

The Effect of Second Language Learning Anxiety on Reading Comprehension of Iranian University Students¹

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Abstract

This study is aimed at investigating the general foreign language classroom anxiety levels of Iranian university students through administering Horwitz scale (FLCAS) in addition to examining their reading anxiety through replicating Saito's reading comprehension anxiety scale (FLRAS). The researchers further checked the former by developing and performing a new five-point Likert type questionnaire (IFLRAS). The psychometric properties of this scale were measured and evaluated, in the first place, to confirm its reliability and validity. To carry out this study, 507 male and female university students of different major types were randomly selected from two national universities (Tehran and Shahed). Also, their reading comprehension anxiety was compared with regard to various variables such as gender, major type (indicating their language proficiency, since more proficient students are apt to be admitted in scientific and technical fields for which higher English entrance mark is required in Iran) and university (which is an indication of length of foreign language instruction, one vs. two semesters of General English course). The data were analyzed using SPSS software. The results obtained through applying Pearson Product Moment correlation, T-test, One way ANOVA, Levene and Scheffe tests revealed that there is a positive relationship between General foreign language classroom anxiety and reading comprehension anxiety ($r=0.54$). Furthermore, gender can positively affect students' reading anxiety ($t=-2.09$). Students of different major types have different reading anxiety levels $F(4,491)=6.965$ $p<0.01$. Two universities are also distinct concerning reading comprehension anxiety levels of their students ($t=-2.20$).

Keywords: Reading comprehension anxiety, Second language classroom anxiety, Gender, Major type, University

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1. Introduction

Foreign and second language experts have at times wondered why language learners are different in acquiring language proficiency. To provide an answer to language practitioners such as teachers and curriculum designers, language researchers have explored various factors as well as the affective ones. Ekman (1992) maintained that due to the fact that cognition and feelings are inseparable, “learner’s emotions” including the level of his learning anxiety, play major roles in language learning. For instance, one of the important effects of elevated anxiety is the disturbance of focused attention such that Learner’s high levels of anxiety result in his less attention and information processing. This in turn leads to his poor performance in difficult or complex tasks (Kuru Gonen, 2005). Thus, most language tutors have faced situations that at times the learner becomes disabled to learn as a result of high anxiety. A great deal of research has been dedicated to foreign language classroom anxiety in order to explore the sources of this affective factor (Horwitz, 1986; Mac Intyre, 1988; Young, 1991). Apart from the massive literature on foreign language classroom anxiety, there is much evidence

concerning the effect of learning anxiety on different language skills including the reading skill (Kuru Gonen, 2007). Reading a second or foreign language is a complicated process owing to factors such as language proficiency, cultural background and learner’s motivation, hence, it can be anxiety –provoking (Lee, 1999; Seller, 2000). Although one may think that reading is the least anxiety-intriguing among the four language skills, Saito et al. 1999 and Seller, 2000 proved the opposite. They found that as with other language skills, reading has negative effects on the learners’ abilities, as well as, their comprehension. Being an important fundamental receptive skill, reading is reported to be necessary for different academic purposes in higher education. (Carrell, et al, 2000).

University students in Iran use English as a foreign language and they don’t have the opportunity to practice and utilize it outside classroom. Although English is not the medium of formal instruction at the university, it is a required subject in all educational stages and is compulsory in higher education system. Therefore, the students have to master it to access the international modern-day knowledge and to

communicate with the English texts and professionals in their field of study. They need to be capable of reading and understanding the scripts if they want to become familiar with the latest thinking and research. However, the majority of university students in Iran express anxiety in learning and reading English language. The language instructors often feel their students' stress and nervousness when they ask the students to read a text loud in the class. The individual only concentrates on performance and loses the track of meaning so that when asked about the main idea of the passage, one can't recall and remember it. It may also be the case with the students that they don't comprehend the reading text. Thus reading task creates a sense of worry in the foreign language reader. That is why last decade was overwhelmed with foreign language (FL) reading anxiety investigation. Saito, Horwitz and Garza, (1999) studied reading anxiety as a skill related to but distinct from foreign language anxiety. According to these researchers, FL reading anxiety varies based on the target language and specific writing system. Some researchers have mentioned different sources for FL reading anxiety. Al- Shboul et al. (2013) suggest textual causes such as

unknown vocabulary and different grammatical structure. Others theorized that cultural background influences reading comprehension Kuru-Gonen (2007) learned that unknown cultural context blocks Turkish learner's comprehension of the FL script. Saito et al. (1999) also proposed unfamiliar culture produces FL reading anxiety. They confirmed that the interaction between FL reader and author's material which is not a shared cultural knowledge leads to stress and anxiety. Another group of researchers stated that personal factors may cause FL reading anxiety. Jalongo and Hirsh (2010) were neurologists who found the association between FL reading task and anxiety. They showed that when amygdale of brain is triggered, it causes reading anxiety. After scrutinizing the literature related to foreign language learning the gap of investigation in case of FL learning and reading anxiety was revealed. Moreover, considering the emphasis and importance placed on reading comprehension in Iran universities, the researchers of the present study felt the urge and need to investigate the FL anxiety as well as FL reading anxiety of the Iranian students to answer the following questions: Do Iranian university students feel anxious when learning and

reading foreign language? Does gender affect the students' reading comprehension? Is there a relationship between the students' language proficiency and reading anxiety? Is there a difference between participants of Tehran and Shahed Universities in reading anxiety? Are the freshmen students more anxious than the junior students who have been exposed to foreign language more than freshmen? Does the students' major type (science or humanities) influence their FL reading anxiety since it seems that the majority of students with higher English marks in the University Entrance Exam are admitted in scientific majors Do those who experience FL classroom anxiety also feel FL reading anxiety?.

2. Literature Review

More recently researchers have investigated whether language anxiety is a short term or a long-term (lasting) trait, whether it is harmful or helpful, which factors correlate with language anxiety and how anxiety can be identified in language classrooms. They have also explored the interaction of foreign language learning anxiety and other variables such as gender, culture, and language proficiency. {Pappamihel, 2001;

Elkhafaifi, 2005;Huang, 2001 Padilla et al., 1988; Kuru Gonen, 2007}

2.1. Foreign Language Anxiety and Language Proficiency

Studies examining the effects of FL anxiety in terms of learners' performance are more pervasive. Aida (1994) found a significant negative relationship between foreign language classroom anxiety and the final course grades. The high anxiety group received significantly lower grades than the low anxiety group. Casado and Dershiwsky (2001) detected that language learning anxiety of Spanish subjects at elementary levels was due to their lack of competence and extended knowledge of vocabulary compared to more advanced learners.

