



EFL students' anxiety and reading comprehension

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Abstract

Reading comprehension is a very important basic skill in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL), as it strongly supports students' overall academic success. However, many EFL learners struggle to understand reading texts due to emotional barriers, especially anxiety. This article presents a narrative literature review examining the relationship between EFL students' reading anxiety and their reading comprehension. It synthesizes findings from national and international studies published between 2017 to 2025. The review is based on two theoretical frameworks: Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, which highlights the role of emotional factors, such as anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence in second language acquisition; and Constructivist Learning Theory, which emphasizes the importance of learners actively constructing knowledge through cognitive factors in language learning. The review identifies several common causes of reading anxiety, such as unfamiliar vocabulary, complex sentence structures, low self-confidence, and negative prior experiences. Anxiety not only disrupts reading comprehension but also affects students' motivation, self-esteem, and willingness to read. The findings highlight the importance of addressing students' emotional need during reading instruction. Teachers are encouraged to adopt supportive strategies, such as simplifying reading materials, providing encouragement, and fostering a safe environment. This article concludes with a call for further empirical research to explore effective teaching practice that can reduce reading anxiety and enhance comprehension in EFL contexts.

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INTRODUCTION

Through reading activities, students can increase vocabulary, understand sentence structure, recognize main ideas, and develop an understanding of the content of the text. In the context of EFL learning, reading is not only an activity of recognizing words, but it is a complex process that involves linguistic, cognitive, and affective abilities. Besides of students are required to understand the meaning of the text, and be able to connect new information to the knowledge they already have. However, in practice, many EFL students experience difficulties in understanding English text. These difficulties are caused not only by limited language acquisition but also by psychological aspects, especially reading anxiety.

Reading anxiety is a kind of academic anxiety that happens when students feel stressed, afraid of making mistakes, or not confident while reading texts in a foreign language. In EFL learning, this type of anxiety can be a serious problem that makes it hard for students to fully understand what they read. This anxiety can come from various causes, such as not knowing enough vocabulary, not understanding grammar, pressure from the learning environment, or bad experiences in the past when reading. The signs of reading anxiety can be different for each student. Some may feel their heart beating fast, forget what they just read, or even refuse to continue reading. When students feel emotionally uncomfortable during reading, their brain has more trouble understanding the meaning of the text. These ideas match what Krashen (1982) proposed through his Affective Filter Theory. He says that negative emotions like anxiety can act as a barrier that blocks language input from entering the brain properly. This shows that emotional factors in reading should be taken seriously in language learning. On the other hand, reading anxiety is also closely related to personal factors such as past learning experiences, internal motivation, and self-confidence. Students who fail to understand reading texts or have been criticized harshly by their teachers may develop a strong fear of reading. This negative experience can cause light emotional trauma, and if not handled properly, it can become a serious problem in the future. Along with this, students who have low motivation in learning English are often more likely to feel anxious. This is because they do not have enough internal drive to continue learning when reading becomes difficult. Reading anxiety is usually higher in students who are unmotivated and do not believe in their abilities. In a stressful learning environment, such as a competitive class or when the teacher is not supportive, external factors can also worsen reading anxiety. When the teacher speaks too fast, gives very difficult exercises, or harshly corrects students, it can make students more nervous. Classes that are full of pressure, jokes, or do not allow students to ask questions and practice reading comfortably can also increase anxiety. For that reason, creating a friendly and caring class is very important. A positive environment can help reduce students' fear of reading and help them understand texts better. This makes the emotional readiness of students just as important as their language skills in reading comprehension.

Reading comprehension itself is a complex process that involves more than just recognizing words. Snow (2002) explained that reading means understanding the meaning of a text and thinking about what it says. Brown (2001) added that students need to use their thinking skills to guess new words and understand ideas that are not directly stated. Therefore, reading comprehension requires both language knowledge and mental effort. However, this process is often influenced by emotional factors, particularly anxiety (Saito et al., 1999). Horwitz et al. (1986) described three types of language anxiety: fear of speaking, fear of being judged, and fear of tests. These types of anxiety can also appear during reading. For instance, students may feel worried when reading a long or difficult text, or when experiencing pressure in class. This condition can make it harder for them to focus and understand what they are reading (Ghaith, 2020).

