

Foreign Language Reading Anxiety in a Jordanian EFL Context: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

In the last two decades, investigating the sources of foreign language anxiety in general has increasingly attracted the attention of many researchers in the field of foreign language teaching. However, the sources of anxiety that influence the acquisition of certain specific language skills such as reading in particular have rarely been investigated. Thus, the aim of this study was to explore and understand the underlying problems and factors that contribute to reading anxiety faced by EFL students at Yarmouk University, Jordan. It was a qualitative exploration of the sources of English language reading anxiety for which observation, semi-structured interviews and diaries were collected from six informants with different levels of English language proficiency. The findings of the study revealed that there were two aspects of foreign language reading anxiety: personal factor and text feature. Under the concept of personal factor there were also two main sources of foreign language reading anxiety, which are: afraid of making errors and worry about reading effects. On the other hand, there were three main sources of foreign language reading anxiety under the concept of text feature, which are: unknown vocabulary, unfamiliar topic, and unfamiliar culture. The five main sources of foreign language reading anxiety were arranged according to their occurrences and percentages in the study. Moreover, recommendations were proposed.

Keywords: English language reading anxiety, foreign language reading anxiety, Jordanian EFL context, Yarmouk University, qualitative study

1. Introduction

Researchers in the field of foreign and second language teaching correlate individual differences in second or foreign language learning into three categories: first, cognitive factors which include intelligence, language aptitude, language learning strategies and previous language learning and experience. Second, affective factors which includes attitudes, motivation, language anxiety, self-confidence about the language, personality and learning style. Third, miscellaneous factors such as age and socio-cultural experience (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1992, 1993).

One of the affective factors which play an important role in learning second or foreign language is anxiety. According to Brown (2007), anxiety plays a major affective role among the affective factors in second or foreign language acquisition. It is the most powerful predictor on the students' performance among the affective factors (Liu & Huang, 2011). Also Krashen (1987) related the affective factors to success in second or foreign language acquisition or learning. Furthermore, Gardner, Tremblay, and Masgoret (1997) investigated the relationship between foreign language anxiety among different affective variables and language performance to declare that foreign language anxiety was ranked as the highest factor which negatively correlated with language achievement. More recently, Olivares-Cuhat (2010) also investigated the relative important of various learner variables such as cognitive, meta cognitive and affective variables on foreign or second language performance to assert over again that foreign language anxiety is the important factor in learning foreign or second languages. In fact, the last two decades witnessed a plethora of research that showed how language anxiety affects the learning process (e.g. Abu-Ghararah, 1999; Awan, Azher, Nadeem, & Naz, 2010; Batumlu & Erden, 2007; Chiang, 2010; Ghonsooly & Elahi, 2011; Horwitz, 2001; Macintyre & Gardner, 1994; Onwuegbuzie, Bailey, & Daley, 1999). Consequently, Al-Shboul, Ahmad, Nordin, and Rahman (2013) have conducted a comprehensive review to conclude that foreign language anxiety not only affects the students' learning process and outcomes but

also the negative relationship between foreign language anxiety and achievement seems to vary according to specific skill.

Early studies in this field have focused on foreign language anxiety in general. The four skills of learning foreign or second language; speaking, listening, reading and writing were included under the concept of foreign language anxiety (e.g. Aida, 1994; Bailey, Onwuegbuzie, & Daley, 2000; Burden, 2004; Casdado & Dereshiwsky, 2004; Cheng, 2004; Horwitz, 1986; Horwitz, 2001; Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; Sanchez-Herrero & Sanchez, 1992).

However, recent research in this area has proved that each skill has its own anxiety such as foreign language listening anxiety (e.g. Chang, 2008, 2010; Gonen, 2009; Kim, 2001; Kimura, 2008; Ko, 2010), foreign language reading anxiety (e.g. Çetinkaya, 2011; Kuru-Gonen, 2005, 2009; Shariati & Bordbar, 2009; Zhao, 2009), foreign language writing anxiety (e.g. Cheng, 2002, 2004; Cheng, Horwitz, & Schallert, 1999; Lin, 2009), and foreign language speaking anxiety (e.g. Abdullah & Rahman, 2010; Cheng, 2009; Osboe, Fujimura, & Hirschel, 2007). Even though foreign language anxiety in general and foreign language speaking anxiety concepts have been used interchangeably, one of the four specific language anxieties which are still open to research is foreign language reading anxiety. In fact, foreign language reading anxiety as a specific skill has rarely been investigated. Thus, more research in this specific area is needed. Moreover, sources of foreign language reading anxiety are still new area of research.

Even though few studies have investigated foreign language reading anxiety as a distinct phenomenon (Alghothani, 2010), reading anxiety levels in a foreign language varies according to the target language and related to the specific writing system (Saito, Horwitz, & Garza, 1999). Correspondingly, the brain of Arabic native speakers employs a more effective strategy when reading English text than English native speakers. That is, the brain circuitry underlying reading for Arabic native speakers develops in a different way than that English native speaker and so on across the different languages with different orthographic structures (Hinton, Miyamoto, & Della-Chiesa, 2008). Learners of English who learn French, Japanese, Russian, Spanish, or Chinese as a foreign language (Brantmeier, 2005; Saito et al., 1999; Sellers, 2000; Zhao, 2009) and Persian, Japanese, Spanish, Chinese, Taiwanese, Turkish, and Arabic who learn the English language as a foreign or second language have been researched (Badakhshan, 2012; Çetinkaya, 2011; Ghonsooly & Elahi, 2011; Jafarigohar, 2012; Kuru-Gonen, 2005, 2007, 2009; Miyanaga, 2007; Sas, 2003; Shariati & Bordbar, 2009; Wu, 2011).

However, Arabic learners who learn English as a foreign language have rarely been investigated. The differences vary according to the target language and writing system. Thus, Arabic learners who learn English as a foreign language is in dire need to be investigated.

Furthermore, according to Young (1991) language anxiety is a complex psychological construct requiring investigation from a variety of perspectives and approaches. Besides, Saito et al. (1999) point out that sources of foreign language reading anxiety are still unidentified suggesting that learners' interviews and other techniques might be useful to accurately determine why students feel anxious about reading in a foreign language.

To date, there is not a single proper research being done to understand this phenomenon in the Jordanian context where Arabic is the mother tongue language. To address the lack of research in this topic, this study was designed to explore the sources of foreign language reading anxiety utilizing case study design in the Jordanian EFL context.

