



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN READING ANXIETY AND ACADEMIC
READING PERFORMANCE AMONG ESL LEARNERS**

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**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN READING ANXIETY AND
ACADEMIC READING PERFORMANCE AMONG ESL LEARNERS**

By

ZUHANA MOHD ZIN

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra
Malaysia, in Fulfilment of the Requirement for the Degree of Master
of Arts**

August 2007



DEDICATION

To my husband Sean, Deena and Irfansyah
and
my parents



Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia
in fulfilment of the requirement for the Degree of Masters of Arts

**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN READING ANXIETY AND
COMPREHENSION PERFORMANCE AMONG ESL LEARNERS**

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August 2007

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The purpose of this study is to examine the possible relationship between reading anxiety among university ESL learners and their performance in comprehending academic texts. This study was conducted based on the assumption that anxiety could be another factor which could explain the differences in comprehension performance among the ESL learners.

The subjects who participated in this study were the low proficiency Malay ESL learners from Kolej Sains dan Teknologi, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur who had just entered the university. This study adopted correlation design which employed quantitative approaches. Two survey questionnaires, namely Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scales (FLRAS) and Cognitive Interference



Questionnaire (CIQ) were utilized to measure the level of reading anxiety and the interference in the subjects cognitive systems of the subjects. Their comprehension performance were measured by means of a reading comprehension test and a written recall task.

The results gained from this study indicated that the subjects' comprehension performance were inversely related to reading anxiety which suggests reading anxiety plays a role in influencing the low proficiency ESL learners when reading academic texts. In addition, the findings also demonstrated that the interference experienced by the subjects while engaging in the reading tasks was related to the level of anxiety reactions. However, the findings can only be generalized to the samples involved in this study. Further studies to investigate the influence of reading anxiety should include other ESL learners from other local universities to enable the results to be generalized to general population.



Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Master Sastera

**HUBUNG KAIT DI ANTARA PERASAAN CEMAS DAN
BIMBANG SEMASA MENBACA DAN KEBOLEHAN
KEFAHAMAN DI KALANGAN PELAJAR-PELAJAR ESL**

Oleh

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Kajian ini dijalankan bertujuan untuk menyelidik tentang hubung kait di antara perasaan cemas dan bimbang ketika membaca dan kebolehan kefahaman teks akademik di kalangan pelajar-pelajar *English as a Second language (ESL)*. Kajian ini di jalankan berdasarkan kepada hipotesis yang mengatakan yang perasaan cemas dan bimbang semasa membaca boleh menjadi salah satu factor kepada perbezaan kebolehan di kalangan pelajar-pelajar ESL di dalam memahami teks akademik.

Para responden yang terlibat di dalam kajian ini adalah terdiri daripada pelajar-pelajar Melayu daripada Kolej Sains dan Teknologi, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur yang baru sahaja memasuki institusi pengajian tinggi bagi meneruskan pengajian



mereka. Kajian ini menggunakan prosedur analisis korelasi dengan pendekatan kuantitatif. Dua soal-selidik iaitu *Foreign Language reading Anxiety Scales (FLRAS)* dan *Cognitive Interference Questionnaire (CIQ)* yang pertamanya digunakan untuk mengukur tahap kebimbangan dan cemas ketika membaca dan keduanya untuk mengukur tahap gangguan ke atas sistem kognitif pembaca. Kebolehan kefahaman pula diukur melalui ujian kefahaman teks akademik dan *written recall task*.

Dapatan kajian menunjukkan yang hubung kait di antara perasaan bimbang dan cemas ketika membaca dan kebolehan kefahaman teks akademik adalah negatif. Ini manandakan bahawa perasaan bimbang dan cemas ketika membaca boleh mempengaruhi kebolehan kefahaman. Tambahan lagi, dapatan kajian juga menunjukkan yang gangguan kepada sistem kognitif ketika membaca mempunyai hubung kait dengan tahap cemas dan bimbang yang di alami ketika membaca. Walaubagaimanapun, dapatan kajian ini hanya dapat di generalisasikan kepada kelompok sampel yang terlibat kajian ini sahaja. Oleh itu, kajian yang ingin melihat pengaruh perasaan cemas dan bimbang ketika membaca yang seterusnya perlu mengambil pelajar-pelajar ESL yang terdiri daripada institusi-institusi pengajian

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I certify that an Examination Committee has met on ...2007 to conduct the final examination of Zuhana Mohd Zin on her Master of Arts thesis entitled "The Relationship between Reading Anxiety and Comprehension Performance of an Academic Texts among ESL Learners" in accordance with Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Regulations Act 1980 and Universiti Pertanian Malaysia 1981. The Committee recommended that the candidate be awarded the relevant degree.

