



## The Correlation between Reading Anxiety and Students' Critical Reading Ability at English Department of UNP

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### Article History

Submitted: 2023-01-18

Accepted: 2023-02-10

Published: 2023-03-20

### Keywords:

Reading English,  
Critical Reading,  
Ability, Foreign  
Language Reading  
Anxiety

### Abstract

This study investigates the possible relationship between reading anxiety and the critical reading ability of students majoring in English. Thirty-two students majoring in English education were selected as the research sample. The instrument used by the researcher was the form of a TOEFL test consisting of 30 questions which were used to measure students' ability to read critically. In addition, the researcher also developed a questionnaire based on the theory of experts consisting of 20 statements used to measure students' reading anxiety. Pearson Product-Moment investigates the relationship between reading anxiety and students' critical reading ability. This research found several results; 1) Most students experience anxiety at the medium level, with a percentage of 62.50%. 2) The level of students' critical reading ability is at the average level, with a percentage of (75%). 3) There is a correlation between students' reading anxiety and critical reading ability, as indicated by  $r = .0.375$ . This shows that  $H_0$  is rejected and  $H_a$  is accepted. The results shows that the higher reading anxiety students , the lower students' scores in critical reading.

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**How to Cite:** Erdiansyah, E., & Fitrawati, F. (2023). The Correlation between Reading Anxiety and Students' Critical Reading Ability at English Department of UNP. *Journal of English Language Teaching*, 12. (1): pp. 270-279, DOI: [10.24036/jelt.v12i1.121547](https://doi.org/10.24036/jelt.v12i1.121547)

## INTRODUCTION

English has become a mandatory subject in Indonesia from junior high school to the university. Students need English because it may help them widen their perspectives, develop emotional abilities, and enhance their quality of life by giving them career prospects.

One of the essential skills is reading. According to Grabe, (2008), "Reading is a process in which students learn from what they read and apply what they have learned in academic circumstances as part of their education." Unlike speaking, reading is done quietly with many chances for reflection and reconsideration. Reading categorize as an individual act that does not need the validation of others to determine its success" Saito et al., (1999). Students who have a strong desire to learn English will have to understand what is reading in English then they can move into an English-speaking environment (Bright and McGregor, 1970, cited in Brusck, (1991)). The key to success in learning lies in how students can read. The more proficient a student is in reading, the more comprehensive his knowledge.

Reading at the university level is divided into literal, interpretive, and critical reading comprehension Par, (2018). Critical reading is assumed to be the highest level of reading Rohmah, (2018). Darch & Kameenui, (1987) defined critical reading as an activity that requires evaluation and interpretation skills that enable the reader to sort out unimportant information, distinguish between fact and opinion, and recognize the author's purpose. Critical reading requires a high ability to evaluate and analyze complex texts such as news texts, essays, and theses. Critical reading is more complex and requires the students to read more carefully and using different skills to understand the text (Huijie, 2010). Everyone can read, from children to the elderly, everyone can read. However, to find deeper meaning of the text, only a few are able to. For the university level, critical reading is an ability that students have to master. Nevertheless, in practice, students may experience some difficulties in critical reading.

Anuar et al.,(2020) found some difficulties in mastering critical reading: lack of motivation, low English proficiency, mental fatigue, fear of negative feedback, and fear of being wrong. It can be seen that most of the difficulties lead to anxiety. Complex reading texts and high reading demands in critical reading can increase students' possibility of feeling anxious in reading. Several critical reading activities, such as looking for specific information in passages or encountering FL unfamiliar words, provoke students to feel fear and anxiety in reading a foreign language. Anxiety in reading affects students' thinking skills and causes students to read carelessly without understanding the meaning of the text. Anxiety weakens the connections in some parts of the brain which can lead to irrational thought and erratic behavior. Students may also experience blank-outs while reading due to anxiety. High anxiety levels are negatively correlated with academic achievement in reading English and students' grades Hembree, (1988). This kind of anxiety is called Foreign Language Reading Anxiety.