Kuru Gonen (2007) also found a negative relationship between these two variables, i.e. proficiency and anxiety. He maintains that foreign language reading anxiety decreases when the students become more proficient in the foreign language. However, his results showed that even the advanced students experienced anxiety. Studies using course grades as a performance of language proficiency measure also showed same results, for instance, Horwitz et al. (1986) reported a

negative correlation between FL learning or classroom anxiety scores and final course grades. Nevertheless, Bachman (1976) suggested that there was no connection between anxiety of Venezuelan students of English and their language achievements.

2.2. Foreign Language Anxiety and Gender

It has been observed in different studies that female students were more concerned with language difficulties than male students, thus, they expressed higher levels of FL learning anxiety (Plancherel and Bolognini, 1995). Moreover, Pappamihiel (2001) believes that gender does influence the anxiety level of Mexican boys and girls differently. Studying 178 middle class Mexican immigrants in the U.S., Pappamihiel showed that there was no gender difference in anxiety in English as a second language; however, girls demonstrated significantly more English language anxiety in their mainstream classes. Pappamiheil's findings were consistent with those of Padilla et al. (1988). In another study, Padilla (1988) examined the psychological stressors experienced by Mexicans in the U.S. He conducted semi-structured interviews with

62 respondents half of whom were male. He found that men scored higher on a measure of depression than women. This study also revealed that the language barrier of non-English male speakers was more than the females. In another cultural context, Machia (2001) examined foreign language anxiety in a Japanese-learning class based on gender, nationality, first language and prior foreign language experience. She found significant differences for gender, i.e. female language-learners were more anxious than males. Furthermore, the students of different nationalities displayed lower Japanese-learning anxiety than Chinese and English speakers. Elkhafaifi (2005) conducted a study with Arab students of English the result of ANOVA indicated a significant difference between males and females in their level of learning anxiety with females being more anxious.

2.3. Foreign Language Anxiety and Language Skills

Kleinmann (1997) maintains that use of complex structures provokes strong speaking anxiety, but he does not confirm the effect of anxiety on oral abilities. Curran (1976) and Stevick (1980) provide that immediate oral response induced anxiety in

the learners Young (1991) examined 60 students specializing in French, Spanish and German teaching who were preparing for oral proficiency interview (OPI). Although negative correlations were initially found between the foreign language classroom anxiety FLCAS scores and the scores on OPI, these turned out to be non-significant. Chapman (2002) who examined the relationship between anxiety and oral performance reported a significant negative relationship between oral performance and FL learning anxiety. Although a large proportion of anxiety research has focused on speaking apprehension, considering speaking the main communication component, several investigators have studied writing apprehension and its effect on students' performance in foreign language context. Cheng et al. (1999) in spite of the lack of instrument designed to measure learners' writing anxiety, set out to assess this construct His study of EFL learners in Taiwan produced empirical evidence that writing apprehension and general foreign language anxiety are separate but related phenomena. Listening in a sense is the least thoroughly studied skill in general. We know even less about the interaction

between listening and learning anxiety. Elkhafaifi (2005) concluded that although foreign language learning anxiety and listening anxiety appear to represent separate, distinguishable constructs, they are interrelated. Arab students with higher levels of foreign language anxiety tend to have higher levels of listening anxiety.

Saito, et al. (1999) first introduced the construct of foreign language reading anxiety. With the development of the Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale (FLRAS) and employing 383 university-level participants, Saito distinguished foreign language reading anxiety from general foreign language anxiety. They found that reading anxiety levels varied with different target languages. Besides, specific writing systems seemed to influence the levels of reading anxiety. Furthermore, perceived difficulty of reading texts also played an important role in reading anxiety levels. The levels of reading anxiety and general foreign language anxiety were related to the decrease of the participants' grades as well.

In another study, Young (2000) measured the relationships among L2 reading anxiety on L2 reading comprehension and other variables, such as

L1 and L2 reading ability, background knowledge and text length. The findings showed that there was a significant positive relationship between L2 comprehension and L1 and L2 reading ability, but reading anxiety was not a significant predictor of reading comprehension in the second language. These findings were not consistent with results of most studies on the relationship between reading anxiety and reading comprehension. Sas (2002) explored the relationships among reading anxiety, incidental vocabulary acquisition, and culturally relevant texts. The participants were 30 adult ESL students, 16 of Mexican origin and 14 of Chinese. The results revealed a significant negative correlation between reading anxiety and performance on vocabulary tests. Besides, reading anxiety was the primary predictor of performance.

In yet another study conducted by Sellers (2000), the principal goal was to confirm empirically that reading anxiety was a distinct phenomenon in language learning as well as to assess its relationship to reading comprehension. Seller's study supports the findings of Saito et al. (1999) Matsuda and Gobel (2001) investigated the same possible relationship between the

general foreign language classroom anxiety and foreign language reading anxiety along with gender and classroom performance. The results of this study indicated the relationship between the two separate constructs and the fact that gender did not have a significant effect on reading anxiety. Kuru Gonen (2005), who carried out his study with Turkish students, obtained the sources of foreign language reading anxiety. For this purpose, the students in her study kept diaries for two months. Moreover, they were interviewed to confirm the findings derived from the analyses of the diaries. The results indicated the specific nature of reading anxiety. Kuru Gonen in a later study (2007) with 225 students of different proficiency levels filled the gap of the relationship between language proficiency and reading anxiety. Based on the findings of his study he proposed that reading anxiety exists as a phenomenon separate from general foreign language anxiety, and it changes according to the students' proficiency level.

Huang (2001) investigated the foreign language reading anxiety of 236 EFL Taiwanese students. He concluded that university students experienced foreign language reading anxiety and their reading

anxiety levels differed according to their personal reading purposes, the length of time they have studied English, and their cultural/educational background.

