

## Breaking the Barrier: Understanding and Addressing the Roots of Foreign Language and Reading Anxiety

Adem Daskan<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>English Language Teaching Department, Faculty of Education, Tishk International University, Erbil, Iraq  
Correspondence: Adem Daskan, Tishk International University, Erbil, Iraq  
Email: adem.daskan@tiu.edu.iq

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this article is to investigate the causes of foreign language and reading anxiety and to show solutions to overcome this problem. When examined from Google Scholar and other sources, many studies have been done on writing, speaking, and listening anxiety. So it was decided to make a study about reading anxiety too. This study contains answers to the questions of what anxiety is, foreign language anxiety, and reading anxiety. The reasons and solutions for these two anxieties are investigated. Foreign language anxiety (FLA) is a common phenomenon experienced by language learners when they encounter situations in which they must communicate in a language other than their first language. Reading anxiety is a common issue that affects many individuals, and it can have a negative impact on reading performance, learning, and retention of information. As a result of the research, it has been revealed that the main causes of Foreign Language and Reading Anxiety are lack of confidence, learning disabilities, lack of interest, and language barriers.

**Keywords:** Foreign Language Anxiety, Reading Anxiety, Anxiety, FLA

### 1. Introduction

Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) is a problem that many language learners suffer while communicating in a language that is not their native tongue. FLA refers to the uncomfortable emotional responses individuals experience when employing a foreign or second language. According to research, FLA can express itself in a variety of situations, including public speaking, dealing with native speakers, and taking exams (Horwitz et al., 1986). It is an important factor in language acquisition, as it can severely impede the process. Reading anxiety is a prevalent concern in education, especially in second-language learning environments. It is characterized as the fear, nervousness, or unease associated with reading tasks. Reading anxiety can negatively impact reading comprehension, vocabulary growth, and academic accomplishment, according to research. It can also result in reading avoidance and a lack of drive to read. Building reading confidence, offering support and guidance, and employing instructional resources that match kids' reading levels and interests are all strategies for lowering reading anxiety. (Azizi et al., 2022; Al-Yateem et al., 2020; Namaziandost et al., 2022).

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Research indicates that FLA can have a significant effect on the motivation, attitude, self-confidence, and language competency of students (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Horwitz et al., 1986). FLA is not a stable trait and is subject to change over time. Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) is a type of therapy that focuses on modifying negative thought patterns and behaviors, and it can assist language-learners handle anxiety (Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002).

In addition, the strain of high-stakes testing and academic performance requirements might worsen reading anxiety. Children may suffer anxiety around reading comprehension tests and the imagined repercussions of poor performance. Instructors can lessen this anxiety by giving students with test-taking skills, familiarizing them with the test's style, and encouraging them to focus on the process of reading and comprehending as opposed to the end result. Incorporating mindfulness and relaxation strategies into reading education can also reduce anxiety and enhance overall reading performance. (Das et al., 2014; Chen et al., 2012).

Greater exposure to the language, such as through immersion programs, can reduce FLA by fostering greater confidence and comfort in using it (Horwitz et al., 1986). Teachers can assist lessen FLA by providing a supportive classroom environment, providing learners with the opportunity to practice the language in a low-stress setting, and recognizing their students' efforts and accomplishments (Horwitz et al., 1986).

Reading Anxiety is a widespread condition that affects many people, and it can negatively influence reading performance, learning, and information retention. Lack of confidence in one's reading skills is one of the primary causes of reading anxiety, along with the pressure to do well. Reading anxiety can have far-reaching consequences. People with reading anxiety may have trouble concentrating while reading, which can hinder their capacity to grasp and retain information. In addition, they may have bodily symptoms, such as a racing heart or excessive sweating, that make reading uncomfortable and unpleasant (Saito et al., 1999).

## **2. What is Anxiety?**

Individuals commonly experience anxiety when they perceive a threat, danger, or uncertainty over future occurrences. It is a typical reaction to stressful conditions and can be advantageous in certain circumstances, such as pushing a person to take action or be cautious. When anxiety becomes persistent or overwhelming, it might impair a person's capacity to function in daily life and may suggest an anxiety disorder (Küçük, 2023a).

There is a range of physical, emotional, and cognitive symptoms of anxiety. Anxiety can emerge physically as a quick heartbeat, sweating, trembling, and shortness of breath. Emotional symptoms may include apprehension, anxiety, and fear, along with impatience, concentration difficulties, and restlessness. Negative or catastrophic thinking may be cognitive indicators of anxiety, which can perpetuate and exacerbate the condition (Khan et al., 2017). Many factors, including genetic predisposition, environmental stresses, and past experiences, may contribute to the onset of anxiety. According to the World Health Organization, anxiety disorders are among the most widespread mental health diseases worldwide, impacting an estimated 284 million individuals worldwide (World Health Organization, 2001).

