based on the results, the statement with the highest score is "I enjoy reading a text in English text in English when I know its translation" (*M*=4.15; *SD*=.730). Meanwhile, the statement with the lowest score is "In reading aloud in the class I do not understand the text even though it is easy" (*M*=3.00; *SD*=1.055). The data imply that the most significant factor in students' reading anxiety is lack of vocabulary and the least factor is worrying about reading effects.<br><br>**Keywords:** *junior high school, reading, reading anxiety* |

**INTRODUCTION**

Reading is linked to instruction that students find anxious or difficult (Johnson, 2008). However, some studies show that students are not able to perform well in reading activities because they experience reading anxiety. A study by Ahmad et.al. (2013) shows that students experience anxiety because of personal factors and text features. In addition, students will enjoy reading if they comprehend the vocabulary. In line with Ahmad et.al. (2013), Aisyah (2017) also found that unknown vocabulary is the most common cause of reading anxiety in English as a foreign language classroom. Furthermore, a study by Muhlis (2017) supports the previous finding by confirming that unknown vocabulary creates anxiety toward students' comprehension of English reading materials. In short, most studies agree that the lack of vocabulary contributes as the biggest cause of anxiety. Unfamiliar vocabulary might be related to the learners comprehension and could cause difficulty which is turning into anxiousness (Ahmad et al., 2013).

Despite the similarities of some previous studies, there is still limited study on reading anxiety for junior high school students because most of the studies represented students from senior high school and higher education. Ahmad et.al. (2013) identified the reading anxiety of 384 freshmen students at Yarmouk University. Meanwhile, Al-Sohbani (2018) examined foreign reading anxiety levels in secondary school students, ranging from age 16 to 17. Muhlis (2017) and Male (2018) investigated foreign language reading anxiety among Indonesian EFL senior high school students. Aisyah (2017) described the level and the cause of students' anxiety in a reading class. The respondents of this study were junior high school students in grade 8. However, there were only 33 respondents who were willing to participate in her research. The presentation of the data was not able to represent diverse responses (Aisyah, 2017). Because of the limited studies on junior high school students, most reading anxiety data represent adult learners only. In reality, foreign language anxiety can occur in young learners as well (Liu & Hong, 2021). Liu and Hong (2021) suggest that young learners can experience anxiety in a form of sweating, trembling or not knowing what to do/say. Therefore, Nilsson (2019) suggests that teachers perceive foreign language anxiety as an evaluation of teaching practices, not a negative trait of students in learning target language. Teachers also need to conduct intervention strategies at the early of formal education to address reading abilities, negative feeling toward reading and students' perception on their own reading ability (Ramirez et al., 2019).

To fill the gap, this study would like to describe the cause of reading anxiety of junior high school students in Indonesia. Reading anxiety in this research refer to foreign language anxiety which concerns to performance evaluation in academic and social settings (Horwitz et al., 1986). Conceptually, there are three kinds of performance anxieties, i.e., communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation (Horwitz et. al., 1986). Communication apprehension is related to difficulties in communicating with people, meanwhile, test anxiety refers to a fear of failure. In addition, fear of negative evaluation occurs due to fear of people' perspective toward oneself. Reading anxiety is affected by several factors such as personal factors and social identities. Personal factors bring difficulty to students in understanding the value of certain topics. It occurs because they concentrate on the task rather than comprehension. Thus, they tend to connect their brain to worry and thus being anxious (Muhlis, 2017). As a result, some students avoid activities in English reading classes, cut the classes, postpone taking English courses until the last academic year, or at least they are not enthusiastic towards reading in English and in some cases, they avoid reading English materials. The anxiety encourages the student to 'battle' the new step of the learning task. Therefore, it is important to investigate more about students' reading anxiety in EFL to assist students with effective activities to reduce their anxiety.

