

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents a brief explanation of several theories that support the study. The theories are related to Foreign Language Reading Anxiety (FLRA), how emotions affect language learning, and the role of affective factors in influencing students' reading comprehension and performance in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts.

A. Theoretical Framework

1. Reading in EFL Contexts

In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), reading is understood as an active cognitive process involving complex interactions between the reader and the text to construct meaning. This process is not limited to word recognition, but also encompasses information processing, the integration of ideas, and the simultaneous use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies. In the view of Grabe & Stoller (2013), reading is positioned as a strategic and goal-oriented activity, in which readers need to coordinate various skills to achieve comprehensive understanding. Recent studies by Vettori et al. (2024) also confirm that reading success in EFL is highly dependent on the ability to integrate bottom-up and top-down processes that occur simultaneously in the comprehension of academic texts.

Reading comprehension in EFL depends not only on mastery of vocabulary and language structure, but also on the reader's ability to process information in depth. Koda (2007) emphasises that reading comprehension is the result of an interaction between linguistic knowledge and the reader's cognitive processing abilities in connecting ideas within a text. In the context of modern learning, reading comprehension is also viewed as a problem-solving process, in which students must be able to identify main ideas, draw inferences, and understand the relationships between parts of the text. Chinpakdee & Gu (2021) indicate that reading strategies and self-regulation

play a significant role in improving EFL students' reading comprehension, particularly at the secondary level.

Difficulties in reading within an EFL context often arise due to limited vocabulary, the complexity of text structure, and a lack of background knowledge relevant to the text's content. From the perspective of schema theory, Rumelhart (1980) explains that comprehension occurs when new information can be linked to the reader's existing schemas or knowledge. When a student's schemata do not match the text content, the comprehension process is hindered, leading to confusion even though the student recognises the words in the text. In line with Kharismanto & Farani (2022) indicates that a mismatch between cultural background and text content can impair comprehension and increase the cognitive load involved in reading EFL.

In the context of lower secondary school, reading plays a vital role as both the primary source of foreign language input and a means of developing academic knowledge. Due to limited exposure to English outside the classroom, pupils rely heavily on reading activities at school to develop their language skills. However, when pupils struggle to understand texts, this can lead to reading anxiety, which in turn affects their reading performance. Recent research by Wulandari (2025) indicates that reading anxiety has a significant negative correlation with reading comprehension, with students exhibiting high levels of anxiety tending to face greater difficulties in understanding EFL texts.

2. Foreign Language Reading Anxiety

Reading in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) requires learners to integrate various aspects of the language simultaneously, such as vocabulary acquisition, understanding of grammatical structures, and the ability to link information in the text with prior knowledge. In addition to involving cognitive processes, reading success is also influenced by affective factors, one of which is anxiety.

In educational psychology, anxiety is understood as an emotional response that arises when a person faces a situation considered challenging or

potentially leading to failure. According to Spielberger (2022), anxiety comprises a cognitive component consisting of worry, negative thoughts, and self-doubt, as well as an emotional component characterised by feelings of tension, nervousness, and restlessness. In foreign language learning, both components may arise when students face reading tasks they perceive as difficult.

Anxiety that arises specifically during reading activities has given rise to the concept of Foreign Language Reading Anxiety (FLRA). This concept was introduced by Saito et al. (1999), who explained that anxiety about reading in a foreign language is a specific form of anxiety that differs from general foreign language anxiety. FLRA refers to feelings of fear, worry, tension, or lack of confidence that arise when learners attempt to comprehend texts in the target language.

Research indicates that FLRA is influenced by various linguistic and non-linguistic factors. From a linguistic perspective, limited vocabulary, complex sentence structures, and difficulties in understanding the content of the text are the main causes of reading anxiety (Fitrawati et al., 2023). Furthermore, unfamiliarity with cultural elements present in the text can also increase anxiety as students struggle to interpret the meaning comprehensively (Saito et al., 1999).

Psychological factors also contribute to the emergence of FLRA. W. Liu (2023) found that students with high levels of reading anxiety tend to have low self-confidence in their ability to comprehend English texts. This result is in line with Limeranto & Subekti (2021), which states that students who lack confidence in their ability to understand a foreign language experience reading anxiety. Experiences of failing to understand what they read, concerns about academic performance, and a fear of making mistakes can exacerbate anxiety during the reading process.

