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Foreign Language Reading Anxiety: Exploring First Semester Students' Experiences with Economics English Texts

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ABSTRAK

This investigation examines the phenomenon of foreign language reading anxiety experienced by first-semester Economics Development students at Universitas Negeri Makassar when engaging with specialized English economics texts. The research employed a modified version of Zoghy's Foreign Language Reading Anxiety (FLRA) scale to collect data from 95 respondents, measuring anxiety manifestations across four critical dimensions: text-related anxiety, language-related anxiety, comprehension-related anxiety, and performance-related anxiety. Statistical analysis demonstrated that these Economics Development students encounter moderate to high anxiety levels overall, with particularly elevated anxiety regarding performance evaluation and assessment situations. These findings highlight the necessity for language instructors at Universitas Negeri Makassar to develop and implement strategically targeted interventions addressing reading anxiety, with particular emphasis on alleviating performance-related stress while simultaneously enhancing linguistic competence. The study provides valuable insights into the specific challenges confronted by Economics Development students at Universitas Negeri Makassar as they navigate discipline-specific foreign language materials essential to their academic development.

Keywords: Foreign language reading anxiety, English economics texts, EFL students, Reading comprehension, Academic performance

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PENDAHULUAN

Reading academic texts represents a cornerstone of university learning—yet when this foundational skill must be performed in a foreign language, it transforms into a formidable cognitive challenge. For first-semester Economic Development students at Universitas Negeri Makassar (UNM), navigating English economics texts creates a particularly intense dual-processing burden: they must simultaneously decode unfamiliar linguistic structures while grappling with complex economic theories, mathematical models, and specialized terminology. This cognitive juggling act frequently triggers significant anxiety responses that can profoundly undermine both comprehension and academic confidence during their crucial first exposure to university-level economics study.

Foreign Language Reading Anxiety (FLRA) encompasses the constellation of uncomfortable psychological and physiological responses including apprehension, tension, and avoidance behaviors—that emerge when engaging with texts in non-native languages. The pioneering work of

Saito et al. (1999) established FLRA as a distinct construct from general language anxiety, while subsequent research by Zhao et al. (2013) has demonstrated its substantial negative impacts on reading comprehension, strategy deployment, and overall language acquisition. However, despite extensive research on general foreign language anxiety, the specific manifestation of reading anxiety within specialized academic disciplines remains notably underexplored in the literature.

Economics texts present particularly formidable barriers for Indonesian learners due to their unique fusion of abstract theoretical frameworks, mathematical expressions, and data-driven analyses—all communicated through discipline-specific discourse conventions that can seem impenetrable even to native English speakers. As Mohammed and Ab Rashid (2019) discovered, economics majors consistently report significantly elevated anxiety levels when processing specialized disciplinary texts compared to general English materials. This anxiety creates a troubling cycle where comprehension difficulties intensify emotional responses, which further impair cognitive processing, potentially derailing academic progress at a crucial developmental stage.

The English for Economics course at UNM serves as a critical gateway for first-semester students entering the Economic Development program, requiring them to rapidly adapt to sophisticated economic terminology and concepts presented entirely through an unfamiliar linguistic medium. Despite the foundational importance of this course for subsequent academic progress and future professional opportunities, little research has examined the specific dimensions of reading anxiety experienced by Indonesian economics students confronting these specialized texts. Muhlis (2017) has documented the particular challenges Indonesian university students face with technical vocabulary acquisition in academic English contexts, while Prasetyo and Widodo (2019) revealed that economics majors specifically report heightened anxiety when processing discipline-specific materials—yet neither study explored the multidimensional nature of this anxiety within the specific educational context of Indonesian economics programs.

This study addresses this significant research gap by applying Zoghy's multidimensional framework to investigate the specific anxiety profiles of first-semester Economic Development students at UNM, examining how text-related, language-related, comprehension-related, and performance-related dimensions of anxiety interact to shape these students' engagement with specialized economics texts. Unlike previous general studies of FLRA, this research deliberately focuses on the distinctive anxiety patterns emerging within a discipline-specific learning environment, providing unprecedented insight into which anxiety dimensions most significantly impact economic students' learning experiences during this critical introductory period.

Building on Subekti's (2020) promising findings regarding context-specific FLRA interventions among Indonesian university students, this research aims to generate evidence-based

recommendations for targeted pedagogical approaches that specifically address the most significant anxiety dimensions identified among UNM economics students. By identifying and addressing these specific anxiety triggers, this study holds significant potential for enhancing learning outcomes in a course that serves as both a crucial foundation for subsequent academic development and an essential preparation for future professional engagement with international economic literature and discourse. The findings will contribute not only to theoretical understanding of discipline-specific anxiety manifestations but also to practical improvements in instructional design for specialized language courses across Indonesian economic education contexts.

