Perception on English Reading Comprehension Anxiety of Third Year EFL Students at the Institute of Foreign Languages, Cambodia

■ Samphors Um
■ Chalong Tubsree
■ Janpanit Surasin

Abstract. The purposes of this study were to investigate the perceptionsof third year EFL students at the Institute of Foreign Languages (IFL), Cambodia on their levels of English reading anxiety, and how they were related to gender and reading comprehension, and to explore the sources of their English reading anxiety. A group of 232 junior students participated in the current study. A multiple-method research methodology was employed by using a sequential design, beginning with a quantitative approach followed by a qualitative approach. For the quantitative stage, two survey questionnaires adapted from the Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale by Saito, Garza and Horwitz (1999) were administered to the participants. For the qualitative stage, a semi-structured interview was created and used to identify the sources of English reading anxiety from ten bottom list anxiety score students and ten top list anxiety score students. The quantitative findings revealed that third year EFL students perceived they had a low level of English reading anxiety and the level of English reading anxiety between males and females was found to have no significant difference. Moreover, the result from the questionnaire showed that third year EFL students perceived that their reading anxiety had a moderate effect on their reading comprehension.

From the qualitative analysis, the sources of English reading anxiety were identified and categorized into six main categories. They were linguistic features of texts, environment, personal traits of readers, physical look of texts, time constraint and teachers.

Keywords: English reading comprehension anxiety; third year EFL students; Institute of Foreign languages, Cambodia

Introduction

Learning English as a Second Language (ESL) or Foreign Language (EFL) can be a challenging task for many language learners. In other words, some learners can learn language easily, so that they become successful in learning a new language.

While many learners find their language learning stressful, as they may experience extensive uneasiness and tension when learning a foreign language, although they are good learners in other subject areas.

Being unable to understand spoken and written input can lead to confusion and embarrassment about how to respond or act (Horwitz and Young, 1991). According to Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986, p.125), students "may have an anxiety reaction which impedes their ability to perform successfully in a foreign language class".

Many foreign language researchers have investigated the debilitating factors in the language learning classroom situation and language learning emotions during the process of learning a new language. According to Horwitz (1988) and Worde (1998), language anxiety has been recognized as significantly interfering with language learning and production for most language learners.

Even though there were previous studies that were conducted on reading anxiety, those studies worked with low language proficiency students. Given that the study of reading anxiety was crucial, the current research aimed to study the level of reading anxiety among third year EFL learners who were at an advanced language proficiency level.

Statement of the Problem

Even though reading would seem to be the component least susceptible to anxiety (Saito, Garza andHorwitz, 1999), its effect should not be overlooked, particularly at a higher level of language proficiency. As language proficiency developed over time, the rate of errors in terms of content knowledge and comprehension knowledge was reduced (Bernhardt, 2003). Motivated by the hypothesis of Bernhardt (2003), the current researcher was interested to investigate whether the level of difficulty in reading English at the advanced level of language learning and instruction was low or not in the Cambodian EFL context.

Although there were some previous studies of reading anxiety, the relationship between EFL reading anxiety and gender was not clear. The findings showed inconsistent results. Thus, according to different cultures and exposure to the target language, the current study aimed to investigate the English reading anxiety level of third year male and female students who were studying English as their major and as a foreign language.

At the Institute of Foreign Languages (IFL), traditional teaching is the common method. The traditional teaching methods and learning conditions may make some students become uneasy and may be the result of lack of confidence of the students. Thus, students may become anxious in reading in this particular setting. Therefore, according to the IFL context of the language teaching and learning environment, the effect of reading anxiety on reading comprehension and the sources of English reading anxiety should be necessity to explore.

Research Objectives

This study aimed to explore the following objectives:To investigate the levels of English reading anxiety of third year EFL students at the IFL;

To find out whether there was a significant gender difference in English reading anxiety of third year EFL students at the IFL;

To discover the effects of English reading anxiety on reading comprehension of third year EFL students at the IFL; and

To explore the sources of English reading anxiety of third year EFL students at the IFL.

Research Questions

For these purposes, this study investigated the following questions : What are the English reading anxiety levels of third year EFL students at the IFL?

Is there a significant difference in English reading anxiety level between third year male and female EFL students at the IFL?

How do the levels of English reading anxiety affect reading comprehension of third year EFL students at the IFL?

What are the sources of English reading anxiety of third year EFL students at the IFL?