Eysenck and Calvo (2008) also explained that anxiety affects students' memory and attention, which are both important for understanding a text. In other words, when students are anxious, their ability to remember what they read and to stay focused decreases significantly. Several studies support this idea. Hasriati (2017) found that students who lack vocabulary and grammar knowledge often feel anxious when reading. Gao et al. (2024) reported that students who do not know how to use reading strategies may feel lost when reading complex texts. Shehzad et al. (2019) found that EFL students have pressure in the classroom, such as difficult tests or unsupportive teachers, which can also increase anxiety, leading to poor comprehension and lower confidence. On the other hand, some studies suggest practical ways to reduce anxiety and improve reading comprehension. Ghaith (2020) suggested that using reading materials that match students' levels can help them feel more confident. Zheng (2024) emphasized the importance of teaching reading strategies such as skimming, scanning, and predicting. These strategies allow students to feel more in control of their

reading process and reduce fear of failure. Creating a safe and friendly classroom where students are not afraid to make mistakes also helps Salihoglu (2024). Moreover, involving students in collaborative reading tasks, peer discussions, and encouraging self-selected reading topics can promote autonomy and reduce tension. With the right support, students can reduce their anxiety and improve their reading performance.

The problem of reading anxiety is not just a personal issue that students have to deal with on their own. It is also a teaching challenge that should be handled carefully by teachers, schools, and education policymakers. Reading instruction should include the emotional aspects of students, not just focus on language skills. For example, teachers can give reading texts that match students' ability levels, use group reading activities, and create a classroom atmosphere that feels safe and free from pressure. Giving positive feedback, celebrating small achievements, and offering choices in reading tasks can help reduce students' anxiety and build their confidence. What's more, simple relation techniques before reading, breathing exercises, or light psychological approaches have been found helpful in managing students' anxiety.

Because of these reasons, this narrative literature review is important to help teachers and researchers understand that success in reading a foreign language is not only about students' cognitive and language abilities, but also strongly influenced by their emotional conditions. This article explores how reading anxiety affects students' reading comprehension in EFL settings by reviewing and synthesizing findings from recent studies. It also discusses the main causes of reading anxiety, both intrinsic (from within the learner) and extrinsic (from the learning environment). By recognizing that reading anxiety is a common phenomenon among EFL students, this review hopes to encourage teachers and education practitioners to be more sensitive and responsive in designing emotionally supportive reading instruction. Learning activities that are enjoyable, inclusive, and mindful of affective factors can not only improve reading comprehension but also foster positive attitudes toward English. In the long term, effective management of reading anxiety can significantly increase EFL students' motivation, self-confidence, and learning achievement. Therefore, continued discussion and research on this issue are essential to inform curriculum development and pedagogical practices in EFL contexts.

METHODS

This article applies a narrative literature review method to examine how reading anxiety affects EFL students' reading comprehension. This type of review is suitable for exploring educational and psychological phenomena because it allows the researcher to organize, interpret, and synthesize diverse findings and theories from existing literature. Rather than collecting primary data through surveys or experiments, this method focuses on integrating knowledge from previous studies to generate a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

The literature was collected between April and June 2025 using various academic databases and search engines, including Google Scholar, ERIC, Scopus, ScienceDirect, and ResearchGate. To ensure the relevance and credibility of the sources, three inclusion criteria were applied: (1) The publication must be from 2017 to 2025; (2) the study must focus on topics related to reading comprehension, reading anxiety, or EFL learning; and (3) the source must be peer-reviewed or otherwise academically credible. In the initial stage, over 28 articles and reports were identified. After applying the criteria, reviewing the abstracts and full texts, a total of 22 sources were purposely selected. These include journal articles, book chapters, and conference proceedings, both national and international (e.g., Alshehri, 2025; Fitrawati *et al.*, 2023; Horwitz, 1986; Krashen, 1982). The selected literature was thematically analyzed to identify patterns, recurring issues, and theoretical connections related to the topic. The analysis is organized into four major themes: (1) the importance of reading skills in EFL contexts, (2) factors that affect students' reading comprehension, (3) causes and effects of reading anxiety, and (4) strategies for reducing affective barriers to reading. This thematic structure enables a clear synthesis of findings and shows how different elements interact to shape students' reading experiences. A key theoretical framework used in this article is Krashen's (1982) *Affective Filter Hypothesis*, which explains how emotional factors such as anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence can influence second language acquisition. According to this theory, when learners experience high anxiety, their ability to absorb and process language input becomes blocked. This makes it harder for them to understand what they read, even if they have necessary vocabulary or grammar knowledge.