Hsu (2004) examined the effect of reading anxiety on reading comprehension and investigated the causes of reading anxiety among EFL Taiwanese junior college students. She also explored the effects of reading texts with varying difficulty levels. The results indicated that reading anxiety did not significantly affect reading comprehension when the text was difficult, and limited English proficiency was the most serious cause of reading anxiety.

3. The Aim of the Study

In the light of the above researches and with regard to lack of such studies in Iran, it seemed appropriate to the researchers to set out to conduct a research on the reading comprehension anxiety of Iranian university students. In Iran teaching English as a foreign language begins in the secondary school for most of the students especially in cities that lack language institutions and facilities. In most classes, teaching English takes place through reading textbooks, hence reading

comprehension appears to be the primary focus of language teachers. Other skills especially "speaking" and listening are either totally ignored or underestimated in the formal language curriculum due to the fact that most schools lack the budget to provide the students with a language lab. The same language skill is pursued in some high schools, higher education centers and universities, since some English instructors think that the comprehension of specialized and technical texts is supposed to be a prerequisite of academic achievement. Moreover, reading comprehension can be an underlying and basic ability needed to do research in some respects, because the researcher's correct perception and interpretation of English sources may be of great help in appropriate application of the information.

In spite of all the time and energy invested in the language teaching programs each year and the effort put into the revision of English textbooks, the above-mentioned educational objectives have been less achieved. In addition, most of different English achievement tests in our country, either the university entrance exam or TOFEL which is essential to getting a Phd also includes a reading comprehension test.

These reasons have motivated the researcher to seek the obstacles which inhibit the Iranian learners to fully enjoy a reading text and understand it. Since language anxiety in general, and reading anxiety in particular play a role in achieving the aforementioned English learning objectives, it seems appropriate to evaluate the reading anxiety of Iranian students to propose the measures that may be taken to help the English learners. The following were considered in the present study:

1. Determining the reading comprehension anxiety levels of Iranian (male/female) university students (Tehran and Shahed Universities).
2. Detecting the relationship between general foreign language classroom anxiety and reading comprehension anxiety.
3. Replicating Saito's reading comprehension anxiety scale with Iranian students to measure the scale with Iranian population and to normalize it.
4. Evaluating and analyzing the psychometric characteristics of researcher-made reading comprehension anxiety scale (the reading anxiety scale developed by authors of the present study) to evaluate its reliability and validity.

5. Investigating the relationship of gender with reading comprehension anxiety.
6. Exploring the relationship between reading comprehension anxiety and university major type. (and the difference between reading anxiety of the students of science and humanities with their language proficiency).
7. Detecting the effect of the duration of language instruction on reading comprehension anxiety in two universities of Tehran and Shahed.

Note that "Duration of language study" refers to the freshmen who typically pass a general or pre-university English course and senior students who take specialized English courses related to their field of study.

4. Methodology

4.1. Participants

Typically a sample large enough guarantees the representation of the population. Nevertheless, in quantitative studies random sampling is selected due to the researcher's budget and other administrative constraints. For the same reasons the current research was carried out with the available sample and the target population was arbitrary allocated.

Therefore, a total number of 507 (219 males and 287 females) Iranian undergraduates enrolled for the "General English" course at Tehran and Shahed universities. The sample represented a relatively homogeneous group with respect to English proficiency, since their entrance exam English mark was over 50. These students were randomly selected from different majors of Educational sciences, Medical sciences, Arts, Electronics, Computer sciences, Medical Engineering, Civil Engineering, Dentistry, Political Sciences, Herbal Medicine, Law, Consulting, Accounting, Psychology, Nursing, Industrial Management, Business Administration, Library and IT. Thus, this sample can be a good representative of the statistical population which include all five major faculties at Tehran and Shahed universities, that is, Humanities, Engineering, Medicine, Arts, and Agriculture. The descriptive statistics of the participants showed that 54.3 % of the participants were from Tehran University and 45.5% of the participants were from Shahed University. 39.4% of the sample studied Humanities, 28.5% of the respondents were from Medical Sciences, 27% studied Engineering, 0.6% were Agriculture majors, and 4.3% of the

participants were from Arts faculty. It is obvious that the students of the first three major types outnumbered those participants who studied Arts and Agriculture. This can be justified by the fact that the students enrolled in these fields of study are much less than the other branches of science. Moreover, 43.1% of the participants were male, whereas, 56.5% were female representing a half of the total statistical population.

4.2. Procedure

This study had two separate phases. The first phase was a qualitative study through semi- structured interviews to generate an appropriate FL reading anxiety scale for Iranian Students, while the second consecutive phase was a quantitative one. Prior to the pilot study, the research tools were translated into Persian and were also back translated to ensure the correctness of the first translation. Next, "Reading anxiety scale of Iranian students" (IFLRAS) was administered to 10 Psychology and 10 English Language instructors at Tehran and Shahed universities to confirm the face and content validities of the scale. The reviewers indicated that the newly developed scale looked, read and felt right

for measuring Iranian students' FL reading anxiety. Their comments on the items were taken into consideration and redundant items were deleted and the ambiguous items were modified. Then, at the beginning of the first semester (2009-2010), the participants completed foreign language reading anxiety scale "FLRAS", foreign language class anxiety "FLCAS" and the researcher-made reading anxiety scale for Iranian learners in separate English language sessions to avoid the test effect or retention effect. Pilot study aimed at replicating Saito's "FLRAS" and validating the researcher-made questionnaire against it. Therefore, 38 randomly selected participants filled out the questionnaires. Eight weeks later, test administration took place with the same participants once again to measure the Test-retest reliability of IFLRAS. To re-affirm the reliability obtained for IFLRAS, Cronbach's alpha was computed as well. Since based on the definition offered by Ary (2010) reliability is the degree to which an instrument consistently measures whatever it is proposed to be measured and Cronbach's alpha is the most common measure of reliability Furthermore, in a quantitative research validity refers to the degree which

the instrument measures the concept it is supposed to measure (Ray, 2010) the concurrent validity of IFLRAS was investigated through obtaining the correlations between the questionnaire and Saito's scale when these two were administered to the subjects. After the psychometric properties of the scale developed by the researchers were assessed, the researchers sought to find the relationships among gender, field of study (major type) and university with the reading comprehension anxiety.