Foreign Language Reading Anxiety is any discomfort or fear of reading foreign texts during the reading process. FLRA causes physical reactions and cognitive reactions due to response anxiety while reading. Reading anxiety, considered less experienced by students has long been neglected in research on anxiety. Until the late 1990s that research on foreign language reading anxiety emerged.

Ghonsooly & Elahi, (2010) conducted a study to find relationship between EFL students' reading comprehension, self-efficacy, and reading anxiety. A total of 150 second-year English literature students from three universities participated in this study. Jafarigohar & Behrooznia, (2012) who investigated the correlation between Foreign Language Reading Anxiety (FLRA) and reading comprehension skills among 112 Iranian learners study English as a foreign language at B.A. degree. Badara et al., (2019) investigate the correlation between anxiety level and foreign language learners' reading comprehension. 95 students of second-semester at English Department were the sample. Findings reveal that anxiety in reading is natural and that students' reading anxiety levels rise in tandem with their perceptions of how difficult it is to read in their foreign language. The lower the achievement scores, the higher their anxiety level.

As explained above, several studies were investigate the relationship between students reading anxiety and reading comprehension. The search results found by researcher, not many studies were found that investigated the relationship of reading anxiety and reading ability especially in critical reading. This far there is only a

research by Aghajani & Gholamrezapour, (2019) who investigate the relationship between critical thinking, critical reading and foreign language reading anxiety. The results found that there is a relationship between foreign language reading anxiety and critical thinking. Although, Aghajani & Gholamrezapour, (2019) research main focus is on critical thinking, several experts said that critical thinking is similar with critical reading. To explore the results of previous studies, this study focuses more on the relationship between reading anxiety and critical reading, especially for students majoring in English. English students are chosen due to the assumption that students majoring in English are unlikely to experience problems when reading in English since English is something that the students should be mastered at.

Based on the problems described above, the researcher intends to know the correlation between reading anxiety and students' critical reading ability. This research is quantitative correlational research. The researcher use a questionnaire to determine students' anxiety levels and a test to measure students' critical reading ability.

## **METHOD**

### ***Research Design***

In this study, the researcher chose correlational research techniques. The correlational research design applied in this study aims to determine whether or not there is a relationship between students' reading anxiety and students' critical reading ability. According to Creswell, (2015), Correlation is a statistic test to determine the possible relationship between the two variables.

The approach chosen in this study is quantitative research. The researcher used the questionnaire to determine students' reading anxiety levels and reading tests to determine students' critical reading ability. The research procedures to be carried out are. First, the researcher found students' anxiety in reading by using a questionnaire. Second, students' critical reading ability was obtained by using a reading test. Third, the researcher found a correlation between variables by Pearson Correlation Product Moment through SPSS based on questionnaires and students' reading tests. The next step is to analyze the effect of reading anxiety on the students' critical reading ability.

### ***Population and Sample***

The accessible population is the third-year (The academic year 2019) English Education students. This population has five classes (K1, K2, K3, K4, and K5). The sampling technique chosen by the researcher is simple random sampling. According to Fraenkel et al., (2012) a simple random sampling is a sampling technique which selecting a sample from the population to make equal. The researcher randomly select 20% of the population (32 students) to be sampled in this study.

### ***Data Collecting and Analysis Technique***

The researcher use Google forms for efficiency and effectiveness of time and place in collecting the data in this pandemic situation. The instrument used in this research are : 1) Questionnaire , 2) Critical Reading Test, 3) Interview

#### *1) Questionnaire*

The researcher made a questionnaire based on the theory of Anuar et al., (2020); Saito et al., (1999); Sheikh Ahmad et al., (2013); Zbornik, (2001). In this study the researcher used a 5-point Likert scale. The questionnaire consists of 20 statements regarding reading anxiety in general and specifically in critical reading. The indicators contained in the questionnaire are as follow: 1) Students' Reading Anxiety Source (Cognitive), 2) Difficulties in Critical Reading, 3) Reading Anxiety symptoms ; Physical, Cognitive, 3) Students' Reading Anxiety Source (Text)

The researcher calculated the questionnaire using a Likert scale of 1-5. After it has been calculated, to determine the anxiety level of the students, the researcher uses the following formula which is adopted from Gonen (2007)

**Table 1.** Reading Anxiety Level

Level	Score
High	>76
Medium	50 - 75
Low	<49

#### 2) *Reading Test*

The researcher uses the TOEFL Reading test as the second instrument for conducting this research. Cambridge Preparation for the TOEFL Test 4th edition book adopted the TOEFL test. It consists of three reading passages, the passages followed by several reading comprehension questions and vocabulary questions for 30 questions. Moreover, the topics are varied but are often about informational subjects.