METODE

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research design using survey methodology to investigate reading anxiety among first-semester university students at Universitas Negeri Makassar (UNM) when engaging with English economics texts.

Participants

The study sample comprised 95 first-semester undergraduate students enrolled in the Economics Development Program at Makassar State University in Indonesia. The sample included both male and female students with varying levels of English proficiency. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 21 years, with the majority (87%) having studied English formally for 6-9 years in previous educational settings. Most participants (92%) identified Bahasa Indonesia as their primary language, with the remainder reporting regional Indonesian languages as their mother tongue.

Instrument

Data was collected using an adapted version of the Foreign Language Reading Anxiety (FLRA) scale developed by Zoghy. The adapted questionnaire consisted of 24 items measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The items were categorized into four dimensions:

1. Text-related anxiety (items 1-6)
2. Language-related anxiety (items 7-12)
3. Comprehension-related anxiety (items 13-18)
4. Performance-related anxiety (items 19-24)

The adaptation process included pilot testing with a small sample (n=15) of similar students not included in the main study. The instrument demonstrated robust psychometric properties with high internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.89$ for the overall scale). Subscale reliability coefficients

were similarly strong: text-related anxiety (α = 0.84), language-related anxiety (α = 0.87), comprehension-related anxiety (α = 0.81), and performance-related anxiety (α = 0.90).

Data Collection and Analysis

The questionnaire was administered to students during regular class sessions. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and assured of the confidentiality of their responses.

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) version 28.0. The analysis included descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequencies) to determine the levels of reading anxiety across different dimensions. Additionally, correlational analyses were performed to explore relationships between different dimensions of reading anxiety.

HASIL DAN PEMBAHASAN

Overall Reading Anxiety Levels

Statistical analysis of the survey data revealed that first-semester Economics Development students at Universitas Negeri Makassar experienced moderate to high levels of reading anxiety when engaging with English economics texts in their "English for Economics" course. The aggregate mean score for overall reading anxiety was 3.62 (SD = 0.83) on the 5-point Likert scale, indicating substantial anxiety responses when processing specialized economics materials in English. This finding aligns with previous research suggesting that discipline-specific foreign language reading creates particularly challenging cognitive and affective demands (Mohammed & Ab Rashid, 2019).

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Reading Anxiety Dimensions

Dimension	Mean	SD	Anxiety Level
Text-related anxiety	3.51	0.91	Moderate
Language-related anxiety	3.74	0.87	High
Comprehension-related anxiety	3.58	0.95	Moderate
Performance-related anxiety	3.86	0.88	High
Overall reading anxiety	3.62	0.83	Moderate-High

The dimensional analysis revealed a noteworthy pattern wherein Economics Development students experienced the most pronounced anxiety regarding performance-related aspects (M = 3.86, SD = 0.88), followed closely by language-related concerns (M = 3.74, SD = 0.87). This finding suggests that the evaluative contexts in which economics reading occurs and the specialized linguistic features of economics texts represent the most significant anxiety triggers for these students.

Text-Related Anxiety

Analysis of responses to text-related anxiety items demonstrated that Economics Development students experienced moderate apprehension regarding structural and content features

of economics texts (M = 3.51, SD = 0.91). This dimension received the lowest anxiety ratings among the four measured categories, suggesting that while challenging, the textual characteristics of economics materials were relatively less anxiety-inducing than other factors.

Within this dimension, closer examination revealed that students reported heightened anxiety specifically regarding two textual features: the length and density of economics texts (M = 3.78, SD = 0.94) and unfamiliarity with economic topics (M = 3.72, SD = 0.89). These findings correspond with Al-Shboul et al.'s (2013) conclusion that text characteristics significantly contribute to foreign language reading anxiety. For Economics Development students at Makassar State University, the technical density and specialized content of economics texts appear to create moderate anxiety barriers to effective reading engagement.

Interestingly, despite being first-semester students with limited prior exposure to university-level economics content, participants demonstrated relatively lower anxiety about text organization and structure. This might suggest that the formal structural conventions of economics texts (e.g., abstract-introduction-methods format) provide helpful scaffolding for comprehension despite content challenges.

Language-Related Anxiety

Language-related anxiety emerged as a substantial concern for Economics Development students, with a mean score of 3.74 (SD = 0.87) indicating high anxiety levels regarding linguistic features of economics texts. Detailed analysis revealed that students experienced particularly acute anxiety regarding specialized economics vocabulary (M = 4.02, SD = 0.92) and complex grammatical structures typical of academic economics discourse (M = 3.85, SD = 0.83).

