

PROVIDING ENGLISH LANGUAGE INPUT: DECREASING STUDENTS' ANXIETY IN READING COMPREHENSION PERFORMANCE

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Abstract:

The primary condition for successful in second or foreign language learning is providing an adequate environment. It is as a medium of increasing the students' language exposure in order to be able to success in acquiring second or foreign language proficiency. This study was designed to propose the adequate English language input that can decrease the students' anxiety in reading comprehension performance. Of the four skills, somehow reading can be regarded as especially important because reading is assumed to be the central means for learning new information. Some students, however, still encounter many problems in reading. It is because of their anxiety when they are reading. Providing and creating an interesting-contextual reading material and gratified teachers can make out this problem which occurs mostly in Indonesian's classrooms. It revealed that the younger learners of English there do not received adequate amount of the target language input in their learning of English. Hence, it suggested the adoption of extensive reading programs as the most effective means in the creation of an input-rich environment in EFL learning contexts. Besides they also give suggestion to book writers and publisher to provide myriad books that appropriate and readable for their students.

Keywords: *English*

There are many research conducted in the latter context which are

identified students' lack of exposure to the target language or input-poor environment as a major problem in the learning English. Since comprehensible input in adequate amount is a primary (although not an exclusive) condition for L2 learning, its importance cannot be over emphasized in EFL contexts (Wang, 2011). Therefore, comprehensible input through extensive reading is very important to the young learners in mastering the language target.

Here extensive reading is as independence free reading at comfortable level and reading in quantity, in or out the classroom or school for the purposes of entertainment, information, or other pragmatic uses. Not only providing a comfortable level in doing extensive reading in or out the classroom, but also decreasing the students' reading anxiety is the way to improve the learners' English language input. Hence, the present study is to look into the issue of decreasing students' reading anxiety in extensive reading at high school or even in college levels.

Anxiety, a complicated phenomenon, is a kind of emotion so the issue of anxiety in second language (L2) learning has concerned language educators and researchers for many years. A substantial amount of research has been conducted in this area and suggests that anxiety is an important factor in SLA - Second Language Acquisition (Na, 2007; Wei, 2007). However, most of the research centers on the discussion of listening, speaking, and writing. Little attention has been paid to reading.

The type of motivation for reading a particular text is an important factor influencing the choice of approach to learning, and thus also determining likely levels of outcome. It concluded that students naturally perform better on reading comprehension when there is no expectation of a factual knowledge test. Many researchers explored the imagery and emotional responses that readers experienced while reading a text in L1 and L2. Readers completed rating scales for imagery and emotional response ratings as well as free reports. Overall, findings revealed that affect and imagery are present during the reading process and that the "nonverbal representational system is a fundamental component of both L1 and L2 reading". Saito, Horwitz,

and Garza (1999) found that foreign language reading anxiety does exist, and that it is distinct from general foreign language anxiety concerning oral performance.

The higher the self-reported level of foreign language reading anxiety, the lower the course grade, and vice versa. The authors discuss the level of instruction as a variable to be examined in future inquiries of this type. Additionally, as Saito, Horwitz and Garza (1999: 215) state, "... the anxiety might appear at some point after the reading was actually accomplished or when the student encounters the teacher's or other students' interpretations of the text".

With participants from a third semester course and an intermediate level conversation course in university level Spanish, Sellers (2000) also found that reading anxiety is a distinct variable in foreign language learning. Furthermore, students with higher levels of overall foreign language learning anxiety reported higher levels of reading anxiety. In a close look at anxiety ratings, findings showed that more students indicated feeling "somewhat" anxious about L2 reading than any other rating. Sellers asked students to read a magazine article and found a negative relationship between reading anxiety and L2 reading comprehension. These findings echo Seller's (2000) results with third semester participants where reading anxiety affected reading comprehension. Results also revealed that reading anxiety is not a good predictor of L2 comprehension at this level. Finally, to explore the relationship between anxiety and reading comprehension, the following research questions will guide the present study:

1. Do learners feel more anxious about the process of L2 reading?
2. Is there a relationship between students' reading anxiety and reading comprehension performance?
3. What are the factors that can decrease students' reading anxiety?

