

Investigating the Source of Reading Anxiety among Undergraduate Saudi Female EFL Students in Translation Departments

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the sources of reading anxiety among undergraduate female EFL students in KSA. The study compared the sources of reading anxiety between EFL students in the English Department and EFL students who study French as a foreign language. Also, the study compared between the students in terms of year of study (level 1, level 2, level 3, and level 4). The total number of participants were 507 participants, and the data were collected through a survey designed for the study to investigate the personal and text factors of reading anxiety. The analysis of the data through SPSS showed that there are no significant differences in reading anxiety among students according to department of study (English and French), and year of study. Moreover, the findings of the study showed that text sources, such as unknown vocabulary and unfamiliar pronunciation, contributed more to reading anxiety than the personal sources of reading anxiety. The study concluded that teachers need to pay more attention to enriching the students' vocabulary and improving their pronunciation, since this helps to alleviate students' reading anxiety.

Keywords: reading anxiety, Saudi female EFL students, source of reading anxiety, translation

Introduction

Reading is one of the main skills for EFL learners, since students need to study and improve their knowledge through reading. Also, the importance of reading skills emerges from the students' needs for reading to improve their academic achievement, taking into consideration that EFL students have different courses to study every semester, which requires reading as the main skill to understand the content knowledge of the materials of every course. However,

weak reading skills might have a negative impact on students' academic achievement, which leads to demotivation and frustration among students. In other words, reading anxiety might have a debilitating impact on EFL students (Liu & Huang, 2011; Zhang & Zhong, 2012; Wei & Yodkamlue, 2012; Sahranavard & Hassan, 2015; Akkakoson, 2016). Even though EFL students need reading during their academic study more than the other skills, little attention has been paid to reading anxiety, and this might be due to that reading does not require any interaction among students, making it away from the observation of lecturers (Joo & Damron, 2015; Razak, Yassin & Moqbel, 2019). Another issue related to reading among EFL/ESL learners is that reading in a foreign language is usually carried out through the cognitive filters of the mother language (Karimi, 2019). This makes reading a challenge skill for the students to change the reading process from the mother language to comprehend the text through English, which is a foreign language for learners.

Reading is a challenging activity as it is a complex process, problem-solving and situationally bounded, which made it a potential barrier of learning among EFL/ESL learners (Nasrollahi, 2014). The major role of reading is to improve students' vocabulary, and learners without avid reading habits might conceive reading in English problematic. Reading skills focus mainly on the text to get meaning, and reading skill, as a receptive skill, is essential to get the meaning from the text in hand to get knowledge and improve one's input (Acevedo & Forero, 2016).

In the context of KSA, students study English as a foreign language, and they face different barriers that hinder progressing in English language proficiency (Al-Ghamdi & Alrefae, 2020), and one of the main barriers is language anxiety (Asif, 2017). Reading anxiety is one of the main challenges among Saudi EFL learners (Alrabai, 2016), which still needs further investigation to identify the sources of reading anxiety, especially among Saudi female undergraduate students, since this area has not received enough attention in the research area. Therefore, the current study aims to investigate the sources of reading anxiety among Saudi female EFL students through the following questions:

1. What is the level of English reading anxiety among students?
2. Are there any significant differences in students' perceptions of the sources of English reading anxiety according to major (English and French)?
3. Are there any significant differences in students' perceptions of the sources of English reading anxiety according to level (level 1, level 2, level 3, and level 4)?

Literature Review

Language anxiety is a distinct feeling, usually experienced by EFL students, and it is a common feeling that students might not be able to overcome, yet they such feeling might be mitigated with the passage of time. Foreign language anxiety (FLA) was regarded by Horwitz, Cope and Horwitz (1986) as a particular situation anxiety of a foreign language that has a negative impact on language learning. They argued that when learning a foreign language, even intelligent students in native language face difficulties (Yassin, & Razak, 2017). MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) found that students with any degree of foreign language anxiety have considerable difficulty demonstrating the skills they have. Also, Saito et al. (1999) stated that there is foreign language anxiety, but reading anxiety is distinct from the general anxiety of foreign language, and this is due to the distinct factors of reading anxiety due to textual and cultural elements of the text.