Although this article does not collect new data from classrooms, it critically discusses empirical findings from previous research. For example, Liu and Wang (2023) demonstrated that simplified reading texts, emotional support from teachers, and group-based reading activities help reduce students' anxiety and improve comprehension outcomes. Similarly, Gao *et al.* (2024) found that giving students more reading autonomy and creating a supportive classroom climate significantly lowered affective barriers. By synthesizing findings from such studies, this review provides a foundation for future research and offers practical insights for EFL educators. It emphasizes the importance of addressing students' emotional states in reading instruction and highlights strategies that may be effective in real classroom contexts. Thus, the narrative literature review method proves valuable in both advancing theoretical understanding and supporting educational practice.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Importance of Reading for EFL Students'

Reading plays a very important role in helping EFL students improve their language skills. Reading is not only a basic skill in learning a language, but it is also a foundation for academic success and learning in general. Through reading, EFL students can learn new vocabulary, sentence structure, and how language is used in real situations. All of these help students improve their English skills. Reading gives students real and useful language input, which is needed to improve reading comprehension and fluency in English. It also helps students naturally learn grammar and vocabulary, because they often see the same words or phrases in different meaningful situations. When students read texts many times, it becomes easier for them to remember new words. Some studies have shown that regular reading can help students improve their language skills overall. For example, Chi and City (2021) found that EFL students who read often had higher reading comprehension and writing scores than those who rarely read. The same study was conducted by Li and Gan (2022), who explained that reading not only increases vocabulary knowledge but also helps students develop critical thinking and the ability to make conclusions. These skills are very important for understanding main ideas, finding supporting details, and thinking about the meaning of the text, both in school and in everyday life. Reading also has a positive impact on students' learning independence. When EFL students get used to reading, they start to take an active role in learning, choose the reading they like, and learn new words independently without always depending on the teacher. This is supported by Liu and Wang's (2023) research, which states that reading activities can increase students' learning independence and motivation, which are key factors in the long-term improvement of language skills. On top of that, reading can also open new insights and knowledge about culture. This can help students develop intercultural awareness and empathy skills, which are very important in the current era of globalization.

Besides that, reading can also reduce anxiety and increase students' confidence in language learning. Research by Gao *et al.* (2024) shows that students who feel comfortable with reading activities tend to be more confident in using English, both in writing and speaking skills. Through reading, students have the opportunity to practice quietly and independently, without pressure from others. This is very beneficial for students who are shy or feel anxious when they have to perform in front of the class. This finding strengthens the Affective Filter Hypothesis theory put forward by Krashen (1982), which states that the condition of reading is the most important. For this reason, reading is not just a skill that students need to learn, but also a valuable tool to help improve vocabulary, grammar understanding, critical thinking, independent learning, and emotional health. For EFL students, reading is an important part of learning the language and achieving success in school. That's why teachers and educators should encourage students to read regularly by giving them interesting and level-appropriate texts. This can help create a positive reading environment and connect reading with other language skills in a complete and meaningful way.

Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension is an important process in reading. Because it is not only seeing or saying the words, but also understanding what the text means. This means that reading is not just about recognizing letters or words, but about understanding the message that the author wants to share. According to Snow (2002), reading involves two main processes, namely extracting meaning and constructing meaning. This means that the reader must be active in using what they already know, their own experiences, and reading strategies to understand the content well. Besides that, Brown

(2001) also explains that reading comprehension is not just about reading words correctly. Readers need to think deeply. They should be able to understand ideas that are not written, guess the meaning of unfamiliar words based on context, and assess whether the information in the text is logical and relevant. In this case, reading becomes an active activity that involves analysis, evaluation, and reflection. A good reader is someone who can think carefully while reading, not just read fast or a lot. It is the reason reading comprehension is very important in learning, especially for EFL students, because they need to develop the ability to understand the content of English texts more deeply and meaningfully.