4.3. Instruments and Scoring

Three instruments were utilized in this study: (1) FLCAS, (2) FLRAS and (3) the reading anxiety scale developed by the researchers (IFLRAS).

4.3.1. Foreign Language Class Anxiety Scale (FLCAS)

This scale was primarily designed by Horwitz et al. (1986) for assessing the students' anxiety in Spanish classes. It consists of 33 items each accompanied by a five point Likert type scale: (1) strongly agree (2) agree (3) undecided (4) disagree (5) strongly disagree. This instrument measures the amount and type of anxiety

experienced by the foreign language students in a classroom context. It integrates three related anxieties- communicative apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation (Oxford, 1999). Furthermore, levels of general foreign language anxiety do not depend on the specific target language, that is, it has stability regardless of the target language. (Rodriges and Abreu, 2003).

The validity and reliability data for this scale have appeared in the reports of several studies (e.g. Horwitz et al. 1986; Saito et al. 1999; Seller, 2000). The estimated reliability for the scale through Cronbach's alpha was 0.94 (n=233) as reported by Elkhaphieffi (2005). Horwitz et al. (1986) reported the internal consistency of 0.93 (n=75) and test-retest reliability over a period of eight weeks yielded $r = 0.83$ ($p < 0.001$) with all the items showing significant correlated item-total scale correlations. The construct validity of FLCAS suggests that foreign language anxiety may be distinguished from other types of anxiety. The maximum range for the scale is 33 to 165, with lower scores indicating lower anxiety and higher scores indicating higher anxiety. When the statements are negatively worded as items

number 2, 8, 5, 11, 14, 18, 28 and 32, the responses are negatively coded and scored.

4.3.2. Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale (FLRAS)

The second instrument employed in the present study was developed by Saito, Horwitz and Garza (1999) to assess the participants' foreign language reading anxiety. In Saito et al.'s study this scale was utilized to measure the levels of participants' reading anxiety in three foreign language courses- Spanish, Russian, and Japanese. It is a twenty item self-report inventory with five point Likert type scale, ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". The scoring of each item depends on positive wording or negative wording for which the items are reverse-scored. Thus, items number 12, 13, 14, and 16 are negatively scored. The theoretical range of the FLRAS is 20 to 100. Higher scores indicate higher level of reading anxiety. The Chinese translation of this scale showed the internal reliability with an internal consistency coefficient of (0.85 Cronbach's alpha, $n = 383$) {Sus, 2002}

4.3.3. Researcher-made Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale (IFLRAS)(Appendix A)

The Rationale to develop an Iranian version of FLRAS

Although Saito et al.'s scale of foreign language anxiety was developed in 1999, it seemed that the existing scale does not cover all potential sources of foreign language reading anxiety in an Iranian context. Since Iranian culture is varies the foreign (English) culture, the researchers of current study undertook the generation of a new version of FLRAS based on the cultural and linguistic problems obtained from the qualitative study, i.e., the data obtained from the interview with the informants over years of their instruction. As a result they captured and added more related items to assess the FL learners' reading anxiety. This kind of modification is used by other researchers as well, For instance Zhao (2009) modified FLRAS to be used with Chinese learners of English language.

This scale IFRAS was particularly developed for Iranian students by taking into consideration the special cultural and linguistic sources of these students' reading anxiety and with regard to the previous measures of reading anxiety scales designed by Saito and Horwitz et al. It consists of 36 items in five point Likert type scale, for

which the statements number 4, 10, 12, 18, 20, 22, 23, 24, 26, 27, 28. 29, 30, 32, and 36 are negatively worded and scored. Thus, it ranged from 36 to 360. The higher scores reveal less reading comprehension; hence, higher reading anxiety.

The test-retest reliability obtained in the present study was $r=0.68$ ($p < 0.01$). The internal consistency co-efficient was $r=0.73$ ($p < 0.01$) which are both at acceptable levels. To evaluate the construct validity, the scale was correlated with Saito et al.'s (FLRAS), $r = 0.81$. The calculated correlation was $r = 0.64$ ($p < 0.01$) which indicates an acceptable correlation between the two reading anxiety scales. Moreover, the correlation co-efficient of $r=0.54$ between this scale and FLCAS indicates a rather significant correlation at 0.01 level.

4.3.4. Limitations of the Study

Several limitations are detected in this study which are noteworthy. First, the participants were randomized only from two public universities in Iran, i.e., Tehran and Shahed universities and the sample comprised of 507 FL Iranian learners. Therefore, similar to other quantitative inquiries, this study was small-scaled. Thus, the findings are hardly generalizable to all EFL Iranian

university students. Moreover, since the instruments were self-reported questionnaires, there is the potential possibility that some students might not have been willing to express themselves frankly and honestly, so that this should be taken into consideration in the validity of the scales as well. Third, The correlational type of analysis may not be sufficient to draw absolute and definite conclusions in terms of the construct validity of the scales in an Iranian environment. It may be more appropriate to perform more detailed factor analysis in the future studies to fully confirm the construct validity. Last but not least, there exist some uncontrollable student related variables such as student's reading strategies like bottom-up or up-bottom methods employed by the student while reading texts. The student's limited world or word knowledge. The time allotted to reading activity by each individual student also the type and length of reading

passage which may all contribute to reading comprehension performance. Due to the limitations of the study, it is more reasonable to consider the findings of this study as suggestive rather than conclusive. Nevertheless, these findings may pave the way for further investigations and may point out the critical role of FL teacher in addressing students' anxiety and enhancing their L2 reading comprehension.

5. Results

The data were analyzed by SPSS, an alpha level of 0.01 was used as the standard for determining the significance. If the respondents failed to answer items or failed to follow the directions while answering, those items were coded as "missing data" and the corresponding questionnaires were excluded from analyses. This accounts for the inconsistent number of questionnaires across all tests.