The researcher divides three levels of students' TOEFL scores. If students can answer 70 - 100% (20-30) questions correctly, students are said to have advanced critical reading abilities. If students can answer 30 - 60% (8-19) questions correctly, students are said to have an average critical reading ability; if students can answer <20% (1-7) questions correctly, students are said to have the poor critical reading ability.

#### 3) *Interview*

In this study, the researcher used semi-structured interviews. This interview is a combination of free interviews and guided interviews. In practice, the interviewer brings guidelines which are only an outline of the things to be asked. Researcher conducted interviews to find deeper information about reading anxiety experienced by students in critical reading. The main advantage of the semi-structured interview method is the interviewer and the participants have reciprocal activity Galletta, (2013), allows the interviewer to improvise questions based on participant responses.

#### 4) *Validity*

The researcher used content validity and construct validity for the instruments. Fraenkel et al., (2012) states that the content and format of the instrument is the main

focus of this validity. Content validity is carried out by experts to assess whether a test has content validity or not. The researcher asked for the help of an expert to test the validity of the instrument to be used. Furthermore, for the construct validity, the researcher tested the research instrument on 24 fourth-year students. Pearson Product Moment is used to test the validity. Items that have a value below  $r = .404$  are considered invalid. The results found for the questionnaire there were 6 invalid items and for the test there were 12 invalid items. The researcher decided to only use valid items, namely 20 items for the questionnaire and 30 items for the test.

5) *Reliability*

The Cronbach Alpha technique is used to determine the reliability of the instrument. If the value higher than 0.70 the instrument is reliable. The reliability results using Cronbach’s alpha for the questionnaire produced a value of  $0.906 > 0.70$  which means the reliability of the questionnaire can be categorized as good.

**Table 2.** Reliability of Questionnaire

<b>Reliability Statistics</b>	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.906	20

Also, for the reliability results using Cronbach alpha on the reading test it produces a value of  $0.924 > 0.70$  which means the reliability of the critical reading test can be categorized as good.

**Table 3.** Reliability of Reading Test

<b>Reliability Statistics</b>	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.924	30

**RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

***Data Descriptions and Analysis***

The findings in this research are from the questionnaire, test, and interview. In order to find the correlation between reading anxiety and critical reading ability, the research must find the results from questionnaire level and critical reading test first.

1. *Students’ Reading Anxiety Level*

**Table 4.** Reading Anxiety Level Statistics

N	Level	Freq.	Percentage	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
32	Low (20-49)	6	18.75%	43.0	91.0	63.03	13.074
	Medium (50 - 75)	20	62.50%				
	High (>76)	6	18.75%				

In the Reading Anxiety statistic table above, it is known that the sample is 32 students. The maximum score is 91.00, and the minimum score is 43.00. The mean score is 63.03 and the standard deviation is 13.074.

From the questionnaire it can be seen that the three levels of reading anxiety are all felt by students. The results of the analysis showed that there were 6 (18.75%) students who scored 20-49 at a low anxiety level, 20 (62.50%) students scored between 50-75 at a medium anxiety level, and there were 6 students who scored > 76 (18.75%) at high anxiety levels.

### 2. Students' Critical Reading Ability

**Table 5.** Critical Reading Ability Statistics

N	Level	Freq.	Percentage	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
32	Poor (<29)	8	25%	17.0	67.0	39.69	15.059
	Average (30 - 69)	24	75%				
	Advanced (>70)	0	0%				

In the Critical Reading Ability test table above, it is known that the number of samples is 32 students. The maximum score is 67.00, and the minimum score is 17.00. The mean score is 39.69 and the standard deviation is 15.059. From the test, it turned out that only two levels of Critical Reading ability were felt by students. There were 8 students (25%) who scored <29 at the level of poor critical reading ability, and the remaining sample, 24 students (75%) who scored between 30 - 69 at the average critical reading ability level.

