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READING ANXIETY OF EFL LEARNERS IN INDONESIAN RURAL SCHOOLS: A QUANTITATIVE STUDY

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Abstract
The purposes of this current study were twofold. First, it attempted to find out the level of reading anxiety among EFL learners in rural schools. Second, it sought to determine whether there is a statistical difference in reading anxiety between rural EFL learners across gender and level of study. Seventy-seven EFL learners from several rural Indonesian schools were involved in completing a 27-items EFL Reading Anxiety Inventory (EFLRAI). The findings revealed different levels of top-down, bottom-up, and classroom reading anxiety among rural school learners. Regarding the statistical differences across gender, it is found that male learners outperformed females in terms of top-down and bottom-up reading anxiety. However, female learners offered a better understanding than male learners. Meanwhile, in terms of study grades, it is stated that freshmen learners are more dominant in experiencing reading anxiety than junior and senior learners. In short, reading anxiety has different levels among different EFL learners. In addition, differences occur when each learner with different gender and study grade experience anxiety in reading.

Keywords: EFL learners, reading anxiety, rural schools

Introduction
Reading skill is essential in developing knowledge and understanding among EFL learners. Reading enables EFL learners to explore an unknown topic and deepen their investigation of it (Walczyk & Griffith-Ross, 2007; Cain & Oakhill, 2014). Moreover, creative and higher thinking skill is needed to develop reading comprehension (Anaktototy & Lesnussa, 2022). To achieve this level, the learners must indulge in various reading sources, including journal articles, newspapers, magazines, novels, and even poems. The learners can understand a reading text by scanning, skimming, analyzing, and concluding information from the text. Such reading subskills allow the learners to highlight deeper exploration of a text and thus develop their reading achievement. In this case, the EFL learners must perform correctly to determine whether their reading skills are

higher regarding comprehension of various reading texts (Schiefele et al., 2012; Spörer & Schünemann, 2014; Schaffner et al., 2014).

In general, EFL learners in rural schools have similar tasks to urban EFL learners regarding reading comprehension. Every EFL learner needs to be involved in several reading activities based on a centralized curriculum designed by the central government. Reading in the curriculum requires EFL learners in rural schools to follow every step of reading activities, including brainstorming, scanning, skimming, analyzing, and making conclusions about reading text. However, not all EFL learners can complete such activities as some of them feel worried about the term reading and text. Such feeling leads to anxiety as a psychological attitude that can demotivate and motivate EFL learners to succeed in their reading comprehension (Zhao et al., 2013; Lien, 2016; Katzir et al., 2018).

Meanwhile, anxiety toward reading affects EFL learners' level of understanding of a text. In addition, learners with anxiety toward reading have the lower reading ability. Such reading anxiety has to be responded to by the EFL learners by encouraging themselves as struggling readers whose task is to enhance comprehension of the text (Ismail, 2015).

Regarding anxiety toward the reading of EFL learners, there have been many previous studies discussing similar focus, including reading anxiety in urban schools (Zhao et al., 2013), relationships between reading anxiety and other variables (Alkhateeb, 2014; Awada & Ghaith, 2017; Chow et al., 2017; Katzir at al., 2018), validity and reliability of reading anxiety (Zoghi & Alivandivafa, 2014), the impact of reading anxiety (Lien, 2016), systematic literature on reading anxiety (Piccolo et al., 2016), and survey on reading anxiety (Ismail, 2015). The previous studies focus on reading anxiety in terms of the correlational, survey, and experimental studies on various variables. However, little study has been conducted on a descriptive study concerning EFL reading anxiety in rural schools. Therefore, this current study was undertaken to determine EFL learners' reading anxiety in rural schools. To focus, this study was conducted under the questions:

1. What is the level of reading anxiety among EFL learners in rural schools?
2. Is there a statistical difference in reading anxiety between rural EFL learners across gender and level of study?