Table Descriptive Statistics of all Participants in Three Different Scales

Scale	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Std Error	Mean	SD	Variance
FLRAS	497	71	19	90	0.58	62.2	13.12	172.36
IFLRAS	496	103	79	175	1.55	114	16.80	282.3
FLCAS	437	541	0.00	541	0.75	100.2	32.57	106.1
Valid N	417							

To determine the anxiety level of Iranian students for the different class anxiety and reading anxiety scales, mean ± 1 standard deviation was calculated to divide these students into three low, medium and high anxiety groups.

Scale	Mean	SD
FLRAS	62.26	13.12
IFLRAS	114	16.80
FLCAS	100.27	32.57

Taking the mean and SD of all participants into consideration ($62.26 + 13.12 = 75.38$ and $62.26 - 13.12 = 49.4$), it

becomes obvious that those respondents who got (1 - 49) had low anxiety, (50 - 74) had medium anxiety and above 75 had high anxiety for "FLRAS". Moreover, for "IFLRAS" ($114 + 16.80 = 130$ and $114 - 16 = 98$), those who scored (1 - 97) had low reading anxiety, whereas, (98 - 129) had medium reading anxiety and above 130 had high reading anxiety. As for "FLCAS", those whose mark was below ($100 - 32 = 68$) were low anxiety participants, while above ($100 + 32 = 132$) had high anxiety and between these two extremes (67 - 131) was medium anxiety.

Table 2 The distribution of reading and class anxiety levels of Tehran University Low Medium High

Scale	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
FLRAS	43	18.6	140	60.6	45	19.5
IFLRAS	29	12.6	159	68.8	40	17.3
FLCAS	81	35.1	104	45	20	8.7

Table (2) shows that 18.6% of the participants in Tehran University have low FL reading anxiety and 35.1% have low FL class anxiety.

However, 19.5% of the respondents have high FL reading anxiety and 8.7% have high FL class anxiety. 68.8% fall between these two and have medium class anxiety.

Table 3 Showing the distribution of Reading and Class Anxiety Levels of Shahed University Low Medium High

Scale	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
FLRAS	55	19.9	176	62.8	38	13.8
IFLRAS	55	19.9	171	62	42	15.2
FLCAS	116	42	101	36.6	15	5.4

It is observed that 19.9% of Shahed students had low FL reading anxiety, while 13.8% of them had high FL reading anxiety. It is also shown that 42% of the respondents at Shahed university had low FL class anxiety, whereas, 5.4% had high FL class anxiety.

To answer whether reading comprehension anxiety exists as a phenomenon distinguishable from general foreign language learning anxiety, the correlation co-efficient was calculated for both "FLRAS" and "FLCAS".

Table 4 The index of relationships between IFLRAS, FLCAS and FLRAS:

FLRAS	FLRAS 1	IFLRAS 0.64*	FLCAS 0.54*
N	497	486	428
IFLRAS		1	0.48*
N	486	496	426
FLCAS			1
N	428	426	437

*correlation is significant at 0.01 level.

As it is seen in table (4), there is a positive correlation between "FLRAS" and "FLCAS" ($r = 0.54$, $n = 497$). This means that the two measures share approximately 29% of the variance and approximately 71% of the variance is not shared by the two measures. Moreover, a positive correlation was also found between "FLCAS" and "IFLRAS" ($r = 0.64$, $n = 496$, $p < 0.01$) indicating that these two measures share 40% of the variance. It may be stated that

almost 60% of the variance is not shared between the two measures. On the whole, the findings shown in table (4) may suggest that these phenomena, i.e., reading comprehension anxiety and general foreign language anxiety are two distinct entities; meanwhile, they are related constructs.

Regarding the relationships between gender and reading comprehension anxiety, the following computations were performed:

Table 5 Comparison of Means and SD of Male and Female participants in FLRAS, FLCAS and IFLRAS

Scale	Variable				
1) FLRAS	Gender	N	M	SD	STD Error
	Male	225	61.16	13.55	0.92
2) IFLRAS	Female	282	63.18	12.71	0.75
	Male		112	17.46	1.19
3) FLCAS	Female		115	16.08	0.95
	Male		98.83	41.88	3.03
	Female		101	23.23	1.46

Levene's Test for the Equality of Variances in both genders was performed which revealed that ($F = 1.416$ $P = 0.235$) .

The obtained F is more than 0.05, as a result the variances are unequal. Therefore, T- test is performed for unequal variances.

Table 6 T-Test for the Comparison of Mean Scores of FL Classroom and Reading Comprehension Anxieties for the Male and Female Participants

Scale	T	df	Sig.(2 - tailed)	Mean Difference	Std Error Difference
FLRAS	- 1.70	494	0.090	-2.01	1.18
	- 1.68	442.7	0.093	-2.01	1.19
IFLRAS	- 2.09	493	0.037	-3.17	1.51
	-2.06	433	0.039	-3.17	1.53
FLCAS	-0.86	434	0.38	-2.71	3.14
	-0.79	268.9	0.42	-2.71	3.40

t ($t = -2.069$ $p = 0.39$) is less than $p < 0.05$, therefore, there is a significant difference between the two genders in Iranian Foreign language Reading Anxiety Scale. However,

the genders' T – test correlations are not significant for "FLRAS" and "FLCAS" results.

The relationship between FL reading anxiety and field of study was addressed (It is hypothesized that those students who study science get higher English marks and have more language

proficiency), one-way ANOVA was performed and the relationships between the participants' major types (science or humanities) and FL reading anxiety was determined.

Table 7 Results of One-way ANOVA for Different Faculties

Scale	S S	d f	M S	F	Sig.
Between	7157.16	4	1789.2	11.23	.000
FLRAS Within	78336.70	492	159.2		
Total	85493.87	496			
Between Groups	6786.68	4	1696.6	6.265	.000
IFLRAS Within Groups	132981.30	491	270.8		
Total	139767.99	495			
Between Groups	18436.9	4	4609.2	.001	.000
FLCAS Within Groups	444346.6	432	1028.5		
Total	462783.6	436			

As it is observed, $F(4, 491) = 6.265$, $p < 0.01$. Thereby a significant difference exists at least among students of two different faculties with regard to FL reading and

classroom anxieties. "Scheffe" was also performed for multiple comparisons of means of students from different faculties.