**RESEARCH METHOD**

This research aims to identify students' reading anxiety at junior high school level. The research design employed a quantitative approach in a form of a survey study. Survey studies describe the tendency from the data. 80 junior high school students were willing to participate in the research. The respondents were from grades 9 and 8. Grade 9 respondents included students from four classes meanwhile grade 8 involved students from two classes. There were limited circumstances to obtain students' participation in grade 7 due to pandemic lock down. Not all students came to the class because the school limited the classroom size for offline meeting. Before the respondents proceeded to answer the questionnaire, they were asked their willingness to participate in the research through Google Form. After declaring their consent, they continued to answer the questions.

The instrument was a questionnaire related to the cause of reading anxiety, developed by Ahmad et al. (2013).  It has 5 domains, consisting of: (1) lack of vocabulary (item number 1-6), (2) unfamiliar topic (item number 7-10), (3) unfamiliar culture (item number 11-15), (4) afraid of making errors (item number 16-20), and (5) worry about reading effects (item number 21-26) as seen in Table 1. The instrument was adapted because the questions represent general question about reading anxiety. It does not represent certain level of education. Thus, the instrument can be used to identify reading anxiety at school level. Before collecting the data, the instrument's content validity was validated. The instrument was reviewed by two expert judgments to ensure the validity of conceptual framework relevance and language translation. Next, the reliability of the instrument refers to Cronbach's alpha results which shows that the questionnaire is reliable with the score of .834. The results were determined by using central tendency technique which describe single numerical value based on the average collection of scores (Gall et al., 2003). The results were calculated by using SPSS and Microsoft Excel. The mean scores were calculated by dividing the sum of scores by the number of scores. The highest mean score indicates the most significant factors that contribute to reading anxiety meanwhile the lowest score indicates the least significant factor in causing reading anxiety.

Table 1. Distribution of Questionnaire Item

| No | Domain | Item numbers | Number of items |
|----|--------|--------------|-----------------|
| 1 | Lack of Vocabulary | 1-6 | 6 |
| 2 | Unfamiliar Topic | 7-11 | 6 |
| 3 | Unfamiliar Culture | 12-16 | 6 |
| 4 | Afraid of Making Errors | 17-21 | 6 |
| 5 | Worrying About Reading Effects | 22-26 | 6 |

The questionnaire was distributed using Google Form to students during classroom sessions. The link was also shared through WhatsApp group and Line to ensure widespread distribution for students in grade 8 and 9. The participants filled the questionnaire by choosing 5 scales, from scale 5 (which for strongly agree) to scale 1 (which for strongly disagree).

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The findings describe the results of factors of reading anxiety among junior high school students. The description is divided into two sections: results and discussion. The discussion presents some relevant previous studies to strengthen the facts. Based on the questionnaire, most students chose statement "*I enjoy reading a text in English text in English when I know its*

*translation" (M=*4.15*)*. It means that students will be enjoying reading a text in English text on English as long as they understand the vocabulary. It implies that students have limited vocabulary in English, thus, they feel more comfortable reading English texts with familiar vocabulary. Meanwhile, the lowest score in the questionnaire is *"Worrying About the Reading Effects" and "In reading aloud in the class I do not understand the text even though it is easy (M=*3.00*)"* It means that when it's reading aloud in class, they don't understand the text even though it is easy.

Moreover, each domain shows different results. In the domain of "lack of vocabulary", the highest score is in the statement for "*I enjoy reading a text in English text in English when I know its translation.*" (*M*=4.15). Most students agree that they enjoy reading a text in English when they know its translation. Meanwhile, the lowest is the statements for "*I feel anxious in reading English when I encounter series of three strange words.*" (*M*= 3.28). It means that most students do not mind finding strange words in English texts. Although they do not understand the words, small amounts of new vocabularies do not trigger their anxiety.

For domain "Unknown Topic", the highest scores are in the statement of *"I enjoy English reading when I understand at least some portion of the text"* (*M*=3.90). Students enjoy reading English when they understand at least some portion of the text. Meanwhile the lowest is the statement for *"I do not prefer reading unfamiliar topics, particularly in the English language."* (*M* =3.06). It confirms that familiarity of the topics is one of important consideration in reducing students' anxiety.