Literature review

Definition of anxiety

Anxiety generally refers to an uneasy feeling leading to fearful and dreadful thoughts before or during something (Hettema, 2008; Craske et al., 2009). As for the example, it is expected that a learner faces a difficult task at school before attending a class, taking an exam, or coming to a particular answer to a question. Fortunately, anxiety can be helpful for learners as it helps them focus on their lessons and task. However, learners with anxiety disorders face the long-time effect of anxiety which impacts their minds during a lesson (Jungbluth et al., 2011).

In a learning context, anxiety disorders negatively impact learners' feelings during the study as the disorders stay longer inside their minds. Anxiety disorders are categorized into several types, including panic disorders (i.e., fearful feeling that suddenly attacks the mind repeatedly but lasts quickly as the mind is under

control), phobia (i.e., intense fear toward something with little impact, such as encountering new classmates, performing in front of classmates, and the like), social anxiety (i.e., feeling of worry about being judged by the others), and obsessive-compulsive anxiety (i.e., a fearful feeling which leads to the repeated deed) (Patrick et al., 2010; Pelissolo et al., 2011; Hz, 2022)

L2 reading anxiety

In general, speaking skill among EFL students has become a focus of various studies. Meanwhile, it is different from reading skills not commonly discussed in many occasions of previous studies. Speaking as an oral performance is a skill requiring L2 students to perform their oral competence in front of the class to be openly evaluated by both L2 teachers and students. Unlike speaking, reading skill is enacted by an individual L2 student whose task is to find the meaning of content and develop the implied meaning of a reading text (Rajab et al., 2012). Working individually toward stated and implied meaning in reading activity has impacted the emergence of L2 students' anxiety (Nelson et al., 2013).

Reading anxiety in the context of foreign language refers to fearful feelings when EFL learners are faced with reading activities in terms of L2 texts. L2 reading anxiety is one of the types of foreign language anxiety which leads to worrying feelings during an oral performance (Horwitz et al., 1986). The rationale of reading anxiety is to determine comparative concepts of text decoding and the meaning of a text to run the actual process within an L2 reading text. As a consequence, it is noted that such a process leads to comprehensive development, which allows L2 learners to acquire English as a foreign language. Anxiety in L2 reading among learners is identified as anxiety when they are asked to complete reading tasks, but they do not perform well in cognitive comprehension (Zoghi & Alivandivafa, 2014). As the learners lack such cognitive performance, they seem challenged with negative self-control and self-evaluation, which eventually negatively impact reading performance.

There have been some fascinating results of previous studies on L2 reading anxiety. Horwitz et al. (1986), for example, sought to investigate thirty students who studied Japanese, Russian, and Spanish who suffered from foreign language anxiety. As for the result, it is stated that the emergence of anxiety in using a foreign language significantly impacts how L2 students perform in their target language in the classroom. Reading performance is determined by the level of anxiety they experience (Grills et al., 2014). In this case, L2 students with lower anxiety levels in reading skills seem to enact proper reading performance compared to those with higher reading anxiety. In addition, complicated procedures in reading performance affect L2 students' level of anxiety in the understanding text of comprehending meaning.

L2 reading anxiety can be caused by several related factors, including specific linguistic elements, material differences, and distinctive features of the curriculum. Procedures or steps in English writing activity are entirely different from those experienced in L1 writing of the learners (Piccolo et al., 2016). The difference ranges from their first language's sound pronunciation and grammatical system. For many L2 learners, reading presented in the form of texts is very complicated to understand as the L2 learners' pronunciation of a word is different

from its writing symbol. Moreover, the use of uncommon vocabulary in a text increases L2 learners' anxiety toward such L2 reading (Meer et al., 2016).

Regarding cultural impact, it is noted that learners whose reading system of first languages is not similar to that of L2 feel anxious about the content or meaning of such a text. Understanding a text in English means that the L2 learners need to be indulged in its culture because if not, they are faced with anxiety toward every kind of reading activity (Commeyras & Mazile, 2011; Joubert et al., 2013; Rezaabadi, 2017). On the other side, knowing L2 cultures enable the learners to enhance their better comprehension of the world they live in and the L2 knowledge they learn. Therefore, L2 learners are expected to build a basic sense of L2 culture to understand various reading types and avoid misinterpretation of the meaning of reading texts (Chiu & Chow, 2010). To learn L2 culture, the learners are provided with novels, magazines, short stories, poems, and newspapers.