Table 8 The differences of three anxiety scales for the students of different majors (science /humanities)

Dependent variable	Faculty (I)	Faculty (J)	Mean differences (I-J)	Std Error	Sig.	95% of confidence lower bound	Upper bound
FLRAS	Humanities	Medicine	6.46	1.33	0.000	2.17	10.74
		Engineering	7.20	1.41	0.000	2.32	11.58
	Medicine	Arts	-9.27	2.94	0.033	-18.69	-0.465
	Arts	Engineering	10.34	2.96	0.017	1.16	19.48

IFLRAS	Humanities	Medicine	5.70	1.80.	0.042	0.126	11.28
	Agricultures	Arts	-31.48	10.12	0.043	-62.80	-0.671
FLCAS	Humanities	Engineering	12.72	3.80	0.025	1.020	24.57

* Mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

It can be seen that there are significant differences between "Humanities" and "Medicine" faculties in "FLRAS". Also between "Humanities" and "Engineering" and between "Arts" and "Engineering", there are significant differences. Moreover meaningful statistical differences can be

observed between "Medicine" AND "Humanities", also between "Arts" and "Agriculture" in "ILFRAS" mean scores. Furthermore, Scheffe results reveal that a significant difference exists between "Engineering" and "Humanities" faculties in "FLCAS" mean scores.

Table 9 Comparison of the Mean Differences of Tehran and Shahed University

SCALE	University	N	M	SD	Std Error Mean
FLRAS	Shahed	269	61.29	12.9	.78
	Tehran	228	63.42	13.3	.88
IFLRAS	Shahed	268	112.4	17.43	1.06
	Tehran	228	115.7	15.88	1.05
FLCAS	Shahed	232	97.80	39.02	2.56
	Tehran	205	103.06	23.00	1.60

This table shows the mean scores and standard deviation of the Tehran and Shahed university students. To distinguish whether the variances are equal or unequal Levene's Test for the Equality of Variances was performed in which the result of Universities indicates that ($F= 2.406$, $P= 0.122$) is more than F critical 0.05, hence,

the hypothesis of equal variances is rejected. Thus, variances are considered to be unequal and finally, T-test is performed to see whether the duration of English language instruction makes a difference between the freshmen and senior students of the two universities.

Table 10 T-test results for Tehran and Shahed Universities

Scale	t	df	Sig. (2 - tailed)	Mean difference	Std Error Difference
FLRAS	-1.81	495	0.71	- 2.13	1.17
	-1.80	476			1.18
IFLRAS	-2.19	494	0.29	- 3.30	1.50
	-2.20	491	0.28		1.49
FLCAS	-1.68	435	.092	- 5.2	3.11
	-1.73	381	.083		3.02

$t = -2.20$ $P = 0.28$ is an indication of significant differences between the two universities in "IFLRAS" mean scores. However, the two universities are similar and have no statistical differences in the other two scales, i.e., "FLRAS" and "FLCAS".

6. Discussion and Conclusion

6.1. The Levels of General Foreign Language Anxiety and FL Reading Comprehension Anxiety

To respond to the question that whether Iranian students experience FL classroom anxiety in general, and thy feel reading comprehension anxiety in particular their mean and standard deviations in the FL reading anxiety and classroom anxiety is represented.

As it is observed in table two almost more than half of the participants from Tehran

and Shahed Universites had moderate FL reading and classroom anxiety. Furthermore, in table (9) the mean score of Tehran university students in "FLRAS" was 63.42 and $SD = 13.3$. The mean score of same subjects for "IFLRAS" was 115, $SD = 17.43$. Moreover, $X = 61.29$, $SD = 12.92$ for Shahed university students' "FLRAS" scores and $X = 112$, $SD = 17.43$ for their "IFLRAS" scores. This indicates that a slightly higher FL reading anxiety of Shahed participants compared to Tehran university participants in the study. With regard to "FLCAS" scores, the Tehran university mean was 97.80, $SD = 39.00$ and that of Shahed university was 103, $SD = 23$. The differences may be attributed to the higher English language requirement of Tehran University so that more proficient students are admitted to the university or it may be assumed that better English

instructions are offered at that university. In sum, it is observed that the students of both universities experience FL classroom and FL reading comprehension anxieties to some extent and the first research question that whether Iranian students have FL reading and classroom anxiety receives positive answer. These findings are consistent with Chen's (2007) study; however, the anxiety level of Iranian students is fairly less than Taiwanese EFL major university students ($X = 61$, $SD = 10.67$). These are also similar to Huang's (2001) findings for which $X = 60.8$ and $SD = 10.7$. It seems that the similarity of these Asian cultures might have produced almost same results for the Iranian and Taiwanese language learners.

6.2. The Relationship between FL Classroom Anxiety and FL Reading Comprehension Anxiety

As it was expected, the general foreign language anxiety and FL reading comprehension anxiety shown in table (4) indicate that the results of the three aforementioned scales (FLRAS, IFLRAS, FLCAS) appear to represent empirically distinguishable constructs. The findings indicate that these two constructs are

positively related (as seen in table 4). The learners with higher level of FL classroom anxiety, tend to have higher levels of FL reading comprehension anxiety as well. Although this relationship is significant and implies a reasonable amount of overlap between the two measures of "FLCAS" and "FLRAS", it also shows a substantial amount of discrimination. Thus, we can slightly claim that there is a positive relationship between FL classroom and reading anxiety.

A correlation coefficient of $r = 0.54$ for these two scales (FLCAS and FLRAS) means that they share approximately 30% of the variance. Hence, approximately 70% of the variance was not common to the two measures. This finding supports the distinctiveness of the two constructs which is in conformity with the finding of Kuru Gonen's study (2007). According to the results obtained from the Pearson Product Moment correlation coefficient, there was a positive correlation between the two constructs of anxiety ($r = .52$, $n = 225$, $p < 0.01$). $.52$ meant that the two measures shared approximately 27% of the variance. Yet, 73% of the variance was not shared between the two measures. These findings also conform to Saito et al.'s (1999) study, in

which a correlation coefficient of 0.64 was found to explain the relationship between these two which indicated that 59% ($r = .64$, $r^2 = 0.41$) of the total variance was related to FL reading comprehension anxiety; however, 41% of the total variance was shared by the two constructs. Similarly, in Sellers' (2000) study the correlation coefficient was 0.70 indicating that approximately 51% ($r = .70$, $r^2 = 0.49$) of the total variance related to the students' anxiety is specific to FL reading anxiety, while 49% of the total variance was shared by these two constructs.