Factors Increasing Reading Comprehension

The ability to understand English texts is very important for students who learn English as a foreign language. However, this skill does not appear suddenly. It is influenced by many different factors that help students understand better. These factors include internal ones like language ability, learning strategies, and motivation, as well as external ones like teacher support, suitable learning materials, and a good learning environment. The more positive factors students have, the better their chances of understanding texts deeply and effectively. One important factor is vocabulary. Vocabulary is the key to understanding a text. If students know more English words, it is easier for them to understand the meaning of the text without always guessing or checking the dictionary. A study by Haviza *et al.* (2022) found that students with good vocabulary knowledge usually get higher reading comprehension scores. They also feel more confident when reading harder texts. A wide vocabulary helps students understand many types of texts, from stories to academic writings, which improves their literacy skills. Besides vocabulary, reading strategies are also very important. Reading strategies like skimming to find the main idea, scanning to look for specific information, predicting, summarizing, and taking notes on main points help students understand information better. The right reading strategy helps make reading easier to understand and more enjoyable to do. According to Zheng (2024), EFL students who are trained to use reading strategies carefully show better results in reading comprehension because they know how to handle difficult texts in a clear and organized way. Reading motivation is another important factor. Students who are highly motivated, whether by an interest in reading or a desire to achieve academic success, tend to read with greater focus and enthusiasm. They do not give up easily when reading gets difficult. Li and Gan (2022) say that intrinsic motivation, which is the inner desire to read, has a positive effect on how students engage with reading and how well they understand it. Students who read because they want to, not because they have to, usually remember more and understand texts better.

Another important factor is support from the teacher and the learning environment. Teachers have a big role in shaping students' reading attitudes and skills. A teacher who can create a fun and comfortable learning atmosphere, give reading materials that match the students' level, and provide helpful guidance and feedback will help students feel more confident and improve their reading ability. This kind of support helps build a positive learning environment. Liu and Wang (2023) found that students' reading fluency and comprehension improved when they had support, especially by making reading a daily habit. A regular reading habit is also very helpful. Students who read every day, even for just a few minutes, show steady progress in their reading skills. By reading often, students become more familiar with English sentence structures, faster at understanding main ideas, and better at catching important details in the text. Liu and Wang (2023) explained that EFL students who practiced reading daily had a big improvement in their reading comprehension after one semester, compared to students who only read during class time. In addition, knowing about text structure awareness also helps students understand better. Students who know how a text is organized such as main ideas, supporting sentences, and conclusions can follow the writer's thoughts more easily. They can also tell the difference between important and irrelevant information in the text. This is very useful when answering comprehension questions or summarizing a reading passage. In general, the increase in EFL students' reading comprehension is influenced by a combination of different factors. Vocabulary mastery, reading strategies, motivation, teacher support, a positive learning environment, regular reading habits, and understanding of text structure all play a role in helping students understand texts better. Besides that, teachers and educational institutions need to consider all these aspects carefully in the teaching process. Improving reading comprehension should not be done by only giving exercises or tests, but also by building reading habits, using the right learning strategies, and applying a teaching approach that supports and motivates students emotionally.

Factors Decreasing Reading Comprehension

In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, one important ability is to understand written texts in English. However, in reality, many EFL students struggle with reading comprehension. These difficulties are not only caused by low language ability, but also by other related factors that directly affect how well students understand what they read. These factors can come from linguistic, psychological, and learning environment aspects. One major reason for low reading comprehension is limited vocabulary. Many EFL students do not have enough English vocabulary, so they often have trouble understanding the meaning of words or phrases in a text. When there are too many unfamiliar words, students may lose the overall meaning of the passage and feel frustrated or give up before finishing the text. Hasriati (2017) found that poor vocabulary knowledge is the biggest reason for reading anxiety because students feel unprepared to understand the full content of a text. Another major challenge for EFL students is complex sentence structure. Many English texts, especially at intermediate and advanced levels, use compound sentences, passive voice, and grammar patterns that are not familiar to beginner learners. This makes students work harder to understand the meaning of each sentence. If they do not know how these structures work, they can easily become confused and misunderstand the content of the text. A study by Gao *et al.* (2024) outlines that difficult sentence structures in academic texts can slow down reading speed and reduce comprehension accuracy. The third factor that affects reading comprehension is the lack of background knowledge that students have about the topic of the text. When students read about topics that are unfamiliar to them, such as foreign cultures, global political issues, or scientific terms, they struggle to connect the text with their knowledge or experiences. This makes it harder for them to understand the meaning of the text.