This pronounced language-related anxiety among Economics Development students aligns with Zhao et al.'s (2013) identification of unfamiliar linguistic elements as primary anxiety triggers in foreign language reading. The findings demonstrate that for first-semester economics students at Makassar State University, the specialized lexicon of economics with its technical terminology, discipline-specific expressions, and conceptual vocabulary represents a particularly significant barrier to comfortable reading experiences.

The high anxiety associated with economics vocabulary merits particular attention from instructors and curriculum developers. Unlike general English instruction, which typically focuses on high-frequency vocabulary development, economics texts contain specialized terms that rarely appear in everyday language contexts (e.g., "elasticity," "marginal utility," "externalities"). This technical terminology appears to create substantial anxiety barriers for students attempting to process economics content in English.

Comprehension-Related Anxiety

Analysis of comprehension-related anxiety items yielded a mean score of 3.58 (SD = 0.95), indicating moderate anxiety levels regarding understanding and interpreting economics texts. Within this dimension, Economics Development students reported heightened anxiety specifically about missing critical information in texts (M = 3.82, SD = 0.91) and effectively understanding complex economic concepts (M = 3.76, SD = 0.97).

This dimension demonstrated interesting interconnections with both text-related and language-related anxiety, suggesting that comprehension difficulties likely emerge from the combined effects of challenging content and unfamiliar linguistic features. The moderate anxiety levels in this dimension suggest that while Economics Development students experience notable concern about their comprehension abilities, this concern is somewhat less pronounced than their performance and language anxieties.

The particular anxiety regarding missing key information indicates that students may be experiencing uncertainty about their ability to distinguish between essential and peripheral content in economics texts. This uncertainty likely reflects the challenge of simultaneously processing unfamiliar economics concepts and unfamiliar language, creating cognitive overload that complicates information prioritization.

Performance-Related Anxiety

Performance-related anxiety received the highest mean score among all dimensions (M = 3.86, SD = 0.88), revealing that Economics Development students experience their most acute anxiety regarding evaluation contexts and demonstrations of reading competence. Particularly notable were high anxiety responses to items concerning reading aloud in class (M = 4.12, SD = 0.85) and taking tests based on English economics reading materials (M = 4.05, SD = 0.92).

These findings align with Horwitz et al.'s (1986) identification of evaluation apprehension as a central component of foreign language anxiety. In the context of the Economics Development program at Makassar State University, where precise understanding of economic concepts is crucial for academic success, the pressure to demonstrate reading comprehension appears to create substantial psychological burden for students.

The notably high anxiety regarding reading aloud suggests that public demonstration of both language skills and economics knowledge creates a particularly threatening situation for students. This finding has significant implications for instructional approaches in the "English for Economics" course, suggesting that instructors should carefully consider the potential anxiety impact of public reading activities.

Correlational Analysis

To examine relationships between different anxiety dimensions, Pearson correlation analysis was conducted. Table 2 presents the correlation matrix for the four reading anxiety dimensions:

Table 2: Correlation Matrix for Reading Anxiety Dimensions

Dimension	1	2	3	4
1. Text-related anxiety	1.00			
2. Language-related anxiety	0.68*	1.00		
3. Comprehension-related anxiety	0.56*	0.72*	1.00	
4. Performance-related anxiety	0.48*	0.52*	0.65*	1.00

*Correlation significant at $p < 0.01$

The correlation analysis revealed statistically significant positive correlations between all dimensions of reading anxiety ($p < 0.01$), with strength ranging from moderate to strong. These interconnections demonstrate the complex, multi-dimensional nature of foreign language reading anxiety among Economics Development students, where different anxiety sources interact with and potentially amplify one another.

The strongest correlation emerged between language-related anxiety and comprehension-related anxiety ($r = 0.72$), suggesting a particularly close relationship between linguistic challenges and difficulties in understanding economics texts. This finding indicates that for Economics Development students at Makassar State University, language proficiency issues and comprehension difficulties are deeply intertwined, with linguistic barriers significantly impacting their ability to extract meaning from economics texts.

Another noteworthy correlation appeared between comprehension-related anxiety and performance-related anxiety ($r = 0.65$), indicating that concerns about understanding economics texts are closely connected to fears about demonstrating that understanding in evaluative contexts. This relationship suggests that improving students' comprehension confidence may have additional benefits in reducing their anxiety about performance.

The moderate correlation between text-related anxiety and performance-related anxiety ($r = 0.48$) represents the weakest relationship among the dimensions, suggesting that while connected, these aspects of reading anxiety may operate somewhat more independently than other dimensions. This finding indicates that interventions targeting text features may have less direct impact on reducing performance anxiety than approaches addressing language and comprehension concerns.