6. 3. The Relationship between Gender and FL Reading Comprehension Anxiety
To investigate the relationship of gender and FL classroom / reading anxiety T-test was performed and a positive correlation was found between gender and FL learning as well as reading anxiety. The findings displayed in table 5 indicate that females are more anxious than males in all three scales. Based on the information gained from t-test, there is significant difference between male and female participants with regard to "IFLRAS", but no significant difference exists between these two genders ,

regarding "FLRAS" and "FLCAS", ($p < 0.05$) (table 6).

The table shows that females performed differently compared to males in such a way that they had more FL reading anxiety, hence, less reading comprehension than males. This finding conforms to that of Elkhafaifi's study (2005), in which females became more anxious in FL classroom compared to the male students. However, this seems to contradict Aida's finding (1994) and Chang's (1996) study whose results uncovered no significant differences exist in FL classroom anxiety between males and females.

6.4. The Relationship between FL General Anxiety/FL Reading Comprehension Anxiety and Major Type (Language proficiency)

As it was mentioned before, English proficiency is a requirement of universities in Iran and as the experience and informal data indicate, Iranian students who have higher English marks in the University Entrance Exam and are more proficient in language skills are admitted in scientific majors rather than in humanities. In other words, the kind of participants' major can be an indication of their language proficiency

with some negligible exceptions. For this reason, the present study also attempted to find the relationship between the participants' language proficiency and FL general and FL reading anxiety. One-way ANOVA is used for three or more groups of the same factor and when we are looking at mean differences of across these groups in the current study these different groups represent one independent variable, namely, language proficiency, because the assumption is that more proficient students are accepted in scientific majors prior to undertaking any language courses at the university. The results of ANOVA showed a positive relationship between major type and FL classroom and reading anxiety. The findings of one-way ANOVA (table 7) emphasized that there were significant differences among the participants in "FLRAS", "IFLRAS" and "FLCAS" from different majors. The results of "Scheffe" post hoc test indicated that greater FL reading anxiety is observed in "Humanities" students compared to "Medical" or "Engineering" students (table 8). Moreover, these students had more FL general anxiety than engineering participants (same table). In addition, "Arts" students had more FL reading comprehension anxiety than

Agriculture respondents to "IFLRAS". However, these findings may not be generalized to all the students in Agriculture faculty as a result of the limited number of subjects and small sample size. ($p < 0.05$)

6.5. The Relationships between Universities (duration of language instruction) and FL Reading Comprehension Anxiety

T-test was carried out to find out the relationship between the duration of FL language instruction on FL classroom and reading anxiety. The freshmen and senior students have shown different degrees of FL reading and classroom anxiety. It was expected that the first year students who were exposed to FL less than those who had passed English technical courses express more FL classroom and reading anxiety at Tehran and Shahed Universities. Tables (9) and (10) demonstrated that there was significant difference between Tehran and Shahed universities in "IFLRAS" $p < 0.05$. That is, Tehran university students were slightly anxious in researcher-made scale compared to their counterparts in Shahed University. However, their means did not actually differ significantly for "FLRAS" and "FLCAS".

($p < 0.05$). Tehran University students' anxiety may show their concern to get good marks in reading comprehension test. This justifies Oxford's (1999) statement that a small dose of anxiety is necessary for better academic performance.

7. Pedagogical Implications

The research findings of this study have several pedagogical implications for EFL university instructors and learners. Iranian EFL teachers should pay attention to the FL reading anxiety levels of their students and put their efforts into lowering this level to a relaxing and comfortable one by helping them have realistic expectations about their reading comprehension. While the degree of FL reading comprehension is affected by FL reading anxiety, the opposite also holds true, so that the FL reading anxiety can affect FL reading comprehension performance. Therefore, the instructors may assist their students to realize that perfect and complete understanding of the whole text and all new vocabulary is hardly practical or even desirable. The students must realize that, in the first place, new and unknown vocabulary, structures or even topics should not "frighten-froze" them. In other words, they should not be paralyzed

and be shocked when confronting unfamiliar subjects, grammatical structures or words. They may be instructed explicitly or implicitly by language teacher to overcome the problems which provoke FL reading anxiety.

The English language instructors not only may teach paragraph structure, paragraph unity / coherence and kinds of paragraph that assist their students to grasp the meaning of a paragraph better, but also they can provide them with helpful reading skills such as scanning or skimming. They may also teach students the reading strategies to reduce their reading anxiety. These strategies can be as follows: guessing meaning from the context, using feature analysis to figure out word meaning based on the word's similarity with other words or word parts of speech (noun, verb, or adjective), examining the relationship of the unknown word with the surrounding words. Thus by resorting to their syntactic knowledge and using their knowledge of grammatical function within or between sentences, the learners make sense of the unknown vocabulary or vague phrases and sentences. The language learners can get the word meaning through applying word formation elements such as (prefix, base

and suffix) or punctuation clues as well. The teacher can instruct the learner how use these strategies and how to draw on his prior knowledge or world knowledge to relate it to new information in order to infer the meaning of unknown word or ambiguous clause and sentence.

Furthermore, the teachers may provide more anxious students with extensive reading materials with various topics or outside classroom activities to increase their reading comprehension abilities and to make them familiar with a wide range of topics and cultural contents, since the learner's anxiety partly arises from unfamiliar cultural points and texts. Nevertheless, the instructors may try to provide optimal low-anxiety classroom environment so that the language learners become fully active, critical and independent in reading. It is the instructor's obligation to distinguish the warning signs of anxiety both in the class and in the reading testing- sessions at an early stage. Thus, she/he can minimize the anxiety by providing the learner with a peaceful learning environment, as well as the necessary support, so that the learner may overcome confusion and stress when facing written English or other FL text.