### **3. Foreign Language Anxiety**

Foreign language anxiety (FLA) is a typical occurrence among language learners who encounter situations requiring communication in a language other than their native tongue. FLA, as defined by Horwitz et al. (1986) refers to the negative emotional responses individuals have when using a second or foreign language. FLA has been discovered as a significant factor impacting language acquisition since it can severely delay the acquisition of a foreign language (Horwitz et al., 1986). The research indicates that FLA can emerge in a variety of ways. For instance, students may suffer anxiety when addressing a group, dealing with native speakers, or taking tests. This nervousness might lead to a complete avoidance of speaking the language or a reduction in willingness to study it (Phillips, 1992).

Several variables have been identified as causes of FLA. Individual variations such as personality traits, prior language learning experiences, and cultural background are among these variables (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). Moreover, the learning environment, including classroom size, teaching approach, and the teacher-student relationship, might influence FLA (Liu & Yuan, 2021).

Cognitive-behavioral therapy is one method for reducing FLV symptoms (CBT). CBT is a method of therapy that focuses on altering negative thought and behavior patterns. In the context of FLA, CBT can assist learners in identifying and challenging negative ideas and attitudes about the language, as well as providing skills for anxiety management in language-learning circumstances (Takeshima et al., 2021). Another method for reducing FLA is language exposure. According to research, increasing exposure to the language, such as through immersion programs, can reduce FLA (Horwitz et al., 1986). This is due to the fact that increasing exposure can lead to improved confidence and comfort with the language.

It is essential for language instructors to understand FLA and its effects on language learning. Instructors can lessen FLA by fostering a supportive classroom climate, offering learners the opportunity to practice the language in a low-pressure setting, and recognizing their students' efforts and success (Phillips, 1992).

#### **3.1 The Effects of Foreign Language Anxiety on Language Learning**

The effects of foreign language anxiety on language acquisition have been intensively investigated in recent years. This phenomenon refers to the apprehension or anxiety felt by language learners when utilizing or learning a foreign language. It has been discovered that language anxiety is one of the most significant determinants of language proficiency (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994).

Foreign language anxiety can negatively impact language acquisition in a variety of ways. Research indicates that anxiety can affect the motivation, attitude, and self-confidence of language learners, hence impacting their language-learning abilities (Dewaele & Alfawzan, 2018). In addition, foreign language anxiety might hinder the ability of language learners to process and remember new information. According to Eysenck and Calvo (1992), anxiety can affect attention and working memory, two crucial elements of language acquisition.

Secondly, foreign language anxiety can result in negative emotional responses, including embarrassment, shame, and dread of making mistakes. These emotions can have a major impact on a learner's desire to engage in language-learning activities and on their willingness to engage in such activities (Cetinkaya,

2005). In addition, worry might hinder students' participation in class, which can have a negative effect on their language proficiency.

Thirdly, foreign language anxiety can have a significant impact on the speaking ability of language learners. Fear of speaking a foreign language in front of others can cause learners to get tongue-tied, which can result in stuttering, hesitancy, and speech problems (Chahrazad & Kamel, 2022). Learners with higher degrees of anxiety tend to make more errors, utilize simpler language, and talk more slowly than those with lower levels of anxiety (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994).

It is crucial to recognize that foreign language anxiety is not a fixed trait and can alter over time. Research has demonstrated that anxiety may be overcome and language competency can be enhanced if language learners receive proper support, such as positive feedback, effective teaching methods, and reduced pressure (Liu, 2018).

#### **4. Reading Anxiety**

Reading anxiety is a prevalent condition that affects many people, and it can negatively influence reading performance, learning, and information retention. Lack of confidence in one's reading skills is one of the primary causes of reading anxiety, according to a study (Yamac & Sezgin, 2018). People who struggle with reading may experience anxiety when confronted with material because they think they may not comprehend it or make errors while reading. This is especially true for those who have previously encountered reading difficulties, such as dyslexia or other learning disorders (Saito et al., 1999).

In addition, the pressure to perform well can generate reading anxiety, particularly for children who must read and comprehend significant volumes of material in a short period of time. This pressure can be exacerbated by the fear of failure or the consequences of poor performance, such as obtaining a low grade (Pekrun et al., 2009).

Reading anxiety can have far-reaching consequences. People with reading anxiety may have trouble concentrating while reading, which can hinder their capacity to grasp and retain information. In addition, they may have bodily symptoms, such as a racing heart or excessive sweating, that make reading uncomfortable and unpleasant. Reading anxiety can result in a reduction in reading frequency, which can have significant effects on academic or professional achievement (Macdonald et al., 2021).