1.1 Research Questions

The study seeks to answer the following research question:

1. What are the underlying factors of reading anxiety in English as a foreign language at Yarmouk University?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Foreign Language Reading Anxiety

Since foreign language anxiety has been recognized as a phenomenon distinct from general anxiety, a plethora of research has been conducted to examine the existence of the phenomenon. Accordingly, most of the foreign language anxiety studies focused on speaking skill because it is considered as the most provoking skill among the four major skills. However, the other three major skills have not been investigated thoroughly until the last decade. One of these skills which is also anxiety provoking to some foreign or second language learners is the reading skill (Brantmeier, 2005; Çetinkaya, 2011; Huang, 2001; Wu, 2011; Zhao, 2009).

Saito et al. (1999) were the first scholars who revealed that foreign language reading anxiety is a distinct phenomenon but related to foreign language anxiety in general. They pointed two aspects of foreign language

reading that elicit anxiety;

Unfamiliar scripts and writing systems: According to them, foreign language learners who are more familiar to the scripts of the target language would be less expected to experience anxiety in the act of reading. For instance, Arab language learners who are required to learn English are less anxious than who are required to learn a language which is weirder to them due to the unfamiliarity of the writing system such as Japanese, Chinese, Korean languages and so on so forth. Thus, learners are more likely to experience the anxiety of reading when they attempt to decode the scripts because they would immediately experience difficulty in the process of reading.

Unfamiliar culture: it might not cause immediate anxiety as the earlier one. The learners can decode the words and make meaning of the sentence. However, at some point of the reading process, the reader would not make sense of the whole text due to the incomplete knowledge of the cultural material underlying the text.

Saito et al. (1999) offered a scale to measure foreign language reading anxiety. They devised a five-point likert scale consisting of 20 items ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree” as a specific scale to measure foreign language reading anxiety. In their preliminary study, they applied both the foreign language classroom anxiety scale (FLCAS) and foreign language reading anxiety scale (FLRAS) to test reliability and validity.

In their study, the whole participant number was 383 of English university students enrolled in first semester of French, Japanese, and Russian courses divided into 192, 114, and 77, respectively. The foreign language reading anxiety measure reported good internal reliability with an internal consistency of .86 on Cronbach’s alpha for the total number of participants. To determine the validity of the foreign language reading anxiety, they examined the concurrent validity using a Person Product-Moment correlation coefficient. The analysis revealed a relationship between the two scales ($r = .64$, $p = .01$, $n = 383$). That is, students who have a high level of foreign language anxiety tend to also have a high level of foreign language reading anxiety and vice versa. A correlation coefficient of .64 means that the two scales share approximately 41% of the variance which also means 59% of the variance is not shared. Thus the discriminant validity was satisfactory. It was enough evidence to support that foreign language reading anxiety is truly distinct from foreign language anxiety.

In conclusion, they hypothesized that the level of foreign language reading anxiety is dependent on the specific target language and it varies by the target language and seems to be related to specific writing systems. In the study, learners of Japanese as a foreign language were the most anxious in the reading skill followed by learners of French as a foreign language, and the learners of Russian as a foreign language had the lowest level of anxiety in reading skill.

Sellers (2000) also confirmed that foreign language reading anxiety is unique. She conducted a study to explore the relationship between language anxiety and reading in Spanish as a foreign language. After applying both FLCAS and FLRAS to 89 English university students, she found that the two scales shared about 49% of variance, which means that 51% of variance was not shared between the two scales proving that foreign language reading anxiety was distinct from general foreign language anxiety.

Kuru-Gonen (2005, 2007, 2009) in three consecutive studies, attempted to find out whether foreign language reading anxiety is a distinguishable phenomenon from the general foreign language anxiety or not; She applied FLCAS and FLRAS to a range sample of 50-225 of first year Turkish students who were learning English as a foreign language. The relationship between the two measures was computed using a Pearson Product-Moment correlation coefficient to find significant correlation of .45 which indicates that the two measures share approximately 20% of the variance. Accordingly, approximately 80% of the variance is not shared between the measures.

Recently, Wu (2011) similarly posed the same question to investigate the relationship between foreign language anxiety as a general phenomenon and foreign language reading anxiety as a specific skill which is related but different. FLCAS and FLRAS administered to 91 Taiwanese university students who were learning English as a foreign language. Pearson Product-Moment correlation coefficient again revealed significant positive correlation between the two scales ($r = .68$, $p = .000$, $n = 91$). That means approximately 54% of variance is not shared between the two measures. In other words, 46% of variance is shared.

These results were an additional endorsement to the early work of foreign language reading anxiety (Saito et al., 1999). Table 1 depicts the correlation, variance shared, and the variance not shared between the foreign language anxieties in general and foreign language reading anxiety as a distinct phenomenon.

Table 1. The correlation between FLCAS and FLRAS

Year	Author	Sample Size	Learner Language	Target Language	r	p	Variance Shared	Variance not Shared
1999	Yoshiko Saito,	192	English	French	.64	.01	41%	59%
	Elaine K.	114		Japanese				
	Thomas J.	77		Russian				
2000	Vanisa Sellers	D. 89	English	Spanish	.70	.000	49%	51%
2005	Ipek KuruGonen	50	Turkish	English	.45	.01	20%	80%
2007	Ipek Kuru-Gonen	225	Turkish	English	.52	.01	27%	73%
2009	Ipek Kuru-Gonen	50	Turkish	English	.45	.01	20%	80%
2011	Hui-Ju Wu	91	Taiwanese	English	.68	.000	46%	54%

In conclusion, it is conspicuous that in spite of the sample size, there are differences between the two phenomena. It confirms that foreign reading language anxiety is a phenomenon related but distinct from foreign language anxiety in general. Further, foreign language reading anxiety varies according to the target language and culture which supports the early claim of Saito et al. (1999).

2.2 Foreign Language Reading Anxiety and Achievement

Generally, few studies have been conducted in foreign language reading anxiety and an even smaller number of studies have investigated the relationship between foreign language reading anxiety as a specific skill and performance. Zhao (2009) explored the relationship between foreign language reading anxiety as measured by FLCAS and foreign language reading performance as measured by a reading scores based test which composed of eight reading passages in a sample of 125 English students who were taking a Chinese course. Pearson Product-Moment correlation coefficient was significant between the two measured variables ($r = -.352$, $p = .000$, $n = 125$) which indicate that students with a higher level of foreign language reading anxiety are most likely to have lower foreign language performance scores.

