



## **Students' Foreign Language Anxiety and English Reading Comprehension: A Correlational Study at Junior High School**

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### **Abstract**

The primary objective of this study was to examine the correlation between students' foreign language anxiety and English reading comprehension. This study employed a correlation research design. The sample was Junior High School students at the ninth grade of Junior High School 04 Dayun. Due to the small number of population in this study, which was 39 students, total sampling was taken. The study used a questionnaire to assess students' foreign language anxiety and a test to find out students' reading comprehension in collecting the data. To examine the relationship between two variables, this study employed the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation coefficient through SPSS 23.0. From the analysis, the result indicated that sig. (2-tailed) value was 0.001. It showed that  $H_0$  is rejected and  $H_a$  is accepted. The correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) value was -0.762. It reveals that there is significant correlation between students' foreign language anxiety and reading comprehension. In conclusion, the students' foreign language anxiety influences reading comprehension, which means that if students' foreign language anxiety is high, students' comprehension in reading will be low and vice versa.

**Keywords:** *foreign language anxiety, English reading comprehension, correlational study*

### **Introduction**

Reading, one of the significant skills, should be mastered by students. It provides the students with much information and broadens their knowledge. In reading, students process the information or written messages for comprehending the meaning of the text from what the author conveys. The more the students read, the more the information they get. According to Richard (2002), reading is obtaining meaning of printed material. This skill is a complex process and requires specific skill. Therefore, the focus of teaching

reading at school is to be independent and active readers and to introduce them to the pleasures and knowledge of effective reading.

In addition, the main purpose of reading is comprehension, not only for understanding the text itself, but also for broader learning, being successful in education, and job. To comprehend the text, readers should possess skills in terms of reading strategies. As mentioned by Oakhill, *et al.* (2015), it is a very complex task requiring the orchestration of many different cognitive skills and abilities. Subsequently, as noted by Klingner (2007), it is a multi-component, a very complex process involving many interactions between readers and the text (background knowledge and use of strategies) and the variables related to the text itself (interest in the text and understanding of text types). Pertaining to the definition, it can be inferred that reading comprehension is the power to get an idea or meaning from written text, understanding it by processing the experience and prior knowledge.

However, a great number of students still have poor comprehension in reading. It was obtained from the report of some international and national surveys. For instance, the International Education Achievement (IEA) in early 2000 conducted a survey. Its result indicated that reading quality of Indonesian children was ranked 29 out of 31 countries in Asia, Africa, Europe, and America. Therefore, the Human Development Index (HDI) in Indonesia is still low. It is supported by a survey carried out by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 2005 that Human Development Index in Indonesia was ranked 117 out of 175 countries (Bimba, as cited in Izzaty, 2014). Moreover, based on the study reported by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 2003, the Program for International Students Assessment (PISA) showed that the reading ability of 15 years old Indonesia students were at level 39 out of 41 countries, and in 2012 UNESCO reported that Indonesian reading interest index only obtained 0.001. It means that in every 1.000 people, only one person has a reading interest.

The problems of reading comprehension as mentioned above are in line with some notions. Most of students, in reading foreign language texts both the simple and complex texts, feel stressful and some think that the text is too hard to be understood (Fauziyah, 2015). It is also stated by Dallmann (1964) that “One cannot study well, in reading or anything else if he is disturbed by anxiety, frustration, and a sense of failure”. The problems can be explained in two aspects of why reading can be anxiety-provoking to learners, which are unfamiliar scripts, writing systems and unfamiliar cultural material (Saito *et al.*, 1999). It can be claimed that anxiety as a factor contributes to students comprehension in reading foreign language texts.