Learning English in rural schools

Learning English in L2 reading has been integrated into curricular content in urban and rural schools. Downes and Roberts (2017) define a rural school as an academic institution consisting of less than six hundred learners more than five kilometres from an urban area. It is found to have more insufficiency than schools in urban areas. In terms of English learning, rural schools are commonly known for their various weaknesses and strengths (Febriana et al., 2018). Regarding rural schools in Indonesia, it is noted that factors such as the geography of rural areas, multilingual communities, and different economic statuses influence the L2 teaching and learning process (Luschei & Zubaidah, 2012). In Indonesia, local dialects consist of more than seven hundred kinds, which shapes this country to deal with learners' multilingual languages. However, English is not a part of these languages.

Generally, L2 learners in rural schools face challenges in learning English as communication in L2 is difficult for L2 teachers and learners. The position of English as L2 in rural schools is assumed to be useless if measured based on positive impacts on their daily lives. Consequently, this assumption has led to a lack of either internal or external motivation to learn English. Support from parents has also become a problem for L2 learners in rural schools as they are not motivated to learn English compared to other skills such as basic writing, reading, and math (Holguín & Morales, 2016). In short, learning English in rural school contexts needs to be accommodated through self-motivation and parents' support, which allow L2 learners to indulge in English learning more effectively.

Moreover, the lack of infrastructure or facilities is another critical factor to be addressed in learning English in rural schools (Moulton, 2001). Such factors include worse internet signals and electricity, lack of classroom teaching and learning equipment, lack of learning resources, and lack of motivated support from headteachers or principals (Febriana et al., 2018). On the other hand, beliefs about teaching English in rural schools because of L2 teachers are considered to be problems in learning English for L2 learners. Such beliefs are much related to how English instruction is carried out in an unstable situation, including in the Covid-19 outbreaks, which cause L2 learners to learn with a lack of online learning sources. This issue, finally, yields some challenges that require L2

teachers to work hard with teaching strategies to accommodate positive pedagogical beliefs toward teaching English to rural school learners.

Method

Participants

This study employed 77 EFL learners from several rural schools in Indonesia, consisting of male (26%) and female (74%) learners. The rural EFL learners had different study grades, such as freshmen, sophomores, and juniors. The age of the learners was from 16 to 18 years old. The objective of such selection was to highlight significant differences among learners with different grades and gender. To select the participants of the study, informed consent was provided as a viable option for the candidate of the participants. Eighty-three consents were sent to the participants via Email and Whatsapp. However, 77 informed consents were received, while the rural EFL learners did not return the remaining six forms.

Instrument

Concerning the instrument, this descriptive study employed a 27-items EFL Reading Anxiety Inventory (EFLRAI) developed by Zoghi (2012). This scale was validated as a proper instrument to measure reading anxiety among EFL learners. EFLRAI consists of three subscales, including Top-down reading anxiety (e.g., It is worrying to me when the ideas expressed in the text are culturally unclear), Bottom-up reading anxiety (e.g., It bothers me when I encounter many words whose meanings are unclear), and Classroom reading anxiety (e.g., It worries me when the instructor calls on me to translate a piece of an English text into our first language.). EFLRAI is a 4-point Likert scale ranging from totally disagree (1) to agree (4). Moreover, EFLRAI has a higher stratified alpha (α=.90), considered highly reliable for a developed instrument (Zoghi & Alivandivafa, 2012).

Data collection

To collect the data, 77 EFL learners from several rural schools were asked to sit in several classrooms during the data collection. EFLRAI, as the only questionnaire, was distributed to the EFL learners, and they were asked to complete the questionnaire for 150 minutes. It is noted that the participants needed much time to consider appropriate responses to each questionnaire statement. After the allocated time, 77 questionnaires were received and collected as raw data.