In reverse context, Wu (2011) used FLCAS to measure foreign language reading anxiety in relation with reading comprehensive performance measured by a multiple-choice reading comprehension test to assert that students with a higher level of foreign language reading anxiety are most likely to have lower foreign language performance scores.

In a different context where English learners learn the Spanish language, Sellers (2000) assessed the relationship between foreign language reading anxiety and reading comprehension. Even though a different scale this time was used to measure foreign language reading anxiety, likewise, findings revealed that reading comprehension was influenced by foreign language reading anxiety.

Scrutinizing the literature in this concern, it is observable that the relationship between foreign language reading anxiety and reading comprehension performance was investigated more. For instance, Shariati and Bordbar (2009) investigated the relationship between foreign language reading anxiety and text feature awareness. For the purpose of investigation 74 Persian students who were learning English as a foreign language were employed to administer FLRAS developed by Saito et al. (1999), and the text feature awareness questionnaire which was developed by other researcher. Person correlation analysis was conducted to show that foreign language reading anxiety was correlated as negatively significant with test feature awareness questionnaire scores ($r = -.270$, $p = .019$, $n = 74$).

In another study, Ghonsooly and Elahi (2011) examined the relationship between foreign language reading anxiety and reading comprehension self-efficacy. Results of correlation coefficient analysis showed a high significant negative correlation between the two variables ($r = -.824$, $p = .000$, $n = 150$). With almost the same sample size, Jafarigohar (2012) investigated the relationship between foreign language anxiety and reading comprehension in distance learning to prove the significant negative correlation between foreign language reading anxiety and reading comprehension in distance learning ($r = -.211$, $p < 0.05$, $n = 112$).

In brief, even though there was scarcity in the research conducted to examine foreign language reading anxiety in relation to performance, it is obvious from the previous studies that performance and reading comprehension

in particular is influenced by foreign language reading anxiety.

3. Methodology

3.1 The Setting and the Participants

According to Horwitz et al. (1986) anxious students are common in foreign language classrooms, at least in the beginning classes at the university level. Therefore, the participants of this study were recruited from bachelor students during the second semester in the academic year 2011/2012 enrolled at Yarmouk University; it is a well-known public university in Jordan. According to the description of the university at the university's website (www.yu.edu.jo), the university has a language centre which is one of the largest centres in the university. Every semester the centre serves nearly six thousand students from various disciplines with the aim to improve the performance of students in the Basic English skills. The centre teaches three courses in the English language which are compulsory for the undergraduate level. Students may be exempted from one or two of them based on their scores in the placement test. All exams of the university compulsory courses are computerized to ensure rapid feedback and strict neutrality in the measurement of student performance and evaluation of their achievement.

3.2 Sampling Procedures

In the current study, the sample was selected purposefully. The researcher intentionally selected the informants who experience English language reading anxiety and those who can provide the best information to achieve the objective of the study (Creswell, 2009). It is one of the most common sampling strategies which is more relative to the nature of the research question. Moreover, this kind of sampling is extremely useful to describe this phenomenon.

To select the informants in the this study, two sequence stages were applied as criteria of assortment; first, the informants must have taken one of the two courses, if not both, and be of those who experience anxiety in reading English with taking in consideration they have been taken from different levels of English language proficiency based on the teachers' knowledge and judgment. Second, the nominated informants should be expressive to give rich information and willing to contribute based on the researcher's judgment. The researcher's judgment was built on the basis of a small conversation with individuals to ensure that the informants met the criteria of selection.

3.3 Sample Size

Outstanding to the nature of the qualitative research, few participants were selected. Some methodologists estimate the sample size required for case study design in case of individuals to approximately range from 6 to 23 cases (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Table 2 symbolizes the classification of the selected informants.

Table 2. The informants' classification in the current study

Informant No	English Level	Gender	Year	Faculty	Specialization
1	Medium	Female	Sophomore	Science	Chemistry
2	Medium	Female	Freshman	Arts	Translation
3	High	Male	Freshman	Engineering	Power Engineering
4	High	Male	Junior	Arts	English Language and Literature
5	Low	Male	Senior	Arts	Islamic Studies
6	Low	Male	Junior	Arts	Sociology and Community Service

3.4 Data Collection Procedures

The data was collected according to the following stages:

The researcher received a letter to conduct the study from the Institution of Education in the International Islamic University Malaysia. The letter was sent to the director of the language center. Then, it was sent to the directorate of the Yarmouk University for endorsement. The researcher then had the permission to attend the classes at the language center to conduct the study which observation from the first week until the last week of the academic year, conducting interviews, and administering learners' diaries have all been done.

During attending the classes, the researcher asked the teachers' support to offer him students with different level of language proficiency who can contribute in the study. 26 volunteer students were categorized into three levels of proficiency based on the teachers' knowledge and judgment. However, only 6 students actually participated in

the study based on the second criteria of selection.

After the informants were assigned, a recorded face to face of semi-structured interview was conducted in the mother tongue language of the informants. As soon as the interview was conducted, it was verbatim transcribed utilizing Express scribe V5.13 software and the Dedoose web based tool. When ideas or questions emerged during transcribing data in the initial interviews, they were added to the next interview.

The informants also were asked to keep diaries for two weeks in order to determine the sources of their anxiety in English reading; they were told to jot down what happens in their reading class and more highly appreciated was to express what they feel about whatever happens during or after the reading section. They were given a detailed explanation about how the diary looks like; the diary was written in the informants' mother tongue language to avoid language barriers or difficulties. It was written in the participants' own style to allow students to express themselves and their feelings more willingly.

The learners' diary data collection technique along with the transcribed interview for the same informants was combined and used as a case to have more reliable triangulated results. Furthermore, the researcher participated in the classroom to take field observation notes to help him understand the phenomenon, improve the interview questions and communicate with the nominated students to get know who to choose as next informants.

3.5 Demonstrating Credibility and Dependability

These concepts are essential in conducting a qualitative research to check for the accuracy and credibility of the findings. The trustworthiness, authenticity, and creditability are used interchangeably in the qualitative research; they were represented by the member checking, triangulation of the data collection techniques and spending prolonged time in the field. The dependability in the qualitative research refers as inter-rater reliability; it was presented by inter-coder agreement or cross-checking (Creswell, 2009).

The following procedures were advocated to ensure credibility and dependability for the qualitative phase (Gibbs, 2007).