In relation to anxiety, Horwitz *et al.* (1986) described anxiety as the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry, which are associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system. If one has an anxious feeling, he or she cannot do something maximally in their life. One with high anxiety level can result in a negative effect. Conolly (2006) also stated that anxiety is a common feeling of being worried and fearful and is a normal part of someone’s development but it may become a problem when he/she increases or interferes with daily life. Conversely, Nevid (2009) argues that anxiety is an adaptive response in some situations. It motivates one to study before a test. If anxiety is

excessive in a particular situation or interferes with the ability to function, it can be abnormal. Fear is a word used to describe anxiety experienced in specific situations, as when following a final test.

In addition to the feeling of anxiety, it can possibly cause negative effect to the students' self-esteem and self-confidence, and extremely inhibit them from being proficient language learners. There are many different types of anxiety. It is critical to distinguish between various types of anxiety. Horwitz (2001) explained that psychologist offers three viewpoints on anxiety. First is Trait Anxiety. It is feeling anxious as a lifelong disposition. Once more, it seems to be connected to upbringing and may even be intimately related to one's self-image. People with high levels of trait anxiety are uneasy; they are unstable emotionally. Individuals with low trait anxiety tend to be emotionally stable and laid back. Second is State Anxiety. It is a temporary response to a specific stimulus. The anxiety is caused by a specific situation and it peaks at a specific moment. It may be related to specific people, a particular teacher. Third is Situation-specific Anxiety. It is similar to trait anxiety, but it is experienced in a specific context or situation. It is triggered by a particular situation type or event-examinations, public speaking, test-taking, or classroom participation. Every situation is different, thus one is probably nervous in a situation but not in others.

Even though negative effects may be caused by anxiety on language learning, it is believed that it could motivate language learning. Alpert and Haber in Brown (2007) provide the difference between facilitative and debilitating anxieties, which are also called helpful and harmful anxiety. Debilitating anxiety is harmful anxiety for language learning process. Anxious students have difficulties related to some tasks such as the feeling of discomfort and lack of confidence. Such problems will decrease concentration influencing the process of language learning. Next, facilitative anxiety is helpful which has a positive effect. A number of studies have discussed the benefit of facilitative anxiety in learning foreign languages. For instance, Bailey in Brown's (2007) in his study of competitiveness and anxiety in second language learning, facilitative anxiety was one key to success, closely related to competitiveness. This anxiety has been motivating students to study harder and make strengthen efforts to perform better in classroom activities.

In relation to the issues of foreign language anxiety and reading comprehension, several previous studies were found in Indonesia such as the research conducted by Azhari Muhlis (2017) and Utami Fauziyah (2015) focusing on senior high school students as the participants and in Iran such as the studies carried out by Reza Moghaddam Kiya (2015), Manoocheer Jafarigohar (2012), and Zahra Mohammadi Salari and Seyed Nezam al-din Moizade (2015) employing undergraduate students as research participants. From the participants of the studies in two countries, it is concluded that the research participants are in senior high school and university level whose ages are ranged 15 to 21 years. Despite some studies have been conducted, there is a lack of studies focusing on foreign language anxiety and reading comprehension in junior high school level. Therefore, the aforementioned condition provides a research opportunity in a Junior High School. This study attempted to examine the correlation between students' foreign language anxiety and their English reading comprehension at Junior High School.

## Methodology

This study employed a correlational research design. It provides an opportunity for the researcher to predict scores and explain the relationship among variables (Creswell, 2012). This study employed the quantitative method. As noted by Sugiyono (2015), quantitative methods are interpreted as the methods of research based on positivism philosophy, which are used to examine a particular population or sample, data collection using research instruments, and quantitative data analysis/statistics, and to test the hypothesis set. Similarly, Gay and Airasian (2000) explained that quantitative approaches are to describe current conditions, investigate relationships, and study cause-effect phenomena. This study comprised of two variables, which foreign language anxiety was an independent variable symbolized by “X” and reading comprehension was an dependent variable symbolized by “Y”.

The population of this research was the ninth grade students of Junior High School 04 Dayun. There were two classes consisting of 39 students as the total population. Because the number population is fewer than 100, the researcher used the total sampling technique. Arikunto (2006) stated that if the population is less than 100, it is better to take all of them as the sample but if the total population is over 100 students.