Concerning the ethical consideration of data collection, 83 informed consents were sent to the rural EFL learners to be read and signed as formal evidence of involvement throughout the study. Seventy-seven informed consents were signed, describing that the EFL learners indulged themselves in giving information during the descriptive study. Such consents were directly returned via Email and Whatsapp replies after one-week distribution.

Data analysis

After collecting the data, the next step was analyzing the data based on the proposed research questions. This data analysis was to determine the percentages or means of the collected data. Descriptive analysis was undertaken as it led to an

appropriate quantitative description of the levels of reading anxiety among rural EFL learners. A t-test was utilized to measure whether there was a significant difference in reading anxiety across gender, age, and level of study. To run each statistical analysis more properly, SPSS 25 was employed.

Findings and Discussion

Findings

This session presents the findings of both research questions one and two. The first question investigates the reading anxiety level among rural school EFL learners. This focus was determined through descriptive statistics in terms of percentages for each item of the questionnaire. Meanwhile, the second question intended to describe whether there was a statistical difference in reading anxiety between rural EFL learners across gender and level of study. In this case, an independent t-test was employed to determine the answer.

(RQ1): What is the level of reading anxiety among EFL learners in rural schools?

The level of reading anxiety was determined by percentages of top-down, bottom-up, and classroom reading anxiety. Each sub-indicator of reading anxiety provided the results of descriptive statistical analyses.

Table 1. Top-down reading anxiety

No	Statements	Percentages			
		TD	SD	SA	TA
1.	I do not feel at ease when the title of the text is unfamiliar to me.	11.7	29.9	31.2	27.3
2.	It is worrying to me when the ideas expressed in the text are culturally unclear.	22.1	10.4	10.4	57.1
3.	I get upset when I lack the previous knowledge about the ideas expressed in the text.	11.7	9.1	64.9	14.3
4.	I worry when I cannot get the gist of the text although no new vocabulary items or grammatical points exist in the text.	9.1	15.6	13	62.3
5.	When I cannot recognize minor ideas (details) of the text is worrying to me.	6.5	11.7	66.2	15.6
6.	I am nervous when I cannot spot the main idea of a certain paragraph.	5.2	55.8	14.3	24.7
7.	It bothers me when I cannot express my opinions or feelings about the text.	10.4	11.7	66.2	11.7

The above table reveals that top-down reading anxiety among EFL learners in Indonesian rural schools varies. The learners found it difficult to understand a text through its title (31.2%). The cultural approach is paramount in comprehending a text. The absence of its approach leads the learners to a situation in which they lack comprehension toward understanding text content (57.1%). Therefore, schemata allow EFL learners to grab more profound ideas of the text content to understand a text. However, the learners' positive attitude decreased as they were not equipped with some previous knowledge about the topic (64.9%). The learners' struggle to interact with the text was disturbed by their own

grammatical and lexical competencies in comprehending a text (62.3%). Similarly, a doubtful attitude toward self-understanding skills eliminated the learners' expectation to be involved in a more profound understanding of the text (66.2%) in terms of written or oral expressions (66.2%). However, 55.8% of EFL learners did not concern with their competence in comprehending meaning from a particular paragraph within the text.