### 3. The Correlation between Reading Anxiety and Students' Critical Reading Ability

**Table 6.** Correlation Test Result

Correlations		Critical Reading Anxiety	Critical Reading Ability
Critical Reading Anxiety	Pearson Correlation	1	-.375*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.035

	N	32	32
Critical Reading Ability	Pearson Correlation	<b>-.375*</b>	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<b>.035</b>	
	N	32	32
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).			

From the results of the analysis above, the correlation coefficient or r-obtained (-0.375) is higher than the r-table (-0.349) and shows a low correlation between the two variables. Furthermore, the significance level (sig. 2-tailed) is 0.035. The p value (0.035) is lower than 0.05 which means that there is a significant relationship between reading anxiety and students' critical reading ability. In conclusion, the less student anxiety, the more critical the reading test score. It can be stated that the null hypothesis (H0) is rejected and the alternative hypothesis (Ha) is accepted.

**Discussion**

The result shows a low correlation between reading anxiety and students' critical reading ability (r = 0.375) and the types is negative correlation. Like other researchers, Marhaeni et al., (2020) and Farihah, (2017) also found correlation between anxiety in reading and student's comprehension in reading. Wijayati et al., (2021) also found a medium correlation between reading anxiety and reading comprehension of ESP students. It means the higher anxiety the students have, the lower the comprehension score they obtain.

From the results that have been shown, it can be seen that English students at UNP experience anxiety at the medium level. From the analysis results, the first indicator, students' had problems with self-belief in reading which makes them feel insecure that students are fine merely reading for themselves but get nervous and uncomfortable if they have to read for some specific purposes. For the second indicator, students experience mental fatigue and are overwhelmed when reading demanding and complex texts. The two indicators above focus on students' mentation. In line with Nazarinasab et al., (2014) found that when students felt anxiety while reading, students spent some of their mental energy thinking about things unrelated to the activity of reading, such as how badly they were doing or how much time they had to finish reading.

For the following indicator, the student responded neutrally on the part of the physical symptoms experienced when anxious, which indicated that the student did not really feel the physical symptoms.

Furthermore, for cognitive symptoms, students said they felt embarrassed if they did not understand anything while reading. Moreover, the last indicator that caused reading anxiety was that students felt worried if they encountered unknown vocabulary. It is in line with Wijayati et al., (2021), who found that students felt annoyed when they found many words with unclear meanings and became upset when they could not find definitions of words they had seen before.

Critical reading requires skilled thinking to read complex words in the text. However, the reflections that students experience while reading are enough to disturb their concentration, thereby reducing their ability to read. This shows that reading anxiety affects not only general reading but other types of reading, such as critical reading. In the case of critical reading, students feel fear when they encounter difficult and unfamiliar words. Different from reading aloud, who are afraid of how to pronounce it, in critical reading, students are afraid because they don't know what the word means.

## CONCLUSION

From the findings and discussion in preceding chapter, several conclusions can be drawn. First, the level of reading anxiety among students is divided into three levels ; High, Medium, and Low. It was calculated that twenty students had a medium level of anxiety (62.50%), six students have experienced low level of anxiety (18.75%), and six students had high level of anxiety (18.75%). it can be proven that the difficulties found in critical reading have significant impact to provoke students' anxiety in reading.

Second, Students' level of critical reading ability is divided into three parts; advanced, average, and poor. Twenty-four students have an average level of critical reading ability (75%), and eight students have a poor level of critical reading ability (25%). Most of the students had scores ranging from 17 - 63. None of the students scored above 70 or had an advanced level.

Third, it can be concluded that students' reading anxiety has negative correlation to their critical reading ability. This can be seen in the weak correlation between students' reading anxiety and critical reading ability with  $r$  0.375. The higher the level of students' reading anxiety, the lower students' reading critical reading ability score.

This shows that a psychological factor such as reading anxiety has an important contribution to the students' reading ability. This study may have several pedagogical implications for future researchers and students.

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