To collect the data, the researcher used an instrument questionnaire and test. The questionnaire was used to get data of students’ foreign language anxiety and the test was used to collect the data of students’ reading comprehension. For questionnaire the researcher adopted a questionnaire of the Foreign Language Anxiety Scale (FLAS) designed by Saito *et al.* (1999). FLAS is a self-report instrument consisting of 20 items of questions that measured the learners’ experience of reading anxiety in the classroom. The FLAS consists of a five-point Likert Scale, ranging from five points “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree”. Each item of score in the questionnaire depends on the negative wording or positive wording. The data of students’ reading comprehension scores were obtained from the daily test conducted by the teacher.

To investigate whether there is a positive and significant correlation between students’ foreign language anxiety and reading comprehension, the data were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) of SPSS 23.0 program for windows. In categorizing the variables of foreign language anxiety and reading comprehension, the researcher classified them into five categories. The next step is interpreting the index scores of “ $r$ ” correlation,  $r$  value ( $r_0$ ) usually used the interpretation.

## Results and Discussion

The data in this study were collected from the results of the questionnaire and students’ reading comprehension scores of daily tests. The data were used to analyze if there is a significant correlation between the students’ foreign language anxiety and reading comprehension as the focus of this study. Generally, this study found that there is a significant correlation between the students’ foreign language anxiety and reading comprehension. To see the findings in detail, the result of questionnaire for foreign language anxiety and reading comprehension test and the analysis of correlation are described as in the following:

### *Students' Foreign Language Anxiety*

The foreign language anxiety scale is grouped into five categories, namely: very low, low, moderate, high, and very high. From the data of questionnaire obtained, it was found the category of the students' foreign language anxiety as illustrated in Table 1.

**Table 1. Category of Students' Foreign Language Anxiety**

Category	Value	Frequency	Percent
Very Low	$X \leq 30$	0	0%
Low	$30 < X \leq 42.5$	15	38.5%
Moderate	$42.5 < X \leq 47.5$	2	5.1%
High	$47.5 < X \leq 60$	19	48.7%
Very High	$60 < X$	3	7.7%
Total		39	100%

Table 1. shows the findings of students' foreign language anxiety. From 39 students, only 3 students obtained very high category (7.7%), 19 students were categorized into high level (48.7%), 2 students reached moderate level of category (5.1%) and 15 students were in low level of category (38.5%). The result indicated that more than 50 % of students' foreign language anxiety was above moderate level.

### *Students' English Reading Comprehension*

The data of students' English reading comprehension were obtained from reading comprehension score of daily test. The result of this study is shown in the descriptive analysis.

**Table 2. Descriptive Statistics**

Reading	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Reading	39	60	96	76.54	9.763
Valid N (listwise)	39				

From table 2 above, it was found that the minimum score of students' English reading comprehension (Y) was 60 and the maximum score was 96, the mean score was 76.54 with a standard deviation of 9.763. Then, the scores of students' reading comprehension are categorized in the following table:

**Table 3. Category of Students' Reading Comprehension**

Category	Value	Frequency	Percent
Very Low	X < 61.45	3	7.7%
Low	61.45 < X < 71.15	13	33.3%
Moderate	71.15 < X < 80.85	11	28.2%
High	80.85 < X < 90.55	9	23.1%
Very High	90.55 < X	3	7.7%
Total		39	100%

Based on the category in table above, the finding indicated that very low category was reached by 3 students (7.7%), there were 13 students categorized into the level of low category (33.3%), 11 students obtained the level of moderate category (28.2%), 9 students were categorized into high category level (23.1%), and only 3 students reached very high category (7.7%). It can be inferred that most of the students got the level of low category.