Table 2. Bottom-up reading anxiety

No	Statements	Percentages			
		TD	SD	SA	TA
8.	I feel uneasy when I cannot figure out meanings of unknown words.	6.5	75.3	0	18.2
9.	It bothers me when I encounter a lot of words whose meanings are unclear.	9.1	7.8	66.2	16.9
10.	I get upset when I cannot figure out the meaning of a word that I feel I have seen before.	6.5	61	10.4	22.1
11.	It bothers me when I feel unable to look up a word in the dictionary.	9.1	13	20.8	57.1
12.	I get confused when the word that I know has a different meaning in the sentence.	11.7	9.1	45.5	33.8
13.	I get upset when I come across idioms that are unfamiliar to me.	7.8	9.1	35.1	48.1
14.	It makes me feel uneasy when an unfamiliar is made up of several parts or syllables.	7.8	14.3	45.5	32.5
15.	I feel worried when the unknown word is difficult to pronounce.	3.9	36.4	50.6	9.1
16.	I am nervous when a certain sentence is long and has a complex structure.	28.6	42.9	11.7	16.9
17.	When a certain sentence is grammatically unfamiliar is worrying to me.	5.2	46.8	36.4	11.7
18.	It bothers me when a passive voice is used in a sentence.	3.9	51.9	32.5	11.7
19.	I feel upset when the tense of a certain sentence is unclear to me.	5.2	42.9	40.3	11.7
20.	I worry when I am unable to recognize different parts of speech such as adjectives, adverbs, or connective words.	2.6	41.6	9.1	46.8
21.	I get confused when what I know about a grammatical point does not make any sense.	10.4	16.9	35.1	37.7

As for bottom-up reading anxiety, it is noted that two opposite perceptions responded to by the rural school EFL learners, including positive and negative attitudes toward basic understandings of words. For example, 75.3% of EFL learners were unaware of their lack of comprehension of the meaning of words in a text. Furthermore, they were confident that longer sentence containing complicated structures was involved in their awareness of basic understandings of such grammatical rules (42.9%). It leads them to another certainty that complex grammatical rules indulged in a sentence were becoming understandable (46.8%). The passive sentence was considered a basic structure that needs some deep comprehension from the EFL learners (51.9%). In this case, the EFL learners were confident that they could cope with problems with words and their types, complex sentence structure, and meaning of words.

On the other hand, the EFL learners believed they felt worried about words with unclear meanings (66.2%). It is similar to the fact that the learners failed to search for the meaning of words in the dictionary (57.1%). The doubt arose when the EFL learners could not compare different meanings of words used in context (45.5%). The use of idioms is one of the examples for this case, and the meaning of the idioms is simply doubtful for many learners (48.1%). Moreover, the learners felt it challenging to build their competence in comprehending chunks of words or word morphemes (45.5%), and they could not pronounce some words they had never been acquainted with (50.6%). This problem leads to a lack of ability to compare different parts of speech (46.8%) and build good sentences (37.7%).

Table 3. Classroom reading anxiety

No	Statements	Percentages			
		TD	SD	SA	TA
22.	It bothers me when the instructor calls on me to read out.	11.7	20.8	41.6	26
23.	It worries me when the instructor calls on me to translate a piece of an English text into our first language.	7.8	32.5	28.6	31.2
24.	When the instructor asks me reading comprehension questions is worrying to me.	6.5	35.1	32.5	26
25.	It upsets me when the instructor chooses uninteresting texts to read in class.	3.9	28.6	40.3	27.3
26.	It makes me feel uneasy when the instructor corrects my pronunciation or translation mistakes.	14.3	31.2	39	15.6
27.	I am nervous when the instructor uses English as a medium of instruction and hardly ever makes use of our first language.	26	31.2	31.2	35.1

In the classroom, reading anxiety emerged as the EFL learners struggled to attend reading activities. 41% of EFL learners were disturbed by the teacher's command that they were to read a text aloud. However, several EFL learners (32.5%) chose to translate sentences into their language. Reading aloud was not a proper choice for the learners, but they tended to read a text silently (35.1%). On the other hand, enthusiasm for reading was influenced by the type of text during the reading activity. If there is a text that is not engaging, the learners become less enthusiastic about reading and comprehending the text (40.3%). Fortunately, the EFL learners (39%) allowed their teacher to correct their mispronouncing sounds and use English as a language for their learning in the classroom (35.1%).

(RQ2): Is there statistical difference of reading anxiety between rural EFL learners across gender and level of study?