METHODOLOGY

A total of 180 students enrolled in reading comprehension classes in English department of IAIN Tulungagung as her participants. It is different from the Wang (2011) than the present study which employs the elementary higher grades (5 and 6) and junior secondary lower grades (7 and 8) as her participant. As part of the course requirements, all students in all sections participated in the investigation. Students were told that they were not obliged to allow results to be used as part of the investigation, but all students signed the consent form to utilize results for the study. In previous beginning and intermediate courses all participants in the study had read short readings from articles. Before coming to class, students complete multiple choice comprehension questions. During class, students are randomly selected to read the story out loud, and then the instructor asks oral comprehension questions to deconstruct the plot. Students are then assigned to write an out-of-class composition about what they read, and they must include supporting evidence from the primary source. Both instructors and students in all sections of the class only speak English in the classroom. In the final analysis only 36 participants were included.

The entire survey was written in English. For questions specific to L2 reading, all questions fit into three categories representing different dimensions of L2 reading and anxiety: general L2 reading; L2 reading and oral tasks; and, L2 reading and written tasks. For each item there were the following five possible choices: (1) Strongly Agree; (2) Agree; (3) Undecided; (4) Disagree; (5) Strongly Disagree.

The background of questionnaire included questions about participant's age, gender, language spoken at home, and years studying English (including high school). Prior research has also shown that when the readers are allowed to use their native language in the written tasks, a truer depiction of comprehension is revealed. Therefore, both tasks in this study were completed in the learner's native language, Indonesia.

For Research Questions One and Two data were submitted to SPSS

to obtain frequency scores and percentages. For these questions a repeated measures design was utilized as the comparison is within one group, and a matched t-test allowed for the comparison of scores. For Research Question Three, a description of the factor affecting the students' reading anxiety was explained.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question 1: Do learners feel more anxious about the process of L2 reading?

Mean scores and standard deviations for anxiety items are listed on Table One, and Table Two offers a graphic depiction of mean anxiety scores for L2 reading. As indicated, students are more anxious about both reading out loud and answering oral questions about what they read than they are about the actual act of reading itself. The matched t-test revealed a significant difference in anxiety levels for L2 reading and reading out loud ($p < .05$) and a significant difference in anxiety levels for L2 reading and answering oral comprehension questions ($p < .05$). To further explore this difference, mean scores for oral reading and oral questions were submitted to the matched t-test.

Table Two lists each anxiety item with percentages of students selecting each alternative (anxiety level). A close look at Table Two reveals that 43% of the participants reported being very anxious about not understanding the lengthy texts and only 18% reported being very anxious about reading in English.

A close examination of items concerning oral production reveals that 38% of students indicated feeling very anxious about both having to speak in English class and also having to answer questions orally in class about what they have read. Table Two offers a graphic depiction of mean anxiety scores for L2. As indicated, students are more anxious about completing multiple choice comprehension questions than about reading. The matched t-test revealed a significant difference in anxiety levels for L2 reading ($p < .05$) and no significant difference in anxiety levels for L2 reading and answering written

multiple choice comprehension questions ($p > .05$). Prior research has shown that familiar tasks create less anxiety (Bailey, 1983), and the participants in the present study were accustomed to completing multiple choice tasks after reading in the introductory, intermediate and advanced levels.

Research Question 2: Does anxiety about L2 reading affect comprehension?

Findings both Young (2000) and Sellers (2000) state anxiety affects reading comprehension with students from lower levels of instruction. The lack of significant correlations among anxiety factors and reading comprehension could be interpreted in several ways. The participants in the present study are from advanced levels of language instruction where they are accustomed to reading individually before coming to class. The readers also regularly complete multiple choice questions about the plot before coming to class, so they are accustomed to the expectation of factual knowledge. Prior research has shown that familiar tasks create less anxiety (Bailey, 1983). On the other hand, the students perform better on reading comprehension when there is no expectation of an examination of factual knowledge, but this was not the case in the present investigation with advanced learners.

The present study revealed no association between anxiety and tests scores. Furthermore, no participant indicated that they strongly agree with the statement about becoming anxious when they reading. Even though participants indicated feeling somewhat stressful about the task what they read. Only three students indicated that they strongly agree with the item concerning anxiety about multiple choice questions after reading, but this anxiety did not affect multiple choice scores.

In summary, an interesting finding of the present study is that participants reported higher anxiety about oral than written comprehension assessment tasks. With readers from advanced courses, the present study also reveals that anxiety is not a major obstacle in foreign language reading comprehension. Prior research has consistently found that anxiety is a significant obstacle to be overcome in learning to speak in a foreign language

(Aida, 1996). A future inquiry could examine the association between anxiety about post-oral tasks and performance on oral tasks. The findings of the present study underscore the need for more investigations concerning anxiety and L2 reading. As contends, rejecting any association between anxiety and performance is dangerous. The present study is not enough evidence to assert that with advanced readers anxious feelings do or do not affect comprehension. Perhaps more detailed questions, including open-ended questions and oral interviews, concerning anxiety and L2 reading of lengthy texts would add to the present findings.