1. Credibility

The credibility in the qualitative research is seen as the strength of research. It is suggested to determine whether the findings are accurate from the point of view of the researcher, the participants, or the readers of an account (Creswell, 2009). Thus, to determine the accuracy or the credibility and the dependability of the findings, the researcher has done the following:

- 1) The researcher took the transcriptions to the participants to make sure that they were accurate from their point of view and at the same time gave them opportunity to comment on the findings which led to develop the credibility.
- 2) The researcher attended English classes for more than two months. By doing so, the researcher has developed an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon and more credibility has been given to the findings as (Creswell, 2009) states "the more experience that the researcher has with participants in their actual sitting, the more accurate or valid will be the findings".
- 3) The researcher triangulated the interview transcript with the learner diaries written to build a coherence justification of the themes.

2. Dependability

The researcher checked the transcripts to make sure that they were accurately transcribed and then developed codes. In order to compare the results which are independently derived, Dedoose Code-specific application results was reported using Cohen's kappa statistic (Cohen, 1960). It is a coefficient of agreement for nominal scales. Cohen's kappa statistic is a widely used and respected measure to evaluate inter-rater agreement as compared to the rate of agreement expected by chance based on the coding behavior or each rater (Vries, Elliott, Kanouse, & Teleki, 2008). Further, to report an overall result for tests that include more than one code, Dedoose web application has adopted the Pooled Kappa, rather than a simple average of kappa's across the set, to summarize rater agreement across many codes as mentioned. There are a variety of proposed standards for evaluating the significance of a Cohen's kappa value. Landis and Koch (1977) suggest that kappa values of: < .20 = poor agreement, .21-.4 = fair agreement, .41-.6 = moderate agreement, .61-.8 = good agreement and .81-1.0 = very good agreement. Similarly, Cicchetti and Domenic (1994) suggest analogous guidelines that kappa values of : < .40 = poor agreement, .40-.59 = fair agreement, .60-.74 = good agreement, and .75-1.0 = excellent agreement. Dedoose visual indicators use the following criteria for interpreting kappa values: < .50 = poor agreement, .51-.64 = fair agreement, .65-.80 = good agreement, and > .80 = excellent agreement.

In the Code Application used in Dedoose, one can view the results for the individual codes included in the test with the associated code-specific Kappa result in which view Code Applications button view the excerpts in the test and the actual codes applied by the trainer and trainee. To accomplish that, two trainees in the field of foreign language teaching were asked to improve coding application based on the earlier development of the coding. It was applied to ensure the agreement of the two experts on the codes used for the same passages in the transcribed text. 0.7 reported the first test while the second was .65. In average both tests showed good agreement which endorsed the researcher to proceed.

3.6 Translation Issues

Because the data was collected in the Arabic language, there was a need to explain how the data was translated into English. According to Marriam (2009), there are two common used approaches to handle data collected in a language other than English in case of writing the report in English. One is to translate the whole transcripts into English and then look for the themes. The other approach is to work in the original language which includes the analysis and then translating only the findings that can support evidence to the presentation. In both cases, back to back translation is necessary to check the quality of translation by those who are experts in both languages.

Due to the process of generating tentative and complex thinking improved, the researcher followed the second approach by asking one expert in the Arabic and English languages to translate the major findings and then asked another expert in both languages to translate them back to ensure the accuracy of the translation. Then, both translated scripts were compared to confirm slight significant differences noted.

4. Findings and Discussion

To answer the question, the analysis of the data obtained through interviews and diaries of the informants indicated five themes as sources of reading anxiety in English as a foreign language as expressed by the informants which are; unknown vocabulary, unfamiliar topic, unfamiliar culture, afraid of making errors and worry about reading effects. The Figure 1 presents the concurrences of the emergent themes from each informant to the third sub-question.

DOCUMENTS	THEMES					Total
	Worry about Reading Effects	Afraid of Making Errors	Unfamiliar Culture	Unfamiliar Topic	Unknown Vocabulary	
First Interview	0	1	1	2	0	4
Second Interview	3	0	3	1	2	9
Third Interview	0	0	2	2	4	8
Fourth Interview	4	1	1	4	1	11
Fifth Interview	3	2	0	2	4	11
Sixth Interview	1	1	0	0	1	3
First Diary	0	1	2	1	3	7
Second Diary	5	1	1	1	3	11
Third Diary	0	0	0	0	0	0
Fourth Diary	0	0	1	1	2	4
Fifth Diary	1	0	0	0	1	2
Sixth Diary	1	1	0	1	3	6
Total	18	8	11	15	24	76

Figure 1. The concurrences of the emergent themes from the research question

4.1 Unknown Vocabulary

It seems that unknown vocabulary is a source of foreign language reading anxiety. All informants revealed that strange words drive foreign language learners to anxiety. One informant of low-level-of-proficiency expressed that reading is a boring task unless all vocabulary are understood.

I may enjoy reading but I have to understand what I read. This comes from knowing all vocabulary in the text. (Fifth interview, Excerpt range: 1763-1870)

When he was previously asked about his interest in the reading skill, his answer was.

I have concern to learn reading because of the difficult words. If I know a lot of English words, I may like it. (Fifth interview, Excerpt range: 919-1044)

He also reported that the major problem students' face is the deficiency of vocabulary.

The reason behind low adeptness in English is because of the vocabulary. (Fifth diary, Excerpt range: 185-213)

It appears that he strongly believes that vocabulary is the main sub-skill students must achieve to improve their proficiency.

I focus on vocabulary because if I know vocabulary I can understand the subject. (Fifth interview, Excerpt range: 5110-5180)

Similarly, the other informant considers that lack of vocabulary is responsible for misunderstanding English texts.

If I know vocabulary, I can understand the English text. (Sixth interview, Excerpt range: 4949-5068)

It becomes visible that low-level-of-proficiency students lack to vocabulary which blocks their way to success in reading.

I had an exam, I tried to study hard but I reached a hindered way full of difficult words that I could not know their meaning. (Sixth diary, Excerpt range: 741-872)

Not knowing a lot of words is a problem which leads to quitting the act of reading.

Sometime, I translate some of the vocabulary and then I feel anxious and suddenly quit reading. (Sixth diary, Excerpt range: 1615-1794)

The medium-level-of-proficiency informants also feel anxious in reading English texts which includes difficult vocabulary. One informant clearly reported:

I personally feel disappointed and uneasy in reading when I do not know the meaning of a word. (First diary, Excerpt range: 849-918)

This lack of vocabulary causes anxiety in reading in a foreign language. The other informant reported:

When I read a text in the English language I prefer to be involved in easy vocabulary. (Second diary, Excerpt range: 30-109)

When I read an English text and find difficulty in some words I feel anxious and worry. (Second diary, Excerpt range: 1114-191)

In addition to that, students in the class feel anxious about unknown vocabulary. The same informant expressed in the interview that she finds obscurity in fresh words.