***Correlation between Students' Foreign Language Anxiety and English Reading Comprehension***

To examine the students' relationship between students' foreign language anxiety and English reading comprehension, the Pearson Product Moment was applied using SPSS 23.00. The results of analysis are illustrated in Table 4

**Table 4. Pearson Product Moment**

	Description	Anxiety	Reading
Anxiety	Pearson Correlation	1	-.762
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	39	39
Reading	Pearson Correlation	-.762	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	39	39

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results of the calculation SPSS 23.0 showed the value of  $r_{xy}$  or  $r_o = -0.762$  with a negative relationship. It is revealed that higher the variable X is, the lower the variable Y is. The higher students' foreign language anxiety leads to the lower students' reading comprehension. The coefficient correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed). It means that there is a significant correlation between students' foreign language anxiety and English reading comprehension. Next, to find out the strength level of correlation between two variables, the interpretation of correlation coefficient table was used ((Riduwan, 2010)

**Table 5. The Interpretation of Correlation Coefficient**

Coefficient Interval	Interpretation
0.80-1.000	Very Strong
0.60-0.799	Strong
0.40-0.599	Average
0.20-0.399	Weak
0.00-0.199	Very Weak

With reference to table 5, the correlation coefficient obtained was -0.762, which means the level of students' foreign language anxiety and reading comprehension in the level of average. In Addition, to find out how significant the correlation between students' foreign language anxiety and English reading comprehension is, R determinant should be analyzed. It is illustrated in table 6 below.

**Table 6. Measures of Association**

Variable	R	R Squared	Eta	Eta Squared
Reading* Anxiety	-762	.581	.912	.831

Table 6 showed that result of R Squared was 58.1%. It can be inferred that the foreign anxiety of students provide some contribution to the students' English reading comprehension as much as 58.1% and the remaining about 41.9% was given by other variables.

Pertaining to the findings of this study, it can be discussed that the result of this study, there is a significant correlation between students' foreign language anxiety and their English reading comprehension, indicated that the higher students' foreign language anxiety is, the lower students' English reading comprehension is. Otherwise, the lower students' foreign language anxiety leads to the higher students' English reading comprehension. This study is challenging with the research by Manoochecr Jafarigohar (2012) which shows there was a significant negative relationship between foreign language anxiety and reading comprehension. However, it is in line with the research conducted by Hui-Ju Wu (2010), Azhari Muhlis (2017), Muhtihatul Salmiah (2017), and Utami Fauziyah (2015) that there is a significant correlation between students' foreign language anxiety and English reading comprehension.

Subsequently, the students' foreign language anxiety contributes 58.1% to the students' English reading comprehension and the remaining is 41.9% given by other variables, such as learning difficulties (Chen & Gorreti, 2008), motivation (Kitano, 2001), students' belief about language acquisition (Horwitz et al., 1986), students' achievement on examinations (Mostafa & Behzad, 2013) and willingness of communication (Yana, 2018).

Moreover, related to categorization of students' foreign language anxiety and reading comprehension in the research findings, it is clear that students' foreign language anxiety is in the category level of high. It means most students experienced high anxiety in English class. In a real language use situation, it is normal for second language learners to feel some anxiety. But, if students could not control their anxiety, it would be a problem. Reading comprehension is in a low category. Many students think that the text is too difficult to be understood and as threatening to them, so they show poor learning performance. The other factors that influence students' reading comprehension are intelligence, experience, and mechanism of reading, interest, and skill of comprehending. Above all, it can be explained that low anxiety is very important in learning to improve students' reading comprehension. The more students feel confident, the more the students will show high reading comprehension.

### **Conclusion**

The study, the correlation between students' foreign language anxiety and reading comprehension, comes to some conclusions. First, students' foreign language anxiety is relatively high. Second, students' reading comprehension is in a low category. Third, there is a significant correlation between students' foreign language anxiety and English reading comprehension. At last, to conclude, the students' foreign language anxiety contributes students' reading comprehension. It means that high foreign language anxiety results in low reading comprehension and vice versa.

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