

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The background, formulation of the problem, operational definitions, objective, and significance of the study are covered in this chapter.

A. Background of the Study

Reading is one of the most important skills in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) because it enables learners to access information, develop language knowledge, and support academic achievement. Through reading activities, students expand their vocabulary, understand grammatical structures, and construct meaning from written texts. Reading also provides linguistic input that supports the development of other language skills. Therefore, reading is widely regarded as a fundamental component of successful language learning (Hadi & Ramadhani, 2024).

At the junior high school level, reading receives considerable attention in English instruction because students acquire a substantial amount of vocabulary and language knowledge through reading activities (Oghyanous & Khabiri, 2017). Students are expected to comprehend various text genres, such as descriptive, recount, and narrative texts, while identifying main ideas, specific information, references, and implied meanings. Consequently, reading becomes one of the most frequently practised language skills in English classrooms, and difficulties encountered during reading activities may significantly affect students' overall language learning outcomes.

Despite its importance, many students experience psychological challenges when reading English texts. One of these challenges is Foreign Language Reading Anxiety (FLRA), which refers to feelings of worry, nervousness, tension, and discomfort experienced while reading in a foreign language (Saito et al., 1999). FLRA may occur when students encounter unfamiliar vocabulary, complex grammatical structures, unfamiliar topics, or difficulties in understanding the content of a text. As a result, students who experience reading anxiety may have

difficulty processing information effectively and may become less confident in their reading abilities.

Previous studies have demonstrated that FLRA can negatively affect students' learning outcomes. Hwang & Bae (2022) found a significant negative relationship between reading anxiety and reading comprehension among EFL learners. Similarly, H. Liu et al. (2025) reported that foreign language anxiety mediates the relationship between learning motivation and academic achievement. Furthermore, Al-Kandari (2022) identified unfamiliar vocabulary, complex reading materials, and classroom performance pressure as major factors contributing to reading anxiety. These findings suggest that FLRA is an important affective factor that may hinder students' reading performance and academic success.

The issue of reading anxiety is particularly relevant among junior high school students because they are still developing their linguistic knowledge and reading strategies. Nuralimah et al. (2023) found that junior high school students often experience difficulties in identifying main ideas, understanding vocabulary, interpreting references, making inferences, and locating detailed information in texts. Such difficulties may increase students' anxiety when engaging in English reading activities and hinder their comprehension processes.

Investigating FLRA in Tasikmalaya is particularly meaningful considering the region's strong reading culture. According to *Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Jawa Barat* (2026), Tasikmalaya recorded a Reading Fondness Index score of 63.36 in 2025, indicating a relatively high level of reading interest among its population. However, a high level of reading interest does not necessarily indicate that students feel comfortable when reading English texts. Students may still experience anxiety due to linguistic barriers, limited vocabulary mastery, unfamiliar text structures, and insufficient reading strategies. Therefore, examining FLRA remains important to understand students' psychological experiences in EFL reading contexts.

Tasikmalaya demonstrates a relatively high Reading Fondness Index, indicating that reading activities are generally well established within the community. However, this indicator reflects general reading interest rather than students' emotional experiences when reading English texts. A high level of reading

interest does not necessarily indicate that students feel comfortable or confident when reading in a foreign language. Students may still experience anxiety due to unfamiliar vocabulary, grammatical complexity, limited background knowledge, and difficulties in comprehending English texts. Therefore, investigating Foreign Language Reading Anxiety (FLRA) remains important to better understand students' psychological experiences in English reading activities.

Although previous studies have extensively investigated Foreign Language Reading Anxiety, they predominantly focus on its correlation with other academic variables, such as reading comprehension by Hwang & Bae (2022) and learning motivation by H. Liu et al. (2025), or centre on university and senior high school contexts. Research specifically profiling the baseline level of FLRA among early adolescents, particularly junior high school students who are at a critical transition in acquiring foundational English reading skills, remains scarce. Furthermore, there is a prominent contextual gap; despite Tasikmalaya's statistically high general reading fondness, no empirical studies have mapped how this regional reading culture intersects with foreign language reading anxiety. This highlights an urgent need to fill the demographic and contextual void in the current FLRA literature.

Determining the specific level of FLRA is a vital prerequisite for effective pedagogical intervention. Without precise empirical data detailing whether students experience low, moderate, or severe reading anxiety, educators cannot design targeted instructional strategies or create an emotionally supportive learning environment that suits the learners' actual needs. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the level of Foreign Language Reading Anxiety among junior high school students in Tasikmalaya. The findings are expected to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on FLRA by providing a clear psychological profile of young EFL learners, offering actionable insights for teachers, schools, and educational stakeholders to reduce reading barriers and optimise English instruction.

B. Formulation of the Problem

Based on the above background, this research formulates the problem with the following question: What is the level of foreign language reading anxiety among junior high school students in Tasikmalaya?

C. Operational Definitions

1. Foreign Language Reading Anxiety

Foreign Language Reading Anxiety refers to the feelings of tension, worry, or discomfort that students experience when reading English texts as a foreign language. In this study, FLRA was measured using the Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale (FLRAS) developed by Saito et al. (1999). The scale consists of several Likert-scale statements that assess students' anxiety in foreign-language reading situations. FLRA scores are derived from the total score of students' responses and are then interpreted as low or high levels.

2. Reading Anxiety Level

Reading anxiety level refers to the level of anxiety students experience when reading in English. The level of anxiety is determined based on the total score obtained from the FLRAS questionnaire. The higher the score a student achieves, the higher their level of foreign language reading anxiety. Scores are then classified into low, moderate and high categories based on the grouping criteria used in this study.

3. Junior High School Students

This term refers to students who are currently studying at the junior high school level. In this study, the respondents are students in grades VII, VIII, or IX. These students are learners of English as a foreign language and are the main subjects in measuring the level of Foreign Language Reading Anxiety.

D. Aim of the Study

The present study aims to investigate the level of foreign language reading anxiety among junior high school students in Tasikmalaya.

E. Significance of the Study

This study provides empirical data on the level of reading anxiety among junior high school students in Tasikmalaya.

1. Theoretical Significance

Theoretically, the results of this study are expected to enrich the literature on foreign language reading anxiety (FLRA), particularly in the context of learning English as a foreign language (EFL) at the junior secondary level.

2. Practical Significance

Practically, this research is expected to raise English teachers' awareness regarding the psychological state of their students during reading activities. By knowing the specific level of Foreign Language Reading Anxiety (FLRA) in their classrooms, teachers can use this baseline data to recognise the severity of the issue. Consequently, it alerts teachers to be more empathetic and observant of their students' emotional barriers before pushing for academic demands.

3. Empirical Significance

It is hoped that these empirical findings serve as a reference for other researchers in the future who wish to investigate similar phenomena with different variables or focus. Therefore, this study helps to expand the real data on English language teaching and education in Indonesia, particularly about affective aspects in reading and learning.