In the class, I like the teacher who explains in the Arabic and English language because I face a problem of knowing the meaning of the new words. (Second interview, Excerpt range: 4768-4978)

Likewise, the high-level-of-proficiency informants face the same problem of missing words.

When I read a full page I might come across ten new words. (Third interview, Excerpt range: 885-943)

Even though it appears that there is dissimilarity in the informants reply, this lack of vocabulary causes anxiety in reading.

In the act of reading, I rarely face situation of anxiety. If it happens it is because of not knowing the meaning of a new word. (Third interview, Excerpt range: 2158-2241)

Almost everything I read in English, I can understand but in some cases only two or three new words disturb me too much. (Third interview, Excerpt range: 2943-3143)

Sometimes new topics include new words. (Third interview, Excerpt range: 3772-3890)

The other informant also faces the same as the previous. He revealed that the most anxious situation is connected to series of new words.

Sometimes, the problem is not only you do not know the word but also do not know the word before and after. It is a really anxious situation. (Fourth interview, Excerpt range: 6135-6374)

Moreover, the same informant reported that unknown vocabulary leads to a false impression if he inferred the meaning from the context which ultimately drives him to tenseness.

When I read an English text which involves with some unknown vocabulary, I try to translate them or digest the meaning from the context. If I failed in doing so, I feel frustration. (Fourth diary, Excerpt range: 4059-4604)

Congruent with this finding, unknown vocabulary was categorized to be one of five themes of anxiety caused by reading texts in the study of Turkish students who were learning English language as a foreign language (Kuru-Gonen, 2009).

Furthermore, in Liu (2007) study, lack of vocabulary was identified to be a main cause for Chinese students who were learning the English language. Participants revealed their worry of the speaking skill due to scarcity of vocabulary. Although the latter study was more close to foreign language anxiety in general, it also can be a shared component between foreign language anxiety in general and foreign language reading anxiety as a specific skill ever since foreign language reading anxiety was established to be a phenomenon related to but distinct from foreign language anxiety in general (Kuru-Gonen, 2005, 2007, 2009; Saito et al., 1999; Sellers, 2000; Wu, 2011). In the same way, in Walker (1997) thesis, interview data showed that highly anxious Chinese learners who learn English as a foreign language have less opportunity to succeed because of the insufficient vocabulary in the target language.

4.2 Unfamiliar Topic

It seems that unfamiliar topic is a source of anxiety in reading for all students. All informants feel anxious if they read topics for the first time and do not understand it. To begin, both low level of proficiency informants revealed that topics which are tricky or new are boring to read. One informant stated that he enjoys reading English texts related to his major, Islamic studies.

I took a reading course called "Holy Texts in the English Language". I really enjoyed the course. It was about Holy verses and sometimes Hadiths in both the Arabic and English languages. I liked the translation and enjoyed reading translated texts. (Fifth interview, Excerpt range: 3064-3312)

He also added that he likes reading holy texts in English language due to his background and familiarity about such topics.

I like reading Islamic texts because it is related to my major and most vocabulary is well known to me. They are the same in most topics so when I read in this field I easily understand rather than reading in different fields. (Fifth interview, Excerpt range: 5335-5510)

The other informant assured that he likes and enjoy reading easy and simple stories and materials related to his knowledge.

The only thing I like which I can understand the idea of is social topics and sometimes short stories. (Sixth diary, Excerpt range: 987-1183)

Similarly, both medium-levels-of-proficiency informants like reading short stories and familiar topics. The first informant stated that topics which are not enjoyable are boring.

I do not like reading boring topics. (First interview, Excerpt range: 6024-6061)

Propping the same informant for more details, she exposed.

I like reading what I feel I understand. If I understand 20-30% of the topic, I enjoy reading. (First interview, Excerpt range: 519-821)

The other informant assured that short stories are her favorite because it is easy and familiar in their manner.

The most things I like to read are the short stories because they are easy to understand and they all have the same style. (Second interview, Excerpt range: 2872-2919)

Further, she reported that previous knowledge about the topic makes it easy to understand.

I prefer texts which I have prior knowledge about in order to understand them. (Second diary, Excerpt range: 196-255)

It gives the impression that familiar topics helps to understand and enjoy reading in a foreign language. The high-levels-of-proficiency informants also share the idea of previous knowledge and familiarity. One informant expressed the feeling of anxiety in reading unfamiliar topics.

I feel anxious and I have this kind of worry and fear. (Third interview, Excerpt range: 4118-4188)

It appears that he likes to read familiar topics.

I like familiar texts to understand what I read and then enjoy reading. (Third interview, Excerpt range: 2819-2899)

The other informant prefers to have some thought about the topic before the act of reading to get acquainted.

I feel worried if I read a story without a previous idea or abstract. (Fourth interview, Excerpt range: 6416-6509)

The shared feeling happens in the class as well. The same informant stated that;

Even in the class; if I do not have a brief idea about the topic before the class begins, I easily pay no attention to the class. (Fourth interview, Excerpt range: 7590-7663)

He overtly exposed that familiarity of the topic helps him to read with no trouble and with complete understanding.

When I read any topic, I must know the outline. I prefer to read about the topic and get familiar with it by getting an analysis or summary from the internet. (Fourth interview, Excerpt range: 8144-8287)

When the researcher earlier asked about the choice of reading in case of the availability of both languages, he stated that he prefers to read in Arabic first to get a brief idea.

I might read in Arabic to have a brief and short thought. I am not saying that I read the whole story in Arabic. I read the whole text in English. (Fourth interview, Excerpt range: 4168-4398)

In the diary, he wrote that he likes to study grammar, reading and writing due to his exposure of these topics rather than studying unfamiliar topics such as English literature.

I see that I like to study grammar, reading, and writing related materials rather than studying courses related to English literature. (Fourth diary, Excerpt range: 2337-2467)

A similar finding was found in Kuru-Gonen (2009) study. However, the uninteresting topic theme occupied the largest portion of the Turkish students' diary and interviews as a source of foreign language reading anxiety.