FLRA not only affects students' emotional state but also impacts the reading comprehension process. Li et al. (2024) found that high reading anxiety can disrupt lexical processing as some cognitive resources are

diverted to managing worry. Furthermore, Dang (2024) demonstrated that FLRA has a negative relationship with the use of reading strategies, meaning that students with higher levels of anxiety tend to be less effective in applying reading strategies. This situation can affect reading comprehension and academic achievement.

Although FLRA is a component of foreign language anxiety, its characteristics and triggers are specific as they relate directly to the process of comprehending written text. Öztürk (2023) indicates that reading anxiety is related to other forms of language anxiety, such as listening anxiety, yet it remains a distinct construct in foreign language learning research.

Based on these various studies, FLRA can be understood as a psychological condition characterised by feelings of worry, tension, and a lack of confidence when reading texts in a foreign language. This level of anxiety is influenced by linguistic, cultural, and psychological factors, and has the potential to hinder reading comprehension and the effective use of reading strategies.

3. Effects of FLRA on Reading Comprehension

Foreign Language Reading Anxiety (FLRA) is rooted in the affective perspective in language learning. Krashen (1982), on the Affective Filter Hypothesis, states that emotional factors such as motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety determine how well students receive and process language input. Anxiety levels increase the affective filter, which inhibits comprehension and language acquisition. Jiang et al. (2024) reported that high anxiety significantly inhibited students' performance in an English dictation exam. This suggests that the affective filter has a direct effect on language performance. This understanding of the relationship between emotions and learning pedagogically emphasises the importance of creating an emotionally supportive reading environment. Teachers who use an empathic approach, provide opportunities to cooperate in reading, and emphasise comprehension instead of correcting errors can help reduce students' affective barriers (Dang, 2024; Kim, 2021). In this perspective, FLRA is considered a logical

emotional response. Thus, it can be reduced through teaching strategies that are inclusive and based on emotional support (Wang, 2024). Therefore, managing emotions is an important part of foreign language reading ability. The language acquisition process becomes more effective and meaningful as students feel more secure and comfortable.

B. Study of Relevant Research

This section reviews previous research related to foreign language reading anxiety. The studies discussed below provide insights into its levels, causes, and management strategies, which collectively support the rationale of this study. Overall, the scholarly discussion on FLRA demonstrates that this affective construct is influenced by multiple linguistic, cognitive, and socio-emotional variables, and therefore needs to be examined comprehensively in different learning contexts.

1. FLRA Levels Reported in Previous Studies

Based on various empirical studies, the level of Foreign Language Reading Anxiety (FLRA) among students is generally in the moderate to high category. This phenomenon shows that anxiety when reading in a foreign language is a fairly common problem in the process of learning English as a foreign language. In one study, Miao & Vibulphol (2021) reported that students often experience anxiety when reading English texts due to the linguistic limitations and cognitive demands they face. These findings are in line with various studies from an international context which show that reading anxiety tends to be a persistent problem at various levels of language proficiency. In addition, research conducted by Kharismanto & Farani (2022) reports that junior high school students in Indonesia also experience moderate levels of reading anxiety. This relatively consistent pattern of findings indicates that FLRA is a fairly widespread affective barrier that has the potential to interfere with the reading comprehension process and reduce student motivation in the context of foreign language learning.

2. Causes of Foreign Language Reading Anxiety

Foreign language reading anxiety (FLRA) is influenced by various factors related to linguistic, cognitive, and affective aspects of the reading process. One study shows that limited vocabulary, difficulty understanding the overall meaning of the text, and feelings of alienation from the cultural elements contained in the reading material are the main factors that trigger anxiety when reading in a foreign language. Miao & Vibulphol (2021) emphasise that these conditions often make students feel stressed when dealing with complex English texts. These findings show that FLRA is not only related to language ability but also involves cognitive and emotional processes that can affect learning motivation, reading strategies used, and overall reading comprehension outcomes.

A number of other studies have also reported various factors that contribute to the emergence of FLRA. Some of these include unfamiliarity with the foreign culture that appears in the reading text, uninteresting or difficult-to-understand reading topics, limited vocabulary, and students' concerns about the possibility of making mistakes while reading. For example, Haerani et al. (2025) highlight that a lack of understanding of foreign cultural contexts can increase anxiety when students try to understand English texts. Meanwhile, Fitrawati et al. (2023) found that unfamiliar reading topics and concerns about reading performance can also trigger anxiety in students.