Besides linguistic and cognitive factors, psychological factors such as anxiety, low self-confidence, and academic pressure also play a big role in reducing reading ability (Saito *et al.*, 1999). Many students are afraid of making mistakes while reading, worried they won't be able to answer questions after reading, or feel embarrassed when asked to read in front of the class. This fear and nervousness cause students to lose focus, which affects their thinking process. Shehzad *et al.* (2019) explained that students who experience reading anxiety have lower concentration levels and often avoid reading tasks, which then leads to poor reading comprehension. Not only that, a lack of motivation and reading habits is also an important factor that is often overlooked. Many EFL students only read when their teacher asks them to, not because they want to. As a result, they are not used to reading in English, and their reading skills do not improve naturally. Al-Faki and Siddiek (2013) observed that students with low motivation are usually less active in reading practice and get lower scores in reading comprehension tests compared to those who are more motivated. Likewise, an unsupportive learning environment can also make the situation worse. If teachers do not give students the right reading strategies, or if students do not receive reading materials that match their level, the learning process becomes less effective. Ghaith (2020) showed that teaching methods that focus too much on tests and scores, without paying attention to the reading process or students' interests, can increase pressure and reduce students' involvement in reading activities. These factors are connected and influence each other. Hence, it is important for teachers and educators to understand all of these aspects and design reading strategies that not only focus on the text itself but also consider the students' emotional state and learning needs.

Anxiety

Anxiety in learning English as a foreign language (EFL) is one of the psychological factors that can make learning more difficult for students. This kind of anxiety happens when students feel afraid, nervous, or unsure about using English, whether in speaking or writing. Many EFL students are afraid of making mistakes in pronunciation, grammar, or understanding the meaning of a text. They also worry about being judged by their teachers or classmates. These feelings can make it hard for them to focus, avoid reading or speaking tasks, and even lose their motivation to learn. In educational psychology, this is called foreign language anxiety, which means anxiety that happens when someone is learning or using a foreign language. According to Horwitz *et al.* (1986) categorized language anxiety into three main types: communication anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. In EFL learning, this anxiety often appears when students are asked to read English texts that are difficult or unfamiliar. As a result, their reading comprehension becomes weak because they cannot focus well, or they feel too much pressure while reading. A study by

Subekti (2018) it was found that university students felt medium to high anxiety when reading English. The main reasons were difficult words and topics, or cultures they did not know. Anxiety can make learning harder. For example, students who feel anxious when reading English texts may find it difficult to focus, get tired quickly, or not want to read at all. This certainly interferes with their understanding of the content of the reading. This is also supported by previous research by (Ghaith, 2020). This study involved 103 EFL students in Lebanon and showed that reading anxiety negatively impacts text comprehension and inhibits the use of support strategies when students feel high anxiety. According to Krashen's (1982) *Affective Filter Hypothesis*, anxiety is one of the emotional factors that can make it harder to learn a new language. If a student feels very nervous, the *filter* in the brain becomes high, and the brain cannot understand or remember the lesson well. But if students feel calm and confident, they can learn and remember better. Feeling nervous when reading in a foreign language is common, especially for EFL students. However, if the anxiety is too strong, it can make learning harder, especially when reading English texts. Teachers and schools should help students feel less nervous by making the class comfortable, giving reading texts that match students' levels, and helping students become more confident.

Factors Increasing Anxiety in EFL Students'

Anxiety in learning English as a foreign language (EFL) is something many students often feel, especially when they have to read or understand English texts. This anxiety can come from many different causes that are connected to each other. One big reason is not knowing enough English words and grammar. Students who do not understand many words may feel confused, scared of making mistakes, and not confident. A study by Zheng (2024) found that difficult words are the main reason for reading anxiety, followed by hard sentence structures. Another cause is the pressure from school or the classroom, like the need to get good grades, take hard tests, or deal with teachers who are not patient. A classroom that feels too strict or unfriendly can make students afraid of failing or embarrassed if they make a mistake. Shehzad *et al.* (2019) said that when students do not believe in themselves and do not get support from their teachers, their anxiety becomes worse, and they often avoid reading in English. As another point, bad experiences in the past can also make students feel anxious. For example, if a student were once asked to read out loud and made mistakes, they might feel ashamed. This memory can make them scared to read again in the future. Also, if the text is too hard or includes topics or cultures students do not know, they might feel stressed and give up, even if they try their best. Not knowing how to read in a smart way is another problem. Some students don't learn reading strategies like skimming (reading quickly to find the main idea), scanning (looking for specific information), or finding key points. In turn, when they read long and difficult texts, they try to understand every word, which can make them feel tired, confused, and anxious. Gao *et al.* (2024) said that students who do not use good reading strategies often feel more nervous because they don't know what to do with the text. In short, anxiety in EFL students is not only because of weak English skills, but also because of feelings, past experiences, and a learning environment that does not support them. Teachers can help by making the class a safe and friendly place, giving reading texts that match the students' level, and teaching useful reading strategies. This can help students feel more confident and less stressed when reading in English.