The study of Alrabai (2014) designed a model to investigate anxiety among Saudi EFL learners. The study investigated the level of English anxiety and their sources among 1389 Saudi EFL students. The findings of the study showed that the students reported moderate to high levels of anxiety. This is supported by Asif (2017) who found that language anxiety is a major issue among Saudi EFL students, and she argued that English language anxiety does not need any special treatment, but in order to understand and effectively diagnose this phenomenon among learners, it requires cautious attitude of English language teachers. She added that anxiety feeling when studying English language requires the use of modern interventions that prioritize improving learning opportunities in an environment conducive to learning.

The study of Bensalem (2020) was carried on reading anxiety among EFL students in Saudi universities, and it revealed that female respondents had higher anxiety levels than their male counterparts. Results also showed that third-language knowledge language, self-perceived English reading proficiency, and foreign experience played an important role in predicting reading anxiety levels among Saudi female EFL learners. The same findings were obtained by the quantitative analysis of Abubakar and Hairuddin (2020), which aimed to describe the level of reading anxiety faced by young EFL learners. The study results showed that the students encountered a high degree of reading anxiety, although the value is marginally higher than the moderate level limit. The study concluded that teaching reading strategies are of great importance in reducing the extent of student reading anxiety.

The study of Rahmawati (2020) in reading anxiety showed that reading comprehension is negatively affected by reading anxiety. The study concluded that reading anxiety is a significant factor, influencing reading comprehension among EFL students. Similarly, the

study of Petrus, and Shah (2020) investigated the relationship between reading anxiety, reading strategies and language competency among ESL students in Malaysia. The study concluded that when reading English content, ESL learners experience a medium level of reading anxiety and reading strategies correlates positively with language competency.

Other studies have explored the variables that lead to reading anxiety among EFL learners. The study by Al-Shboul et al. (2013) in Jordan concluded that reading anxiety is triggered by underlying five factors, which are classified into two types: text factors and personal factors. Text factors refer to the content of the text that makes the readers feel anxious; whereas, the personal factors refer to the reader's personality that makes the reading anxiety happen. Unknown vocabulary, unfamiliar script, and unfamiliar culture are the text reading anxiety factors, while personal factors include the students being afraid of making mistakes and worry about reading results. In the same vein, the study of Muchlis (2017) investigated the possible factors that cause reading anxiety among Indonesian students of English. This study found that reading aloud makes students feel anxious more than silent reading, because reading aloud makes students concentrate more on their output rather than understanding the content of the text. Students often view reading aloud as a kind of public speaking, which often generates a sense of apprehension or negative evaluation by peers and teachers.

Based on the above discussion, reading anxiety is a constant challenge among EFL/ESL learners. Reading is a receptive skill, yet it is essential for students to build their knowledge and to improve their academic achievement. Besides, most of the studies have focused on the level of reading anxiety, while a handful studies focused on the factors that are underlying reading anxiety. In the context of KSA, very few studies have focused on the issue of reading anxiety among Saudi female EFL learners, which calls for the need for further studies to investigate reading anxiety factors. The findings of the study will come with implications that might benefit students, and teachers in order to create effective EFL classroom environment.

Method and Materials

Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative research design since the data were collected through a survey. This design is suitable for the study since it allows the researcher to collect data from a large group of students (Creswell, 2014), which gives the researchers a chance to understand the issue of reading anxiety among Saudi female EFL students. Besides, collecting data from

a large number of students makes it possible to generalize the findings at least to the context of KSA, where the study was carried out.

Research Instrument

In terms of the instrument, the researchers of the current study have created a scale based on reviewing findings in past studies. The focus in the process of review for past studies was on the studies of reading anxiety that were carried out among EFL learners to develop the instrument of the current study for investigating the sources of reading anxiety. Further, the final outcome of the survey included 21 items that were divided into personal sources of reading anxiety and textual sources of reading anxiety. The survey was validated by three experts in teaching English as a foreign language. Also, the survey was distributed online to 40 participants to test its reliability through SPSS, using Cronbach's Alpha test. The survey showed a very good internal consistency, since the results of Cronbach's Alpha was 0.881 for personal reading anxiety factors, 0.854 for text reading anxiety factors, and 0.921 for the whole survey.