When compared as a whole, these various studies show a fairly consistent pattern, namely that limited vocabulary often emerges as the most dominant cause in various foreign language learning contexts. On the other hand, unfamiliarity with the social and cultural aspects of reading texts tends to be more prominent in learning contexts in regions with limited exposure to global content. This indicates that linguistic schemas and cultural schemas both play an important role in shaping the experience of reading anxiety in foreign language learners.

Although various studies have identified a number of factors that cause FLRA, most studies still focus on linguistic or cognitive aspects separately. Research discussing how the school environment, teacher-student interactions, and socio-cultural norms in the educational context can strengthen or reduce reading anxiety is still relatively limited. This condition indicates an important research gap that needs to be further explored, especially in the context of culturally diverse regions such as Indonesia.

3. Management Strategies for Reducing FLRA

A positive learning environment is known to play an important role in reducing the level of Foreign Language Reading Anxiety (FLRA) in students. A learning approach that not only focuses on cognitive aspects but also pays attention to students' emotional conditions has been proven to help reduce anxiety in the language learning process. In a study, He et al. (2025) reported that teaching approaches that incorporate affective-oriented strategies such as emotional support, opportunities for learner autonomy, and the integration of group work significantly reduce language anxiety among learners. These findings indicate that pedagogical approaches that are sensitive to students' emotional well-being tend to be more effective than traditional learning models that only emphasise the delivery of knowledge.

Although this research provides strong evidence regarding effective learning strategies in the classroom, studies on FLRA management or handling are still limited. Several other international studies propose additional approaches that can help reduce reading anxiety, such as the use of pre-reading activities to activate students' background knowledge, simplifying input through scaffolding, and utilising technology in reading activities to increase students' confidence. These strategies are believed to help students approach foreign language texts with a higher level of preparedness.

However, there is still little research that specifically examines whether these strategies can be effectively applied in the context of English language learning at the junior high school level in Indonesia. Most research on FLRA

focuses more on identifying the causes of anxiety than on pedagogical solutions that can be applied in the classroom. In addition, many studies have been conducted at the higher education level, so the understanding of reading anxiety management strategies for younger learners is still relatively limited. This condition shows that research on pedagogical strategies to reduce FLRA in junior high school students in the context of EFL is still very much needed.

4. FLRA in the Indonesian Context and Remaining Gaps

International studies on Foreign Language Reading Anxiety (FLRA) have grown significantly in recent years. However, research specifically highlighting the Indonesian context is still relatively limited. Several findings indicate that junior high school students in Indonesia generally experience moderate levels of reading anxiety. In one study, Kharismanto & Farani (2022) reported that the main factors contributing to reading anxiety include limited vocabulary, concerns about negative evaluation from teachers and peers, and low student confidence when reading English texts. The study also highlights socio-cultural characteristics in the Indonesian education system, such as an exam-focused learning orientation and a strong hierarchy in classroom interactions, which have the potential to increase students' emotional burden during the learning process.

However, most existing studies have not explored the experiences of junior high school students in non-metropolitan or rural areas. Schools in these areas often face various limitations, such as limited access to learning resources, fewer opportunities for exposure to English, and variations in teachers' competence in teaching English. These contextual conditions have the potential to shape different characteristics and levels of reading anxiety when compared to students who study in urban environments.

In addition, several studies in Indonesia still rarely integrate theoretical frameworks that are oriented towards affective aspects or anxiety management strategies in reading learning. As a result, there is still a gap, both theoretically and practically, in understanding how FLRA can be effectively overcome in the classroom. This shows that there are still research

gaps in two main aspects, namely the differences in the learning context between urban and rural areas, and the lack of application of an affective perspective that can help explain and manage reading anxiety in English learning at the junior high school level.

5. Rationale for the Present Study

Considering these research gaps, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of the level of Foreign Language Reading Anxiety (FLRA) among junior high school students in Indonesia, especially those in non-metropolitan areas. This research is important because most previous studies have focused more on urban contexts or higher levels of education. In addition, this study also seeks to explore how local cultural values, school climate, and teacher-student interactions can influence the emergence of reading anxiety in English language learning.

By examining these factors more comprehensively, this study is expected to contribute to the development of studies on affective factors in learning English as a foreign language. This study not only responds to the limited number of FLRA studies in the Indonesian context but also seeks to expand the existing literature by integrating contextual, affective, and linguistic dimensions in understanding reading anxiety in learning environments that have been underrepresented in previous studies.