For the domain "Unknown Culture", the highest score is the statement *"It is frustrating in reading English when one word is connected with another to change the meaning."* (*M*=4.00). Students are feeling anxious when they read a text which present a variety of terminologies. Then, the lowest is the statement *"I most often feel that I cannot understand an English text even though I know every word's meaning"* (*M*=3.23). It means that most of students have difficulty in understanding the whole idea in an English text.

The next result is in the domain of "Afraid of Making Errors". The highest score is in the statement of *"When I am reading aloud, I focus on reading correctly rather than focusing on understanding the text"*. It implies that students focus more on reading activity instead of reading comprehension. Next, the lowest score is in the statement *"I feel irritated if I encounter a word, I do not know how it is pronounced"*. It means that students rarely have difficulty in basic reading skills, such as linguistics ability.

The last result is in the domain of "Worrying about Reading Effects". The highest score is in the statement of *"In reading aloud in the class I do not understand the text even though it is easy"*. Reading out loud makes the students focus more on their reading, therefore, they do not divert their attention from their reading to comprehend the text. Meanwhile, the lowest score is in the statement of *"When reading English, I get disturbed and do not remember what I have read"*. It means that students have difficulty in maintaining their reading concentration. Consequently, they are unable to remember what they have read.

The results of this study are in line with the studies from Ahmad et al., (2013), Aisyah (2017) and Muhlis (2017). Those studies reveal that there are two aspects of foreign language reading anxiety: personal factors and text features. These factors are a part of domain "lack of vocabulary" and "worrying about the reading effects". In addition, Mudra and Mckinnon (2022) also found that students experience reading anxiety when they do not comprehend grammatical components. As a result, they fail to master the reading context. Thus, it is confirmed that vocabulary and self-confidence are two biggest factors in creating reading

anxiety among students (Mudra & Mckinnon, 2022). Guimba and Alico (2015) stated that limited grammatical knowledge and unfamiliar culture contributes to reading anxiety. Therefore, teachers need to connect ideas from reading to capture general ideas (Guimba & Alico, 2015). Ayuningsih et al. (2021) suggests that students may experience anxiety in all aspects from worry of the reading effect, fear of making errors, fear of unfamiliar culture, fear of unfamiliar topic to fear of unknown vocabulary. The results suggest that students need more practice before reading. Before students explore specific readings, teachers might assist some activities to build their reading readiness. Le et.al. (2019) identify some factors that affects reading readiness, such as reading interest, parents' supports and types of books. Thus, school needs to encourage students' reading interest, create reading climate and give more time to read. In addition, parents' involvement can strengthen school program by participating in reading activities (Le et al., 2019). Moreover, Johnson (2008) lists some recommendations for teachers to create the condition for learning to read, for instance: encourage student to embrace reading, create a place for students to read every day, provide freedom for students to choose their readings, combine reading for fun and reading for practice, design a simple reading program with easy to follow instruction, formulate real reading activities which involve understanding ideas and enhance social interaction to support reading activities. In sum, reading activities should be viewed as a process, therefore, students are able to prepare themselves better. As a result, they will tend to recognize reading as familiar activity in daily life. It may help them to reduce reading anxiety.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study attempted to determine the factors of junior high school students' reading anxiety. The research used a survey study as a quantitative approach. The respondents were junior high school pupils from one of junior high school in Mataram, Indonesia. They were from grade 8 dan 9. This study adapted a questionnaire from Ahmad et al. (2013) by translating all questions to Indonesian. It was expected that the students would be able to choose the most appropriate response based on their selection because each item was presented in the official language of Indonesia. The results show that students tend to experience anxiety when they do not understand most of the vocabularies. Translation is a significant factor for them to help their comprehension. On the contrary, reading aloud contribute to decrease their anxiety levels because they concentrate on reading the words. Therefore, they do not feel too much anxiety. The findings imply that students need more preparation activities before reading. Teachers can facilitate some scaffoldings activities to build their vocabularies and classroom environments before exploring some readings. Although this research only represented one condition of junior high school students, it will be beneficial for investigating further research on teaching reading strategies.

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