In a different context, Zhao (2009) found unfamiliar topic as a source of foreign language reading anxiety. The researcher utilized FLRAS to explore the foreign language reading anxiety level among 125 English students who were learning the Chinese language in the United States. Besides that, he used item (5) that stated "I am nervous when I am reading a passage in Chinese when I am not familiar with the topic". 44% of the students agree or strongly agree with the explicit item that reveals that unfamiliar topic is one of the anxiety provoking sources in reading Chinese as a foreign language.

Considering that foreign language reading anxiety was found as a phenomenon related but distinguished from foreign language anxiety in general, Lin (2009) found assigned writing subjects which are not exciting to the learners to write about or not commonly related to daily life are a source of anxiety in the writing skill.

4.3 Unfamiliar Culture

Even though English language is considered as a universal language, it seems that some learners still counter cultural familiarity aspects in the act of reading. Only medium and high-level-of-proficiency informants revealed unfamiliar culture as a source of English language reading anxiety.

The medium-level-of-proficiency informants revealed that strange texts which most often have connections of words which are difficult to understand ultimately cause anxiety in reading. The first informant expressed that knowing the words are not enough to understand the English texts.

When I read English text, I might translate words individually. However, understanding the texts is difficult. Sometimes it is difficult to understand the whole meaning. Connecting the words changes the meaning and sometimes there is a hidden meaning. (First interview, Excerpt range: 4750-4963)

In the diary she reported the same idea.

To improve my English language, I was suddenly motivated. I decided to read an English novel which was not translated to Arabic. Frankly, I only read one page and then closed the book. Simply it is because I did not understand the accomplished meaning. (First diary, Excerpt range: 16-228)

Also, she reported that misunderstanding words or sentences causes frustration to grasp the author's meaning.

In the act of reading, misunderstanding a word or a sentence is a disappointment to achieve the meaning of the writer. (First diary, Excerpt range: 849-963)

The second informant shared the same; in the interview, she revealed that translating the meaning to the other language does not necessary connote the same sense.

In the English language course, the lecturer asked the class to translate a story. My translation was totally different from the real one because every word in the text had many connotations in Arabic. I could not understand the whole text. (Second interview, Excerpt range: 3583-3888)

When she was asked about the preferable texts she would like to read, her response was.

The important thing is easy text which does not carry culture. (Second interview, Excerpt range: 4023-4087)

Then she was propped further about the difficulties she might face in reading cultural contents. She said;

Even if I sometimes deduce the major idea, I most often do not achieve the exact meaning. (Second interview, Excerpt range: 5302-5413)

She reported in her diary that in some dense texts she does not understand the whole idea regardless of understanding the meaning of each individual word, which causes her some anxiety in this situation.

In some complex texts, I understand most of the words and translate the difficult ones. However, I worry and feel anxious to not understand the author's meaning. (Second diary, Excerpt range: 452-615)

On the other hand, the high-level-of-proficiency informants exposed that regardless of knowing all the words, it is difficult to understand the whole content as a unit. One informant said;

Sometimes when I read text in the English language I do not achieve the meaning of the text even though all the words are known to me. (Third interview, Excerpt range: 1623-1707)

The same idea was repeated when he said again;

Most often I know all the words. However, I do not understand the whole meaning. (Third interview, Excerpt range: 4020-4117)

The other informant is specialized in English language and literature. He exposed that these problems are most often faced in reading English novels.

I have a problem when I read. I translate the difficult words but still do not get the meaning or the idea behind the paragraph or the text. It happens most often in English novel reading. (Fourth interview, Excerpt range: 3615-3761)

In the diary, the same informant reported that courses related to culture are not his favorite due to the involvement of archaic English.

I see that I like to study grammar, reading, and writing related materials rather than studying courses related to English literature which includes old English words. (Fourth diary, Excerpt range: 2337-2473)

This finding related to the first study of foreign language reading anxiety. In Saito et al. (1999), unfamiliar cultural material was hypothesized to be an aspect that elicits foreign language reading anxiety. According to them, readers connect words to process the meaning of text. However, at some point the reader does not compose a logical message which creates an anxious situation. This is because of the deficient awareness of the cultural material underlying the text.

In addition to that, Tanveer (2007) found that cultural differences between the foreign language learners and the target language is a vital source of anxiety. In the study, a range of students, teachers, and practitioners from different nationalities who refer to English as a foreign/second language were investigated to declare that the more unfamiliar the culture is in the target language, the more it is possible to be an anxiety provoking situation.

4.4 Afraid of Making Errors

It seems that the majority of students are afraid of making errors. According to the informants' reactions, making errors is an undesirable thing whether it occurs in front of the teacher or students. One low-level-of-proficiency informant articulated that silent reading is preferable in order not to be in a situation of making errors.

I like silent reading to avoid making errors in front of the class. (Sixth interview, Excerpt range: 4502-4558)

The same informant assured that the task of reading aloud is not preferable for him to avoid making mistakes. Furthermore, he revealed that in case of reading aloud, he prepares and focuses on the pronunciation to avoid

mispronunciation.

I like to read silently to keep away from committing mistakes in front of the class. In reading aloud situations, I prepare too much and at the same time focus on the pronunciation to avoid embracement. (Sixth Diary, Excerpt range: 1831-2139)

The other informant also dislikes making errors. He exposed that his aim in reading is to perform excellent reading with no mistakes despite the consequences of comprehension if he is asked to read in front of his teacher.

When I am asked to read, I try to read correctly not to focus on understanding what I read (Fifth interview, Excerpt range: 2796-2877)

To prop the informant more, the researcher asked him to read a simple English text, and then, the informant was asked about his feeling.

In the beginning, I was afraid and embarrassed. I thought you want to evaluate my pronunciation. (Fifth interview, Excerpt range: 3462-3455)

When he was asked about his feeling about making mistakes in front of students and teachers, he replied;

I do not like making mistakes whether in front of the students or the teacher. (Fifth interview, Excerpt range: 3455-3462)

Equally, both medium-levels-of-proficiency informants share the same feeling of reading aloud to avoid making mistakes. The first informant said that reading aloud is preferable only in the case of simple and easy texts. However, a specialized text is avoided to stay away from making errors.

I like reading aloud in front of the class in case of easy and simple texts. With scientific texts, I am afraid of reading to steer clear of embracement. (First interview, Excerpt range: 4322-4483)

It seems that the informant likes to read aloud but she afraid of making errors due to the lack of confidence. In the diary she wrote;

Today, I returned back from the English class with bliss. It is the first time I was encouraged. I participated in the class. I read aloud in front of the class and my teacher was happy because I did not commit any mistake. I observed that many students worry. (First diary, Excerpt range: 409-782)

The second informant, on the other hand reported that she refuses to participate in the class to avoid misreading a word.