Individuals might utilize a variety of ways to overcome their reading anxiety. Developing confidence in one's reading abilities via practice is an excellent method. Individuals can improve their reading skills and minimize their anxiety by reading often and selecting books that are appropriate for their reading level. They may also find it useful to divide lengthy passages into smaller, more manageable portions, which can help alleviate feelings of being overwhelmed (Zaccoletti et al., 2020).

The use of relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing or meditation, is another method for reducing anxiety when reading. Individuals can lessen the physical symptoms of anxiety and create a more comfortable reading experience by focusing on their breath or another calming sense. In addition, individuals may find it beneficial to work with a reading specialist or tutor who may provide assistance and guidance for enhancing reading abilities and lowering anxiety (Zaccoletti et al., 2020).

#### **4.1 The Impacts of Reading Anxiety**

Reading anxiety is a condition in which a person perceives fear or dread while reading, which can hinder their ability to grasp and retain information. This problem can affect youngsters learning to read as well as adults in professional settings. Reading anxiety can have significant effects on academic and professional performance, as well as on an individual's well-being as a whole (Ramirez et al., 2019).

A number of research have investigated the effects of reading anxiety on individuals. According to a study conducted by Mar and Oatley (2008), reading anxiety can have a considerable impact on a person's reading comprehension. Those with high levels of reading anxiety had poorer levels of comprehension, which can have a negative effect on their academic achievement, according to the study. Reading anxiety can also impair motivation and interest in reading. A study by Kim et al. (2019) discovered a negative correlation between reading anxiety and reading motivation among Korean college students. The study revealed that students with high levels of reading anxiety were more likely to experience a decline in motivation, which can have a negative impact on their academic and professional achievement.

Reading anxiety can also contribute to psychological suffering and physical consequences. According to a study conducted by Hossain et al. (2021), college students with reading anxiety had elevated levels of stress and anxiety. The study also found that participants with reading anxiety suffered bodily symptoms such as headaches and exhaustion.

#### **4.2 The Reasons for Reading Anxiety among Students**

Reading anxiety is a sort of anxiety that affects many students, especially those in elementary and secondary education. When a student is expected to read the material, such as a book, an essay, or an exam paper, they frequently experience sensations of dread, uneasiness, and terror. Although reading anxiety can be a complicated and multidimensional issue, there are a number of major contributors to its development in pupils (Rajab et al., 2012).

##### **4.2.1 Lack of Confidence**

A lack of confidence in their reading abilities is one of the key causes of reading anxiety among kids. Pupils who lack confidence in their reading abilities may experience anxiety when confronted with novel or difficult content. This concern can lead to a vicious cycle in which students avoid reading assignments, resulting in additional confidence issues. According to a study conducted by Tsai and Li (2012), students who lacked confidence in their reading skills were more likely to suffer anxiety when reading.

##### **4.2.2 Difficulties with Phonics**

The capacity to decode words based on their sounds is a key reading skill. Students who struggle with phonics may experience anxiety and frustration when reading. According to a study conducted by Vellutino et al. (2004), phonological processing issues were an important predictor of reading difficulties and anxiety in students.

#### **4.2.3 Learning Challenges**

Some students may have reading difficulties due to learning problems, such as dyslexia or attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). These impairments can hinder a student's ability to process written language, causing reading anxiety. According to Shaywitz et al. (2023), dyslexia is connected with increased anxiety and decreased self-esteem among students.

#### **4.2.4 Lack of Interest**

Pupils who find the topic they are reading uninteresting may feel disengaged and apprehensive. When students are required to read texts, they find tedious or irrelevant, they may feel overwhelmed and skip reading assignments. According to a study by Durik et al. (2006), reading interest is a significant predictor of student reading engagement and motivation.

#### **4.2.5 Performance Pressure**

Reading anxiety may be experienced by students who feel pressure to perform well on reading evaluations or standardized tests. This pressure might induce feelings of fear or inadequacy, resulting in an aversion to reading and diminished self-confidence. According to research conducted by Jee (2018), academic pressure is a strong predictor of reading anxiety among students.

#### **4.2.6 Language Barriers**

Reading can be a particularly difficult undertaking for pupils who are learning English as a second language. These students may experience difficulty with vocabulary, grammar, and comprehension, causing worry and frustration. According to a study conducted by Tsai and Li (2012), English proficiency was a strong predictor of reading anxiety among Chinese-speaking students. Reading anxiety is a complex issue that can have a substantial impact on academic achievement, self-esteem, and mental health when all of the following elements are considered. Several factors can contribute to reading anxiety, including lack of confidence, trouble with phonics, learning disabilities, lack of interest, performance pressure, and language hurdles. It is essential for educators and parents to recognize the symptoms of reading anxiety and give support and interventions to assist pupils in overcoming their anxieties and developing their reading skills.