8. Suggestions for Further Research

In view of the limitations of this study, the following suggestions for further study are recommended:

- (a) This study may be duplicated with larger sample of EFL Iranian university students. One can also examine the results of another sampling model such as stratified or cluster sampling.
- (b) In addition to quantitative methods of investigation, the qualitative ones such as interviews, keeping diaries, etc. may be used.
- (c) It is also recommended that various sources of FL reading anxiety such as lack of motivation, self-confidence, self-esteem, contextual clues and features, grammatical structures, uninteresting and unknown topics, the nature of English course, classroom environment, fear of evaluation and teacher's behavior be included and explored in other studies.
- (d) Last but not least, the FL reading comprehension techniques and strategies may be taught to those learners of high anxiety levels to decrease or eliminate their anxiety.

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APPENDIX (A)

(IFLRAS)

Age: University:

Student's ID number: Sex:

Field of study:

Please read the following statements and circle the number which best describes your opinion:

1. I feel fine during a reading comprehension test in English.

Strongly disagree disagree neutral
agree strongly agree

1 2 3 4
5
2. I understand what is expected of me when doing a reading comprehension test.

Strongly disagree disagree neutral
agree strongly agree

1 2 3 4
5

3. I understand the main ideas of the text.
Strongly disagree disagree neutral
agree strongly agree

1 2 3 4
5

4. I worry about my grade when I receive the test result.

Strongly disagree disagree neutral
agree strongly agree

1 2 3
4 5

5. I can find supporting ideas for the main idea of the text.

Strongly disagree disagree neutral
agree strongly agree

1 2 3 4
5

6. I don't feel uncomfortable if the reading comprehension text is unseen and unfamiliar.

Strongly disagree disagree neutral
agree strongly agree

1 2 3 4
5
7. I understand the reading comprehension questions.

Strongly disagree disagree neutral
agree strongly agree

1 2 3 4
5

8. I don't think that my reading comprehension mark shows my knowledge of English.

Strongly disagree disagree neutral
agree strongly agree

1 2 3 4
5

9. I can focus on the reading comprehension questions.

Strongly disagree disagree neutral
agree strongly agree

1 2 3 4
5

10. I think of failing the test, when the text is unseen and unfamiliar.

Strongly disagree disagree neutral
agree strongly agree

1 2 3 4
5

11. I apply reading strategies such as scanning and skimming when taking a reading comprehension test.

Strongly disagree disagree neutral
agree strongly agree

1 2 3 4

5

12. I don't want to see my results on the day
I get my test paper back.

Strongly disagree disagree neutral
agree strongly agree

1 2 3

4 5

13. I usually get good marks in reading
comprehension tests.

Strongly disagree disagree neutral
agree strongly agree

1 2 3

4 5

14. I try to prepare myself for an unseen
reading comprehension test.

Strongly disagree disagree neutral
agree strongly agree

1 2 3 4

5

15. My marks are improving in reading
comprehension tests.

Strongly disagree disagree neutral
agree strongly agree

1 2

3 4 5

16. I feel relaxed during a reading
comprehension test.

Strongly disagree disagree neutral
agree strongly agree

1 2 3 4

5

17. When the reading comprehension text is
unseen, I try to forget about it and do my
best.

Strongly disagree disagree neutral
agree strongly agree

1 2 3 4

5

18. I don 't want to go to university on the
day of reading comprehension test.

Strongly disagree disagree neutral
agree strongly agree

1 2 3 4

5

19. I use relaxation exercises and technics
to help me relax when taking a reading
comprehension test.

Strongly disagree disagree neutral
agree strongly agree

1 2 3

4 5

20. I have stomachache on the day of the
reading comprehension test.

Strongly disagree disagree neutral
agree strongly agree

25. When I receive the test paper I immediately start the test.

Strongly disagree disagree
neutral agree strongly agree

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تأثیر اضطراب یادگیری زبان دوم بر مهارت خواندن و درک مطلب دانشجویان دانشگاه‌های ایران

رضا مقدم کیا¹

دریافت: 91/8/14 پذیرش: 93/3/24

تحقیق حاضر اضطراب خواندن متون انگلیسی را در دانشجویان ایرانی مطالعه می‌کند و به دنبال پاسخ به این سؤال است که آیا می‌توان گفت اضطراب عمومی کلاس زبان خارجی و اضطراب خواندن به عنوان دو ویژگی متمایز اما مربوط به هم وجود دارند. علاوه بر آن، رابطه اضطراب خواندن با جنسیت، رشته تحصیلی و دانشگاه محل تحصیل نیز بررسی می‌شود. جامعه آماری این تحقیق را عده 507 نفر دانشجویان دختر و پسر از رشته‌های مختلف تحصیلی از دانشگاه‌های تهران و شاهد تشکیل می‌دهد. داده‌های تحقیق با استفاده از سه پرسشنامه "اندازه‌گیری اضطراب خواندن زبان خارجی سائو و دیگران (1999)"، "اندازه‌گیری اضطراب کلاس زبان خارجی هورویتز (1986)" و پرسشنامه محقق-ساخته گردآوری گردیده است. ابتدا از اعتبار صوری و محتوایی دو پرسشنامه اول اطمینان حاصل شد و اعتبار پرسشنامه‌های سائو و محقق-ساخته به صورت آزمایشی (پایلوت) نیز ارزیابی گردید. سپس اعتبار ساختاری و روانی (آلفای کرونباخ) آن‌ها نیز محاسبه گردید. پس از آن داده‌های گردآوری شده با استفاده از تی تست، آنوای یک طرفه، آزمون شفه، آزمون لوین و آمار توصیفی با استفاده از SPSS، تجزیه و تحلیل شدند. یافته‌های تحقیق نشان داد که بین اضطراب خواندن و اضطراب عمومی کلاس زبان خارجی دانشجویان ایرانی و نیز بین جنسیت و اضطراب خواندن رابطه مثبت وجود دارد. همچنین مشخص گردید که رشته تحصیلی در اضطراب خواندن موثر است. در خصوص پرسشنامه محقق-ساخته، تاثیر متقابل بین دانشگاه محل تحصیل و اضطراب خواندن مشاهده گردید اما در دو پرسشنامه دیگر در این خصوص تفاوت چشم‌گیری مشاهده نشد.

واژگان کلیدی: اضطراب خواندن، اضطراب کلاس زبان خارجی، جنسیت، رشته تحصیلی، دانشگاه محل تحصیل.

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