When I am in the class and asked to answer a question. I feel anxious to read the answer because I do not like to read any word wrongly. (Second diary, Excerpt range: 619-746)

Congruent with the previous, one high level of proficiency informant stated he is always afraid of misreading any words.

I am not afraid of reading itself. However, I feel anxious if there are easy and simple words for the other I misread. In reading class, I am always prepared and also I focus on difficult words and pronunciation. (Fourth interview, Excerpt range: 6552-6785)

As afraid of making error theme was measured as a personal factor, it might be an aspect shared between foreign language anxiety in general and foreign language reading anxiety in particular. That is, foreign language learners who are afraid of reading aloud to avoid committing an observed mistake in pronunciation or misreading any word in the text, they are also more anxious of doing the same in speaking. In the environment where English is used as a foreign language, Turkish students were investigated to confirm that making mistakes or fear of making mistakes were sources of anxiety that influence foreign language learners. In Cubukcu (2007), making mistakes was identified as one of the main sources that cause foreign language anxiety. In other study, fear of making errors in English was found to be a negative effect on the students' anxiety (Celebi, 2009).

Correspondingly, Liu (2007) examined Chinese learners' anxiety in oral English classroom. Reflective journals revealed that fear of making mistakes and being laughed at are situation that cause anxiety.

In distant environment learning, Hauck and Hurd (2005) administered a questionnaire as a part of extensive longitudinal study. The purpose of the questionnaire in the initial investigation aimed to provide a description and analysis of the causes of foreign language anxiety. One of the most important causes of anxiety was fear of making mistakes and worrying about accent.

It can be understood that afraid of making errors in the target language is related to the personal factor and can be shared between foreign language anxiety in general and foreign language reading anxiety in particular in any

case of the learners' language.

4.5 Worry about Reading Effects

It seems that students are anxious during and after the reading process. In most cases they worry more and pay more effort to read well in order to show themselves in a good image. However, if they were asked about reading comprehension, the same state of worrying would come back again. The majority of informants are anxious during and after the act of reading. They try to pay attention on performance and in some cases they try to imitate the native speakers. In these cases, they are worried about their performance in reading while not understanding of what they have read because they paid attention to performance and ignored the understanding part.

In the case of low-level-of-proficiency informants, it is obvious that they pay attention to the act of reading rather than reading comprehension. One informant expressed that he did not understand the sentence totally when the researcher asked him to read and then to explain what has been read.

My goal was to read. Therefore, I did not recognize what I have read. I need to refer to the sentence again. (Fifth interview, Excerpt range: 2093-2223)

When the same informant was asked whether this happens in his mother tongue as well, his immediate answer was;

In the Arabic language I understand whatever I read but in the English language I face a problem in reading in front of others so I do not focus on understanding. (Fifth interview, Excerpt range: 2291-2417)

Probing the same informant, he revealed that he prefers to read silently rather than loudly to understand what he reads.

I find it easy to read silent rather than a loud because I can understand better with silent reading. (Fifth interview, Excerpt range: 4222-4345)

He also reported in the diary the reason why this does not happen in his mother tongue as well.

The problem is that we are learning English consciously. It can be easy to understand if we learn it unconsciously. (Fifth diary, Excerpt range: 725-811)

The other informant showed his feeling of embarrassment if he was asked to read aloud.

If I was asked to read, I feel ashamed and at the same time I feel that they all look at me and I start thinking of their thinking about my reading. (Sixth interview, Excerpt range: 3979-4109)

It is observed that worrying about reading effects distracts the reader's attention in what he reads which ultimately drives the reader to pay more attention on performance.

When I read I focus on pronunciation not on meaning. (Sixth diary, Excerpt range: 1930-1973)

It is also observed that English language specialized students are more worried about reading effects than their counterparts. The medium-level-of-proficiency informant who was specialized in translation expressed extensively that the act of reading aloud prevents her from comprehension.

I do not understand the text unless I read it slowly and silently. I prefer to read the text at home to fully understand it. (Second interview, Excerpt range: 2989-3123)

She also assured that again in a different occasion.

I do not focus unless I am alone and pay attention to every word I read. (Second interview, Excerpt range: 3133-3180)

Also in her diary, she extensively reported that worrying about reading effects is the most anxious situation she faces.

When I read an English language text, I try to understand every individual word in the context in order to understand the whole text. (Second diary, Excerpt range: 353-447)

In the class, most often I hesitate to read the answer of a question I know to avoid misreading. In this case I prefer not to answer any question. This really annoys me too much. (Second diary, Excerpt range: 751-869)

Sometimes, when I read in front of peers I feel that I read in English for the first time and also I feel that I read words which are not in the text. (Second diary, Excerpt range: 874-985)

When I read in front of peers, I feel that I read words which are strange for me even though they are obvious and I can read them well alone. (Second diary, Excerpt range: 986-1095)

Sometimes, when I read in front of the teacher and peers, I need time to pass quickly. (Second diary, Excerpt range: 1100-1181)

The other high-level-of-proficiency informant who is specialized in the English language and literature also expressed intensively that his focus on reading accurately prevents him from understanding. This uncovered issue appeared when the researcher asked the informants to read and suddenly asked them about what they have read.

When I read in front of you, I tried to read as good as I can but the problem I face is that I do not get even the general idea about what I have read because I was focusing on reading accurately. That is 80% was on the act of reading and 20% was on translating the sentence. I know what I read was easy but I focused on the act of reading itself. (Fourth interview, Excerpt range: 4650-4990)

When the informant was asked about his feeling when the researcher asked him to read, he said;

I liked to read and I enjoy pronouncing words as it is pronounced by the native speakers; sometimes I pay attention to some letters like (R). If I read silently also I focus on translating words in my mind. (Fourth interview, Excerpt range: 5660-5929)

It also seems that the informant was fascinated in the pronunciation rather than understanding the text and getting the knowledge.

I try as much as I can to imitate the way of pronunciation that native speakers do. (Fourth interview, Excerpt range: 833-898)

I try to pronounce each word accurately. I always look at the phonetic transcript to pronounce the words correctly. (Fourth interview, Excerpt range: 1782-1919)

Kuru-Gonen (2009) found fear of comprehension as a personal factor that creates foreign language reading anxiety. In her study, Turkish students stated that worrying of not understanding English texts creates anxiety provoking situation in reading the target language.