Table 4. Independent T-test result of reading anxiety across gender

Sub Indicator	Gender	M	SD	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
TRA	Male	16.35	1.98	-2.39	40.32	.019
	Female	17.79	2.41			
BRA	Male	37.95	2.94	-1.16	38.12	.248
	Female	38.95	3.4			

CRA	Male	17.05	2.01	0.4	36.19	.689
	Female	16.85	2.2			

Based on the above table, it is noted that female EFL learners (17.79%) dominated the implementation of top-down reading anxiety. Meanwhile, 37.95% of female learners outperformed male learners regarding bottom-up reading anxiety. However, male learners (17.05%) were more anxious regarding reading anxiety in the EFL classroom than female learners (16.85%). As for significance, the gender difference was configured to be statistically different (.019) among those of BRA (.248) and CRA (.689).

Table 5. Independent T-test result of reading anxiety across level of study

Sub Indicator	Age	M	SD	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
TRA	Freshmen	18.26	2.02	74	.027
	Junior	17.54	2.68		
	Senior	16.18	1.38		
BRA	Freshmen	39.11	2.9	74	.336
	Junior	38.93	3.69		
	Senior	37.69	2.57		
CRA	Freshmen	17.42	2.54	74	.220
	Junior	16.49	2.07		
	Senior	17.24	1.71		

Regarding the level of study, freshmen (18.26%) outperformed junior and senior EFL learners in terms of top-down reading anxiety. The first-year students were also dominant as their bottom-up reading anxiety was higher than that of junior and senior EFL learners. Moreover, their classroom reading anxiety was also higher (17.42%) than junior and senior learners. Meanwhile, it is noted that the level of study was significantly different (.027) in terms of top-down reading anxiety.

Discussion

This current study reveals various levels of reading anxiety among rural EFL learners, including significant differences in their reading anxiety across gender and level of study. As for the first result, it is noted that the EFL learners have severe problems with their self-understanding skills in reading English texts. Self-understanding refers to learners' ability to empower themselves to comprehend a specific object or target. In the reading context, rural EFL learners cannot improve their strategies to increase their textual understanding to get a more profound meaning of an English text. The problem is that self-understanding has been problematic in learning English, such as reading comprehension. It requires EFL learners to comprehend every context of a text they are engaged. It is in line with the findings of Ismail (2015), which state that to understand an L2 text, it is a need for EFL learners to trigger their specific reading skills, including scanning and skimming for deeper meaning. In addition, Zoghi and Alivandivafa (2014) stated that basic skills in reading are as crucial as metacognitive reading

skills because both are interrelated in comprehending a text. The lack of each skill decreases rural EFL learners' ability to get involved in another.

However, since top-down reading skill allows rural EFL learners to begin reading from the title, it is necessary that each part of a text has to be comprehended as a holistic meaning. It is because Piccolo et al. (2016) found that failure in reading a text systematically encourages anxiety in comprehending more texts in the future. To avoid such problems, rural EFL learners need to be aware of the importance of a positive attitude toward reading skills. According to Rajab et al. (2012), such an attitude empowers the learners' self-confidence to eliminate factors that cause anxiety in reading. Reading attitude can also lead to negative feelings about reading, which causes reading anxiety. Grills et al. (2012) show that reading anxiety is a severe obstacle for EFL learners in rural schools as they lack the vocabulary and grammar to understand a given text. In short, top-down reading skill is essential for rural EFL learners as a better understanding of its procedure can be a proper solution to decrease reading anxiety.

In terms of bottom-up reading, the source of anxiety is mainly influenced by rural EFL learners' lack of awareness of reading. Awareness in learning English has a vital role because when every EFL learner is aware that they are in the middle of comprehending a text, they are positively motivated to investigate the meaning of the text. However, in the findings of Katzir et al. (2018), it is stated that awareness is not the only factor that causes anxiety in reading a text. It appears to be influential for rural EFL learners whose learning burden decreases their motivation to comprehend the text. Another issue addressed is whether rural EFL learners need basic grammatical competence and several vocabulary during text reading and comprehension. Similarly, Lien (2016) assumed that reading anxiety among EFL learners is caused by a lack of awareness of the use and usage of grammar and short vocabulary. Moreover, text meaning cannot be constructed without proper knowledge and practices of grammatical competence and vocabulary mastery of the rural EFL learners.