Research Question 3: What are the factors that can decrease students' reading anxiety?

Decreasing students' anxiety and creating a low-anxiety classroom environment might help improve students' reading comprehension performance. According to Horwitz et al. (1986), three components of language anxiety are identified: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. People with communication apprehension are shy about communicating with others and have difficulty speaking in public and listening to spoken messages. In language classes, students are required to communicate with each other and sometimes asked to speak in dyads, in groups, or in public. Students with communication apprehension tend to develop language anxiety.

Test anxiety associates with language anxiety because students hold unrealistic expectations on language achievement. Every grade less than excellent, although viewed as a good grade for others, will be regarded as a failure for anxious students. Since tests and quizzes are frequently used in language classes, students with test anxiety may also develop language anxiety. Students' fear of negative evaluation is similar to test anxiety but more extensive. In language classes, evaluation is not limited to a test-taking situation. It may occur in any evaluative situation, such as group discussions or speaking in front of the classroom. Students who fear negative evaluations from others may also develop language anxiety.

Although students with communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation are apt to develop language anxiety, they may have different levels of language anxiety due to some variables. These are some of the variables that lead to different levels of language anxiety. Other variables, such as language proficiency levels, the length of language learning, teacher's role, and learners' gender, are also discussed in some previous studies.

Regarding "language proficiency level", Liu (2006) explored the language anxiety of 100 EFL students at three different proficiency levels. The results showed that students with advanced English proficiency tended to be less anxious. Elkhafaifi (2005) explored 233 graduate and undergraduate students' language anxiety, and found that advanced students had lower language anxiety than beginning or intermediate students. Casado and Dereshiwsky (2001) compared the anxiety level of first and second semester university students speaking Spanish as a foreign language, and found that students' level of language anxiety seemed to increase slightly rather than decrease with more exposure to the language learning. Regarding "teacher's role", Ewald's study (2007) revealed that teachers' supportive attitude helped relieve students' anxiety. Abu-Rabia (2004) examined whether teachers' attitudes were related to the language anxiety of 67 EFL students. He found that students were less anxious if the teachers' attitude toward them was more supportive. As for "learners' gender", Abu-Rabia's study (2004) identified gender as a predictor of language anxiety with female students showing higher anxiety than male students. Elkhafaifi's study (2005) indicated similar findings with females being more anxious than males. Yet, Matsuda and Gobel (2004) investigated language anxiety in 252 university students majoring in English and found no significant effect of gender on students' anxiety.

In sum, studies examining the variables of language proficiency levels and teacher's role yield similar results, which are that students with higher language proficiency tend to have lower language anxiety, and teacher's supportive attitude helps decrease students' language anxiety. However,

inconsistent results have been found in the studies exploring the variables of the length of language learning and learners' gender. Hence, further exploration of how language anxiety changes with the two variables is needed.

LIMITATIONS

Situational anxiety was the best focus for the present study. However, it must be said that the experiment did not account for teaching approaches. Different teaching approaches could produce different levels of anxiety, especially with post oral comprehension tasks. Furthermore, the present study does not account for anxiety in L1 writing. Students may or may not feel anxious about L1 and L2 writing in a variety of situations. A future study should consider L1 writing ability as well as anxiety about writing in general. Finally, the present study did not include open-ended questions.

CONCLUSION

The previous study was designed to investigate the issue of English language input that younger learner were likely to be exposed to through extensive reading in China. It called for urgent attention to this problem among reform authorities, school administrators, and English teachers in their efforts to improve students' learning outcomes of English and suggested the adoption of extensive reading program as the most effective means in the creation of an input-rich environment in EFL learning contexts. Moreover, the present study is an attempt to address issues concerning L2 reading and anxiety at the advanced stages of acquisition give an addition support to develop a good language input in students' reading comprehensible performance, that is decreasing students' reading anxiety. The results of this investigation reveal that anxiety about L2 reading is not a factor at the advanced level of language instruction as it does not hinder comprehension. Different assessment tasks may require different types of reading, and consequently may invoke different types of anxiety. This investigation shows

that anxiety about oral tasks may be a factor involved in the L2 reading process that should be considered more thoroughly in future inquiries. For now, instructors should be aware of anxiety about oral comprehension tasks and implement practices that involve positive exchanges of ideas.

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