In the case of Chinese learners, Zhao (2009) found reading Chinese as a foreign language is anxiety provoking to most of the students. Approximately 43% of 125 sample enrolled in the Chinese course agree or strongly agree on a one FLRAS item which stated “I’m not sure whether I understand what I am reading in Chinese”. Therefore, worrying about reading effects theme was identified as a source of foreign language reading anxiety in the study.

All in all, five themes were generated from the fieldwork which is consistent with the previous literature represented in a large percentage in the current study. These themes were categorized into two aspects; the text features which are related to the nature of texts, and the personal factors which are related to the foreign language learners. The Figure 2 represents the underlying factors of the sources of anxiety in reading

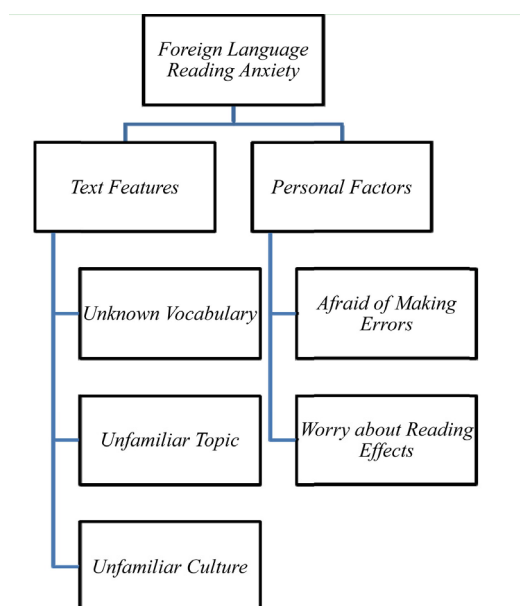


Figure 2. The generated model which represents the underlying factors of English language reading anxiety

The order of the underlying factors of English language reading anxiety is identical in the current study according to text features and personal factors. Figure 3 portrays the occupied space in a pentagon shape which demonstrates the presence of the emergent themes in the qualitative study and Table 3 represents the parallel concurrence percentage of themes in the study.

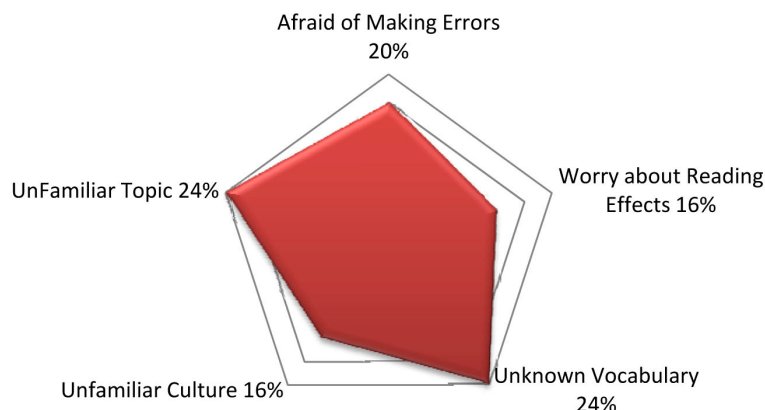


Figure 3. The presence of themes in the study

Text Features

The diagram ranks unknown vocabulary as the most present theme occupied by the informants. It presents 24% of the total sum of themes followed by the unfamiliar topic theme which presents the same amount of the percentage, whereas the unfamiliar culture occupied 16% of the total sum of the themes.

Personal factors

The diagram ranks afraid of making errors theme as the most present theme occupied by the informants. It presents 20% of the total sum of themes followed by the worry about reading effect theme, which presents 16% of the total sum of themes.

Table 3. The concurrence percentages of themes in the study

Themes	Percentage Agreement	Rank	Aspect
Unknown Vocabulary*	24%	1	Text Feature
Unfamiliar Topic	24%	2	
Unfamiliar Culture	16%	3	
Afraid of Making Errors	20%	1	Personal Factor
Worry about Reading Effects	16%	2	

* Unknown vocabulary theme ranked as the first in comparison with the unfamiliar topic theme due to the large number of excerpts.

5. Conclusion

This study responds to the lack of research on foreign language reading anxiety and the need to investigate the sources of foreign language reading anxiety in particular. According to Saito et al. (1999) foreign language reading anxiety varies according to the target language and writing system. Learners of a variety of common languages such as English, Spanish, and French were investigated. Arabic learners who learn one of the common languages have less been investigated and even sources of foreign language reading anxiety have not

been investigated yet. Therefore, this research hopes to add to the previous literature the sources of foreign language reading anxiety in the Arabic context where English is used as a foreign language.

6. Implications of the Study

The findings of this study have revealed that students feel anxiety in reading the English language as a result of two aspects: personal factors and text features. These aspects established that reading in a foreign language is also anxiety provoking. The findings also indicated that students experienced higher levels of foreign language reading anxiety. The reason of this increase was the increase level of difficulty of reading materials in term of both the aspects of personal factor and text feature. These two aspects are represented by the five constructs of unknown vocabulary, unfamiliar topic, unfamiliar culture, worry about reading effects, and afraid of making errors. Accordingly, implications of the study suggest two vital options for the language teachers. According to Horwitz et al (1986), educators can help foreign language learners to reduce foreign language reading anxiety by improving the learners' self-confidence to deal with the personal factor. They can prepare the students for the factors that may cause foreign language reading anxiety before asking the students to read in front of the class or they might discuss these factors to help the students reflect their feelings which can help in reducing foreign language reading anxiety and encourage them to read in the foreign language for the purpose of knowledge.

Moreover, there are other suggestions to reduce foreign language reading anxiety of foreign language learners by; (1) Moving from a formal context to an informal one. (2) Selecting error correction techniques that should be based on instructional philosophy that reduces defensive reactions of students. (3) Using the appropriate approach of teaching that encourages students to say what they meant to avoid correction. (4) Encouraging small group activities. (5) Focusing on topics that are interesting for the students, (6) and paying careful attention to the selection of texts to ensure the suitability of material selection with the appropriate difficulty.

The educators can also create low anxiety situation to alleviate foreign language reading anxiety caused by text feature as well. For example, in English classes; they can select topics which are authentic or common to the students' culture and background which construct vocabulary that are standard to the readers' needs. In this case, the learners again build strong self-confidence and could be familiar with others' feeling and know the purpose of reading which should be clear as well. It should be instituted that objective is attaining contemporary knowledge, not evaluating or competing with native speakers' reading.

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