Relationship between Anxiety and Reading Comprehension

Many researchers have investigated how anxiety affects EFL students' reading comprehension, and most have found the same results. When students feel more anxious, they often have more difficulty understanding what they read. Anxiety can make students lose focus, feel unsure about themselves, and become less interested in reading, especially as EFL students. According to, MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) found that students who feel nervous or worried while reading English narrative text usually get lower scores in the reading test. This means that their anxiety makes it harder for them to understand the stories. One of the students in the study said, "I always feel nervous when reading English. Even when I know the words, I can't focus because I am afraid of making mistakes." So, the study with junior high school students showed a strong negative relationship between anxiety and reading results. This means that when students feel more anxious, they understand less of what they read. Anxiety also makes it hard for them to focus, causes hesitation, or even makes them avoid reading activities. This matches Krashen's (1982) *Affective Filter Hypothesis*, which states that high anxiety acts like a *filter* that blocks language input from reaching the brain. Also, the *Processing*

Efficiency Theory by Eysenck and Calvo (2008) explains that anxiety affects working memory, which makes it hard for students to focus and remember information. This becomes a big problem when reading narrative texts that need reasoning and imagination. Another study by Alshehri (2025) also showed that students who have high anxiety often misunderstand the meaning of the text and cannot make a correct guess about what is happening in the story of the text. It means that when students feel anxious, they cannot keep information in their memory and cannot understand the story well. For example, when reading a story about a child who loses his bicycle, students need to understand feelings like sadness or frustration. But anxious students often get stuck on difficult words and cannot understand the emotional meaning of the story. Coupled with this, Fitrawati *et al.* (2023) found that students who have high anxiety sometimes read too fast or skip some parts of the text because they want to finish quickly. Beyond that, they may even avoid reading completely. These behaviors make their reading comprehension even worse.

Salihoglu (2024) explained that many students with low self-confidence and a fear of making mistakes are more hesitant to analyze the English text. These students often avoid thinking deeply about the meaning of the text because they are worried they will be wrong. For example, rather than explaining or offering their opinion on what they have read, they remain silent or only provide brief responses. This fear prevents them from developing a deeper understanding of the text. As well, anxiety makes students focus more on mistakes or unfamiliar words, instead of the full meaning of the story. Some studies also say that anxiety affects students' thinking processes. Another study by Alqurashi (2024) found that memory can be impacted by anxiety. Students' brains do not function as well when they are anxious or nervous. They could struggle to make connections between new concepts and what they already know, or they might forget why they just read. The reason for this is that their working memory, where the brain holds and processes information, is not functioning properly under stress. This situation supports Krashen's *Affective Filter Hypothesis*, which says that strong emotions like fear, nervousness, or stress can block learning. When students feel anxious, it's like a *filter* in their minds goes up, and this filter stops the language input from going in smoothly. As such, students do not fully understand or remember what they read. Gao *et al.* (2024) said that when students are afraid of making mistakes, they avoid reading actively. They read too carefully, afraid of misunderstanding words, so they miss the main idea of the story. Equally, when ESL students feel anxious while reading narrative texts, they often lose focus and cannot understand the story well.

Based on all previous studies mentioned, it is clear that reading anxiety in EFL learners is not just an emotion. It also creates problems in learning. Anxiety can make students lose focus, feel afraid, and try to avoid reading, especially English reading texts. Anxiety not only makes students uncomfortable but also directly affects their thinking and understanding of English texts. This shows that anxiety has a clear negative impact on EFL students' reading comprehension. That's why teachers and schools need to help students feel more confident and comfortable when they read English texts. Creating a safe classroom environment and using the right strategies to reduce anxiety can help improve students' reading skills and overall learning.