Participants

The participants of the study were Saudi female EFL students in one of the universities in KSA, and the data were collected from students of English belonging to both English and French departments. The total number of participants is shown in Table (1) below.

Table (1): Number of participants

Level of Study	Number
One	115
Two	42
Three	107
Four	243
Total	507

Data Analysis

The data of the study were analyzed using Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS), and three types of analysis were carried out in order to answer the study research questions. That is, the first research question aimed to investigate the level of reading anxiety among Saudi EFL students, and the researchers used descriptive statistics through means, standard deviation, and percentages in order to determine the rank of each source of reading anxiety. Besides, the second research question aimed to investigate if there are statistically significant differences among the students in terms of the departments (English and French), and the researchers used

a t-test to answer this study question. Also, the third research question aimed to investigate if there are statistically significant differences among students according to Year of study, which included Levels One, Two, Three, and Four. To answer this study question, the researchers used One-Way ANOVA in order to compare between the four levels of study and to find if there are statistically significant differences among them.

Results

For statistical analysis, the students' perceptions of the sources of English reading anxiety were categorized into five levels: very high, high, medium, low, and very low. Table (2) provides guidelines for understanding the average scores of students' perceptions of the sources of English reading anxiety.

Table 2: Guidelines for Understanding the Average Scores of Students' Perceptions of English reading anxiety Sources

Range of means		Estimation
From	To	
4.21	5	very high
3.41	4.20	High
2.61	3.40	Moderate
1.81	2.60	Low
1	1.80	very low

a. What is the level of English reading anxiety among students?

This question aims to investigate the level of reading anxiety among undergraduate Saudi female students. The descriptive analysis was carried through means, standard deviation and percentages in order to rank the items that are considered sources of reading anxiety among students. Table 3 below shows the results of the analysis.

Table (3): Descriptive Statistics of the Items

#	Rank	Items	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	%	Estimation
15	1	The text which contains unknown vocabulary makes me anxious when I read.	3.30	1.32	66.04	moderate
18	2	I feel anxious during reading in English when I do not know the correct pronunciation of the words available in the text.	3.25	1.30	64.97	moderate
13	3	I feel anxious when I read about unfamiliar topics.	3.11	1.31	62.25	moderate

16	4	I feel anxious during reading in English when I face difficulty in understanding the meaning of words.	3.10	1.26	62.05	moderate
7	5	I feel anxious when I read in English because I am afraid of making errors.	3.06	1.39	61.18	moderate
17	6	I feel anxious during reading in English when the grammatical structure is complex.	2.97	1.26	59.48	moderate
6	7	I feel anxious when I read in English because I focus on reading instead of focusing on understanding the text.	2.93	1.35	58.66	moderate
19	8	I feel anxious during reading in English when I cannot decipher/decode the letters of the words.	2.93	1.21	58.66	moderate
12	9	I feel anxious in reading because I compare my reading skills with the reading skills of the others.	2.87	1.39	57.36	moderate
2	10	I feel anxious during reading in English because I might not be able to understand the text.	2.81	1.27	56.25	moderate
20	11	I feel anxious during reading in English when I read a long text.	2.79	1.33	55.74	moderate
14	12	I feel anxious when I read a text contains information about unknown culture.	2.75	1.29	54.91	moderate
10	13	I feel anxious when I read in English because I have high expectations about the outcomes of reading.	2.57	1.21	51.32	low
5	14	I feel anxious when I read in English because I am not confident of my reading skills.	2.56	1.31	51.28	low
21	15	I feel anxious when I read uninteresting materials.	2.56	1.23	51.12	low
8	16	I feel anxious when I read because I do not know the appropriate reading strategies.	2.47	1.22	49.39	low
9	17	I feel anxious when I read because I lack motivation to read.	2.42	1.22	48.32	low
4	18	I feel anxious when I read because my reading skills in English are weak.	2.38	1.27	47.53	low
1	19	I feel anxious when I read because reading in English is difficult.	2.30	1.08	46.07	low
11	20	I feel anxious when I read in English because I have negative experiences in my memory about reading.	2.21	1.27	44.10	low
3	21	I feel anxious when I read because I am not interested in reading in English.	1.94	1.21	38.90	low
Total			2.72	0.87	54.49	Moderate