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis is based on my original work except for quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted for any degree at UPM or other institutions.

ZUHANA MOHD. ZIN

Date:



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CIQ	Cognitive Interference Questionnaire
ESL	English as a Second Language
FL	Foreign Language
FLCAS	Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scales
FLRAS	Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scales
HA	High anxiety
LA	Low anxiety
L2	Second language
M	Mean score
Sd	Standard deviation
SPM	Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (Malaysia Certificate of Education)
UTMKL	Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur







CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter set outs the background of the study, the statement of the problem, the research questions, the purpose of the study and its limitations. It also covers the significance of the study and the definition of key terms.

1.1 Background of the Study

In the teaching and learning of English as a Second Language (ESL) or Foreign Language (FL), the acquisition of the four language skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking are considered important. However, reading is by far one of the most important skills for many second language (L2) students (Carrell, 1998; Eskey, 1973) particularly for the university students. This is because reading is highly interrelated with the educational process in that the success of learning at the tertiary level banks upon the students' ability to read written language with a relatively good comprehension (Dechant and Smith, 1977). In addition, in courses for academic purposes which extensively



use English academic reading texts, the acquisition of literacy skills is highly required. This has undoubtedly put reading as one of the most important skills that L2 university readers need to master.

However, it should be noted that it is not easy to acquire reading skills as they cannot be learned overnight. As Dechant and Smith (1977) point out, reading is “the most complex processes, requiring a very specialized skill on the part of the reader” (p.8). It is complex because it entails several interrelated skills (Curtis, 1980) which pose demanding processes on the readers’ cognitive systems (Sellers, 2000).

Thus, in view of the complex nature of the reading process, it is somewhat not surprising to see most of the low proficiency Malay university ESL learners experience problems in performing in reading comprehension tasks. This is because the reading texts at tertiary level are academic in nature and differ from the typical ESL text that they are exposed to at secondary level. Academic texts at tertiary levels are more complex than the reading texts at the secondary level. In addition, the fact that most of the academic reading texts are in English seems to compound the problem. Malay ESL learners are more likely face problems in comprehending academic texts because it is a well-known



fact among the public and language instructors alike that the level of English proficiency among university students in Malaysia is very poor especially among the Malay students (The Star, 2007). Therefore, based on this situation, it is presumed that the low proficiency Malay university ESL learners are the ones who would face difficulties in comprehending the academic reading texts in ESL classrooms.

However, deficits in comprehension performance among ESL readers are not attributable to language proficiency alone. Numerous studies which have investigated on factors that contribute to individual differences in relation to comprehension performance among L2 readers have shown that one of the factors which could influence their performance in reading is anxiety (Sellers, 2000; Saito et al., 1999; Calvo and Carreiras, 1993; Oh, 1990).

Numerous studies have shown that motivation, interest, attitude and self-esteem are some of the affective variables which play as predictors in L2 performance; the studies have consistently produced significant results (Cohen and Norst, 1989). Similarly, initial findings in anxiety research have found that it consistently influences and affects language learning performance.



More studies that seek to investigate the effects of anxiety on specific language skills ensue and they consistently claim that oral activities are the most anxiety-provoking situation for L2 learners (Kitano, 2001; Young, 1992; Price, 1991). Most correlation studies indicate inverse relationship between the two variables. Currently, most L2/FL researchers are exploring the potential influence of debilitating anxiety on reading performance in the L2 learning contexts (see Horwitz, 2001; Kitano, 2001; Gardner and MacIntyre, 1993; MacIntyre and Gardner, 1991; 1989; Horwitz et al., 1986), as one of the variables which could explain individual differences in reading. Even though reading is deemed less susceptible to anxiety (Sellers, 2000), its potential influence should not be underestimated particularly among low proficiency ESL university students. This is because anxiety reactions in L2 classrooms are highly associated with learners' low self-perception of their proficiency in the target language (Kitano, 2001).

Therefore, it is assumed that the Malay ESL learners are the ones who will be critically affected by the feelings of anxiety due to their poor command of English. They are the group of ESL learners who are presumably more susceptible to higher levels of reading anxiety