These correlation patterns have important implications for developing comprehensive approaches to addressing reading anxiety. The significant interconnections between dimensions suggest that effective interventions should target multiple anxiety sources simultaneously rather than focusing on isolated dimensions. Particularly important is the strong language-comprehension

connection, which suggests that linguistic support may be especially valuable for improving overall reading experiences.

Discussion

The findings of this study have several significant implications for teaching English for economics purposes, particularly in the context of the Economics Development program at Universitas Negeri Makassar. Given the high levels of language-related anxiety, instructors in the "English for Economics" course should prioritize explicit vocabulary instruction focusing specifically on economics terminology. Implementation of pre-teaching approaches that introduce and clarify key economic terms before assigning reading tasks could substantially reduce vocabulary-related anxiety. Glossaries of economic terminology, economics-specific vocabulary exercises, and contextual vocabulary introduction would be particularly beneficial for first-semester Economics Development students who are simultaneously learning discipline content and English language skills.

To address the notably high performance-related anxiety, instructors should implement carefully scaffolded reading tasks that incrementally increase in complexity. This graduated approach would provide Economics Development students with opportunities to build confidence with simpler economics texts before encountering more challenging materials in high-stakes evaluation contexts. Supporting this scaffolding with clear reading objectives, comprehension checkpoints, and formative assessment would further help alleviate performance pressure while building reading competence.

The incorporation of collaborative reading activities represents another promising intervention strategy, particularly considering the high anxiety associated with individual performance. Group reading tasks, paired reading discussions, and collaborative text analysis can distribute the cognitive load of processing economics texts while reducing individual evaluation pressure. These approaches also create valuable opportunities for peer support and collaborative meaning-making that may benefit comprehension development.

The findings regarding comprehension anxiety suggest that Economics Development students would benefit from explicit metacognitive strategy training specific to economics texts. Instruction in approaches for interpreting economic graphs, analyzing statistical tables, decoding mathematical expressions, and synthesizing theoretical arguments could provide students with concrete tools for navigating challenging economics materials. Development of economics-specific reading strategies would address both comprehension and performance concerns by increasing students' procedural knowledge for text processing.

Given the particularly high anxiety associated with traditional testing methods, instructors in the Economics Development program should consider implementing alternative assessment

approaches that reduce acute performance pressure while still effectively evaluating comprehension. Options such as portfolio assessment, project-based evaluation, staged assessments with revision opportunities, and self-assessment components could create more supportive evaluation contexts that minimize anxiety while maintaining academic standards.

The significant correlations between anxiety dimensions underscore the importance of developing comprehensive, integrated approaches to reducing reading anxiety rather than targeting isolated factors. Particularly important is addressing the strong connection between language proficiency and comprehension by developing instructional approaches that simultaneously build linguistic knowledge and content understanding. This integrated approach would recognize the complex, multi-dimensional nature of reading anxiety among Economics Development students at Universitas Negeri Makassar.

KESIMPULAN

This study investigated foreign language reading anxiety among first-semester Economic Development students at Universitas Negeri Makassar who were enrolled in the English for Economics course. The findings revealed moderate to high levels of reading anxiety across multiple dimensions, with performance-related anxiety and language-related anxiety emerging as the most significant barriers to effective learning. These first-semester students demonstrated particular difficulty navigating the specialized economic terminology and complex theoretical frameworks presented in English texts, revealing a challenging intersection of linguistic unfamiliarity and discipline-specific content that characterized their early academic experience.

The results illuminate the uniquely challenging position of UNM Economic Development freshmen, who must simultaneously master foundational economic concepts while processing them through the unfamiliar medium of English academic discourse. The significant correlations between different anxiety dimensions demonstrated that linguistic challenges, content comprehension difficulties, and evaluation concerns mutually reinforced one another, creating a multifaceted obstacle to successful engagement with course materials. This anxiety cycle appeared particularly pronounced when students encountered statistical data, mathematical expressions, and abstract economic theories—elements that are fundamental to the discipline but created heightened stress when presented in a non-native language.

For UNM faculty teaching English for Economics and other specialized English courses in the Economic Development program, these findings emphasize the need for integrated pedagogical approaches that simultaneously address multiple dimensions of reading anxiety. By implementing targeted strategies such as pre-teaching specialized vocabulary, providing scaffolded reading activities,

and creating low-pressure opportunities for text engagement before formal evaluation, instructors can help first-semester students develop greater confidence and proficiency with economic texts. The findings suggest that curriculum design for this critical gateway course should intentionally sequence materials to gradually build both linguistic competence and content knowledge, creating a more supportive entry point for students beginning their economic studies at Universitas Negeri Makassar.

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