Table (3) shows that the averages of the students' perceptions of the sources English reading anxiety ranged from (3.30) to (1.94) with corresponding percentages ranged from (66.04%) to (38.90%). The total average of students' perceptions of the sources of English reading anxiety was (2.72) out of (5) and its corresponding percentage was (54.49%), which is a medium-value mean.

At the level of each item, Table (3) reveals the following findings:

- No sources of English reading anxiety were perceived by the respondents to be very high or high, i.e., no item received a mean of (3.41) or more out of (5).

- Twelve sources of English reading anxiety out of twenty-one (57.14% of the total number of sources of English reading anxiety) got medium estimation level by the respondents, namely sources 15, 18, 13, 16, 7, 17, 6, 19, 12, 2, 20 and 14. The means and the corresponding percentages (shown in parentheses) of these sources were 3.30 (66.04%), 3.25 (64.97%), 3.11 (62.25%), 3.10 (62.05%), 3.06 (61.18%), 2.97 (59.48%), 2.93 (58.66%), 2.93 (58.66%), 2.87 (57.36%), 2.81 (56.25%), 2.79 (55.74%), and 2.75 (54.91%) respectively.
- Nine sources of English reading anxiety out of twenty-one (42.86% of the total number of sources of English reading anxiety) got low estimation level by the respondents, namely sources 10, 5, 21, 8, 9, 4, 1, 11, and 3. The means and the corresponding percentages of these sources were 2.57 (51.32%), 2.56 (51.18%), 2.56 (51.12%), 2.47 (49.39%), 2.42 (48.32%), 2.38 (47.53%), 2.30 (46.07%), 2.21 (44.10%), and 1.94 (38.90%) respectively.

b. Are there any significant difference in students' perceptions of the sources of English reading anxiety according to major (English and French)?

To identify whether there are statistically significant differences in students' perceptions of the sources of English reading anxiety according to major (English and French), the researcher used the *t*-test. The results of the *t*-tests are presented in Table (4).

Table (4): T-test Results for based on 'Major'

	Variable	N	M	SD	df	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Major	English	350	2.74	0.85	505	0.677	0.499
	French	157	2.69	0.90			

As Table (4) shows, no statistically significant difference was found [$t(505) = 0.677, p = 0.499$] in students' perceptions of the sources of English reading anxiety between students of *English major* ($M = 2.74, SD = 0.85$) and those of *French major* ($M = 2.69, SD = 0.90$) at the (0.05) level of significance.

c. Are there any significant difference in students' perceptions of the sources of English reading anxiety according to level (Level 1, 2, 3, and 4)?

To identify whether there are statistically significant differences in students' perceptions of the sources of English reading anxiety according to students' level (Level 1, 2, 3, and 4), the researcher used the one-way *ANOVA*. The results of one-way *ANOVA* are given in Table (5).

Table (5): ANOVA Results for Students' Perceptions of Sources of English Reading Anxiety according to 'Students' Level'

Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1230.136	3	410.045	1.229	0.298
Within Groups	167808.093	503	333.614		
Total	169038.229	506			

Table (5) shows that there were no significant differences in the respondents' perceptions of the sources of English reading anxiety according to students' level (Level 1, 2, 3, and 4). The *F*-value was (1.229), indicating no significant differences at $\alpha = 0.05$ since the *p*-value > 0.05 ($p = 0.298$), which indicates that students of all levels have similar perceptions of the sources of reading English anxiety, and Table 6 shows the means of reading anxiety for each level of study.