The problem of vocabulary mastery in reading a text has been considered a classical finding among many researchers on reading skills (Cain & Oakhill, 2014). Vocabulary is paramount in building the meaning of an L2 text, enabling L2 readers to investigate the content as a whole. In L2 classrooms, vocabulary mastery begins with how literal meaning is constructed and defined based on the L2 dictionary. At an advanced level, an EFL learner should be able to conceptualize a word by referring it to an authentic context. For Zhao et al. (2013), reading anxiety emerges because rural EFL learners cannot accommodate the complicated use of various vocabularies in an L2 reading text. To solve such obstacles, understanding how a word is structured and constructed should be enhanced through the view of morphology as the core study of word construction and meaning (Phillips et al., 2014). Along the same line, a study by Li and Kirby (2014) proved that vocabulary needs to be started from the beginning level, such as the morphology of words and meaning. This step is followed by a further level of meaning construction, including pragmatics in learning to build meaning based on a particular context. To conclude, rural EFL learners can avoid reading anxiety by improving the quality of vocabulary understanding used as a tool to construct the meaning of an L2 reading text.

In the classroom, reading anxiety among rural EFL learners emerges when they cannot apply methods in translating a text from English to Indonesian or vice versa. Such anxiety encompasses available strategies in translation that have been implemented during pre-reading activities (Sriyono, 2022). Lee et al. (2015) suggested that constructive reading is determined by EFL learners' competence in understanding and translating a given text, enabling the learners to read successfully. Xenia and Anjani (2022) offered extensive reading to construct EFL learners' competence in understanding both grammatical and content knowledge in reading activities. However, a study by Unrau et al. (2014) shows that EFL learners with learning difficulties have a lower motivation to follow every systematic reading step, which cannot be individually managed before holistic meaning is determined. It should deal with various strategies of each EFL learner to motivate themselves in learning English (Limeranto & Subekti, 2021; Retnowaty, 2022).

Anxiety that emerges with top-down, bottom-up, and classroom reading is considered a general problem among rural EFL learners who involve themselves in various reading activities. As for gender difference, it is noted that there is a different situation between male and female EFL learners in terms of fear of reading skills. Female EFL learners are found to be more anxious compared to male learners. This phenomenon seems conditional as either male or female EFL learners can outperform each other in L2 reading anxiety. Moreover, the characteristics of each EFL learner need to be concerned with the level of anxiety in L2 reading skills.

On the other hand, different grade of study expands related factors of reading anxiety among EFL learners in rural schools. It is noted that first-year students have a higher level of reading anxiety than junior or senior EFL learners. Learning L2 reading through long-term experiences is essential in reducing reading anxiety. Furthermore, grammar, vocabulary, and metacognitive awareness competencies are believed to affect rural EFL learners' problems in reducing their reading anxiety (Limeranto & Subekti, 2021). To deal with this, reading strategies and internal reading motivation are needed to contribute to reading skill development. This solution allows each learner of different gender and grade to develop their reading skills, automatically reducing their reading anxiety.

Conclusion

Reading anxiety emerges in each step of the reading activity, including pre-reading, whilst-reading, and post-reading activities. EFL learners in rural schools who are expected to participate in reading activities need to be aware of such anxiety as its decreases learning motivation and disturbs the reading development of the learners across gender and grade of study. Although it is not easy for many EFL learners to cope with such anxiety, it is noted that some strategies should be followed, including reading in terms of top-down and bottom-up skills. Such skills are essential to monitoring the quality of rural EFL learners' reading development. On the other hand, factors influencing reading anxiety have been managed to be a typical problem for learners who learn how to begin reading a text and construct the deep, holistic meaning of an L2 text. In short, the reading anxiety of rural EFL learners is defined as a fearful feeling toward reading an L2

text and its meaning. Such anxiety can be solved by applying bottom-up and top-down reading activities across different gender and levels of study.

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