How to Cope with Anxiety in Reading

Reading anxiety is a common issue in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms and is considered a major barrier to reading comprehension. When students feel anxious while reading, their cognitive processes are often disrupted, which negatively impacts their ability to understand the text. For this reason, implementing practical strategies to reduce anxiety is essential, not only to improve emotional comfort but also to support better reading performance. One important way to reduce anxiety is to ensure that reading materials are appropriate to students' language levels. Texts that are too difficult or filled with unfamiliar vocabulary and complex grammar may cause students to feel overwhelmed and discouraged. Gradually introducing texts, starting with simpler ones and slowly increasing difficulty, allows students to build confidence over time. According to Ghaith (2020), using level-appropriate materials can reduce students' psychological pressure and increase their motivation to engage with texts. Another effective approach is teaching explicit reading strategies. Techniques such as skimming, scanning, predicting, identifying main ideas, and taking notes can help students navigate reading tasks in a more organized and purposeful manner. Students who are equipped with these strategies are more likely to feel confident and prepared. Besides that, students who were taught reading strategies systematically experienced a significant decrease in anxiety and showed improved performance, as they had a clear plan for understanding the text. Creating a supportive and low-stress classroom environment is also crucial. When teachers foster a

positive atmosphere where students feel safe to make mistakes without fear of judgment, it encourages participation and reduces tension. Positive and constructive feedback also contributes to building students' confidence.

Reported that students who received emotional support from their teachers felt more at ease and were more willing to engage in reading tasks, even when the material was challenging. Selecting reading topics that align with students' interests and experiences can also help reduce anxiety. When students are personally connected to the topic or find it enjoyable, they are more motivated and engaged. This emotional connection can bring better focus and a decrease in anxiety. Liu and Wang (2023) stressed that interest-based reading materials not only increased students' reading enthusiasm but also helped lower their reading-related anxiety. Establishing regular reading habits in a relaxed setting is another useful strategy. Reading daily, even for a short amount of time, can help students become more familiar with English vocabulary and sentence structure, which boosts confidence and comprehension over time. Chi & City (2021) found that EFL students who practiced daily reading for at least 15 minutes over three months showed both reduced anxiety and significant improvements in reading skills. Besides academic techniques, emotional regulation practices can also be helpful. Simple exercises such as deep breathing, muscle relaxation, and positive thinking can support students in managing their emotional responses before or during reading. Li and Gan (2022) also suggest including short breaks during reading tasks to help students refresh and return with better focus. Alongside this, giving students opportunities to express their feelings about reading, either individually or in group discussions, can help identify sources of anxiety. When students feel heard and supported, they are more open to receiving help. Reflective discussions also provide valuable insights for teachers to design more effective and student-centered interventions. To round things off, addressing reading anxiety among EFL students requires a combination of academic support, emotional awareness, and classroom management. When these aspects are considered together, the reading experience becomes more positive, and students can develop stronger reading skills with greater confidence and less stress.

CONCLUSION

Reading comprehension is a key skill in learning English as a foreign language (EFL). It helps students to improve other skills like speaking, writing, and listening. Reading is more than just a school task, and it helps students gain knowledge, build language ability, and understand other cultures. Good reading skills are needed at every level of learning. Hence, they should be a main focus in English classes. However, reading is not only about speed, but also about understanding the meaning, ideas, and hidden messages in a text. According to Snow (2002), reading is an active process that mixes what students already know with new information. Many students have shown that reading comprehension is influenced by personal factors such as vocabulary, motivation, reading interest, and confidence. These same factors can also lead to reading anxiety. High levels of anxiety often make it harder for students to understand English texts. That is why teachers and schools need to pay attention to students' emotions and predict, while also building student confidence, which can help reduce anxiety and improve reading skills.

To understand more about reading anxiety and how it affects EFL students, future researchers are encouraged to do more in-depth studies. These can use quantitative methods to measure how anxiety levels affect reading scores or use qualitative interview methods to explore students' feelings. It's also important to develop tools that match the social and cultural context of students in Indonesia, since many tools now are designed for different countries. Future research should also try out different ways to reduce anxiety, such as relaxation techniques, using fun digital tools, or group projects. Teachers also play a big part in helping students feel less nervous. They should create a friendly classroom where students are not afraid to ask questions or make mistakes. Teachers should pay attention to students who often avoid reading or seem stressed and help them using kind, personal support. Using fun methods like storytelling, group games, and interesting reading materials can make reading more enjoyable. Teaching vocabulary in context and showing how to use reading strategies can help students feel more confident. These efforts will make English learning more positive and meaningful for all EFL students.

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