Table (6): Means of each level of study

Level of Study	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
One	115	55.5913	16.99014
Two	42	57.1190	22.08322
Three	107	60.1121	16.64407
Four	243	56.8601	18.80096
Total	507	57.2801	18.27752

Discussion

The analysis of the survey showed that there are four items scored the highest level of reading anxiety, which are unknown vocabulary, difficult pronunciation, unfamiliar topic, new words, and fear of making errors. All these items are related to the text, except the last factor, namely fear of making errors, as it is a personal source of reading anxiety. These findings are in line with the well know study of Saito et al. (1999), who stated that there are two major sources of reading anxiety, including text and personal factors. In terms of unfamiliar script and writing system, it is literally applicable to Arabic EFL learners, because the writing system of English is different from that of Arabic language. Also, what makes English reading a source of reading anxiety is the unfamiliar pronunciation, especially that the sound system of English differs greatly from the sound system of the Arabi language. Besides, in the English language, there is no complete correspondence between letters and words pronunciation, leading to reading anxiety since the students might not be sure of the correct pronunciation of the words.

Besides, the findings of this study are in line with the findings of Al-Shboul et al. (2013), who listed different factors as sources of reading anxiety. These factors include text

factors and personal factors. One of the sources of reading anxiety is fear of making mistakes, which is supported by the findings of this study. This factor is also related to the text factors, since the personal sources of reading anxiety might attribute to the personal sources of reading anxiety. That is, the students might feel afraid of committing mistakes, and this is due to the unfamiliar writing system, and the difficulty of pronunciation. Such interrelation between text and personal factors makes reading process not that easy for EFL learners.

Another important point related to personal factors is that reading anxiety is an indicator of the students' awareness of their reading, when they compare their reading performance with that of their classmates. This might show that competitiveness of students inside the classroom makes them realize their reading and what they should do to improve their reading performance. Hence, reading anxiety might be a source of motivation for the students to perform better in reading and overcome their difficulties (Abubakar, & Hairuddin, 2020). In other words, students, who realize that they are anxious, tend to motivate themselves to perform better in reading. Accordingly, one can say that reading aloud is more anxiety-provoking than silent reading, since the students will be evaluated by their teachers and classmates. Such realization of being under observation makes the students feel more anxious, and this is in line with the finding of (Muchlis, 2017).

The findings of the study also showed that reading anxiety is not related to reading skills and reading strategies of the students, which opposes the findings of Qanwal and Karim (2014) and Petrus and Shah (2020). This might show that the general moderate level of reading anxiety is due the students' awareness of reading skills and reading strategies, which alleviated the level of anxiety. Besides, the general moderate level of reading anxiety might be explained by that text factors contribute more significantly to reading anxiety than the personal factors. i.e., the students' mastery of the reading skills and reading strategies makes reading easier; however, there are other text factors the students cannot overcome easily such as new vocabulary and the pronunciation of new words. Accordingly, one can say that overcoming the text sources of reading anxiety requires time so that the students could enrich their vocabulary and learn the correct pronunciation of most of the words.

Conclusion and Implications

This study aimed to investigate sources of reading anxiety among Saudi female EFL students. The findings did not show any significant differences between the two groups or between the four levels of study. This directed the study to discuss the sources of reading anxiety as common factors regardless of department or year of study. Further, the study findings showed

that the text factors contribute more to reading anxiety among students than to the personal sources of reading anxiety. The students might know reading skills and strategies; however, the text factors such as new vocabularies and difficult pronunciations are the main sources of reading anxiety, especially that such factors require time from the side of the students so that they can enrich their vocabulary and get to know more about the pronunciation of new words.

The findings of the study led to some implications. First, reading anxiety is associated with speaking, since one of the sources of reading anxiety is the difficult pronunciation. So, teachers might need to focus more on pronunciation during teaching reading so that the students get to know the correct pronunciation of the difficult words which reduces the level of reading anxiety. Another implication is that vocabulary is essential to improve reading performance and to reduce reading anxiety. One of the sources of reading anxiety is unfamiliar topic and unknown words. Therefore, teachers need to provide reading exercises from different fields, as this might help to enrich the students' vocabulary and mitigate reading anxiety among EFL learners.

Acknowledgements

This research was funded by the Deanship of Scientific Research, Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University through the Fast-track Research Funding Program.

We extend our appreciation to Dr. Mimouna Zitouni for her significant assistance and constructive comments.

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