### **5. Methods of overcoming students' reading Anxiety**

Reading anxiety can be a substantial obstacle for many students, negatively affecting their academic performance and well-being as a whole. Fortunately, there are a number of ways supported by scientific research for reducing reading anxiety.

Cognitive-behavioral therapy is an excellent technique for helping kids overcome their reading anxiety (CBT). According to a study conducted by Silverman et al. (1999), CBT dramatically reduced middle school pupils' reading anxiety and improved their reading performance. The researchers concluded that cognitive-behavioral therapy can help students overcome their fear of reading by assisting them in developing coping mechanisms and decreasing their emotional response to reading assignments.

Using metacognitive methods is an additional excellent method for kids to overcome reading anxiety. Metacognitive methods are cognitive processes that enable learners to monitor and control their own learning. According to research by Lee and Schallert (1997), training high school pupils with metacognitive methods dramatically reduced reading anxiety and enhanced reading comprehension. Researchers came to the conclusion that metacognitive methods can assist students to overcome their fear of reading by enhancing their capacity to self-regulate their learning and manage reading assignments.

Moreover, students with reading anxiety can benefit from relaxation strategies such as deep breathing, gradual muscle relaxation, and guided visualization. According to a study conducted by Francis et al. (2021), teaching middle school children relaxing techniques dramatically reduced reading anxiety and enhanced reading performance. The researchers came to the conclusion that relaxation techniques can assist students to overcome their fear of reading by fostering a sense of calm and decreasing their emotional response to reading assignments.

Incorporating technology into reading education might also benefit pupils who experience reading anxiety. Using text-to-speech software, audiobooks, or multimedia materials, for instance, can give students with additional support and lower the cognitive strain of reading assignments. According to a study conducted by Chen et al. (2012), the use of multimedia resources dramatically increased elementary school pupils' reading comprehension and decreased their reading anxiety. The researchers concluded that introducing technology into reading education can assist students in overcoming their reading anxiety by providing them with additional support and lessening the cognitive demands of reading activities.

Also, giving students with reading anxiety with the opportunity to practice reading in a secure and supportive atmosphere might be beneficial. Peer-assisted reading dramatically reduced reading anxiety and increased primary school pupils' reading performance. Peer-assisted reading can help students overcome their fear of reading by providing them with additional support and opportunity to practice their reading skills in a non-threatening environment, as determined by the researchers (Clay & Cazden, 2017; Küçük, 2023b).

## **6. Conclusion**

Foreign language anxiety (FLA) is a typical occurrence among language learners. FLA refers to the negative emotional reactions that people experience when using a second or foreign language. FLA can express itself in a variety of situations, including public speaking and interactions with native speakers. FLA is influenced by a number of variables, including individual characteristics, the learning environment, and the teaching approach. The study suggests cognitive-behavioral therapy and increased language exposure as treatments for FLA. The paper underlines that language teachers must be aware of FLA and its impact on language acquisition and should develop a supportive classroom climate, give learners the opportunity to practice the language, and recognize their students' efforts and progress.

FLA can significantly impact language acquisition in a variety of ways, including motivation, attitude, self-confidence, language processing, and retention, according to research. FLA can result in unpleasant emotional responses such as humiliation, shame, and fear of making mistakes, which can hinder learners' motivation and willingness to engage in language learning activities. In addition, FLA can have a

considerable impact on the speaking ability of language learners, causing them to become tongue-tied, hesitate, and make mistakes.

It is vital to note, however, that FLA is not a constant and can change with time. Anxiety can be overcome and language competency can be enhanced if language learners receive the proper support, such as positive feedback, effective teaching techniques, and reduced pressure. Consequently, language instructors should be aware of the FLA of their pupils and provide the necessary assistance to help them overcome it.

Reading anxiety is another widespread condition that affects a large number of people, especially those who lack confidence in their reading ability or have previously encountered reading difficulties. Students who are forced to read and comprehend huge volumes of material in a short period of time are more susceptible to reading anxiety when they are under performance pressure. Reading anxiety can have far-reaching impacts, including trouble concentrating when reading, bodily symptoms, and detrimental effects on comprehension and information retention. To improve reading performance and learning outcomes, it is therefore vital to identify and alleviate reading anxiety.

FLA and reading anxiety are prevalent problems that might hinder language acquisition and reading performance, respectively. Teachers and educators should be aware of these challenges and provide the right support and solutions to assist students in overcoming their anxiety and enhancing their language acquisition and reading ability. Learners can overcome their nervousness and find success in their language learning and reading pursuits with the proper assistance.

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