Literature Review

Foreign Langauge Learning in Cambodia

Cambodian or Khmer is the official language in Cambodia. However, the notable language in Cambodia used to be French. The country used to adopt the French education system. Then, in 1975, Cambodia was under the rule of the Pol Pot regime or Khmer Rouge for nearly three years when schools were closed. From 1979 until 1993, the educational system was then based on the Vietnamese model, in which the Vietnamese and Russian languages were compulsory from grade 7 onwards. Presently, English has become the most popular language in Cambodia. English has gained prominence when political change came to Cambodia in 1993, when the Royal Government of Cambodia declared English and French as official foreign languages in Cambodia, and Cambodia became a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1999. Because of the

advantage of English in facilitating life skills, the number of Cambodian students learning English is increasing significantly. However, only a small number of them has better English proficiency. Most of them have studied English for over twelve years, but they still cannot comprehend the texts they are reading. Pretorius (2000) stated that when students do not properly develop reading skills in their native language, they cannot transfer those reading skills to foreign languages. According to many language scholars and researchers (MacIntyre, 1995; Saito et al., 1999; Horwitz;2001), anxiety is also found to be one of the crucial factors highlighted in language learning.

Anxiety

According to Hansen (1977), almost every individual has encountered the feeling of uneasiness, a sense of foreboding, and a feeling of tension in a situation where the cause of the tension is not readily apparent. These phenomena are related to the term "anxiety". Since the concept of anxiety has become multi-faceted, anxiety is often categorized into four aspects: facilitating and debilitating, trait, state and situational axiety. Facilitating anxiety encourages learners to take more on challenges, while debelitating anxiety undermines the self-esteem of the learners. State anxiety refers to the feelings of apprehension and heightened autonomic nervous system activity that depends on specific situations. Trait anxiety is considered the deepest level of anxiety and was defined by Spielberger (1983) as an individual's likelihood of becoming anxious in any situation and as the more permanent predisposition which is viewed as an aspect of personality. Situational anxiety is the specific form of anxiety that occurs consistently over time within a language learning situation. According to Horwitz et al. (1986, p. 125), situational anxiety is considered to be foreign language anxiety.

Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA)

Horwitz et al. (1986) defined FLA as a distinct complex of self-perceptions, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom learning, arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process. Their study also found that FLA is distinct from other types of anxiey and specific to language learning. In a language classroom, when language learners are not able to express their own ideas and opinions, as they can do in their native language, it can be claimed that anxiety is provoking incompetency in those students. Or, the inability to pronounce words or use grammar correctly can be a result of negative evaluation by their classmates or others. Also, being unable to understand the spoken and written input can lead to confusion and embarrassment about how to respond or act (Horwitz & Young, 1991).

Foreign Language Reading Anxiety (FLRA)

Reading is a complex cognitive process and is considered to be one of the most important skills for second language (L2) students, especially at the intermediate and higher levels. Therefore, reading is challenging for many students.When learning a foreign langauge, reading becomes more complicated, because it includes language ability, background knowledge and motivation. Thus, reading difficulties in foreign language text induce such frustration and self-doubt that foreign language students often suffer from FLA and it is called FLRA. Saito et al. (1999) claimed that reading in a FL can be anxiety provoking and then raised the concept of FLRA that learners experience in reading a FL. To explore the possibilities of anxiety in relation to second language reading, the Forieng Language Reading Anxiety Scale (FLRAS) was introduced to measure the levels of reading anxiety in a target language.

Research Methodology

Research Design

A multiple-method research methodology was employed by using a sequential design for this study, beginning with a quantitative approach followed by a qualitative approach.

Quantitative Approach

Population and sample

The population in this study was all third year undergraduate EFL students at the IFL, Cambodia. There were 616 students, 292 males and 324 females, from 20 classes. The researcher adopted the formula of sample selection by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) and planned the results to be at the 95% confidence level, with a margin of error of 5%. Thus, the sample size from the population of 616 was 237. Because the researcher conducted a study according to the accessibility and availability of the teachers who were teaching third year students at the IFL, a convenience sampling was employed in this study. As there was an average of 30 students in a class, 300 selected students from ten chosen classes were invited to participate in the study. After administering the questionnaires, only 237 sets of the questionnaire were returned and 5 papers were excluded due to incomplete data. Thus, the data from 232 students were employed in this study.

Research Tools

Two sets of questionnaires adapted from Saito et al. (1999) were used: the Modified Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale (MFLRAS) and the Effects of Reading Anxiety on Reading Comprehension Scale (ERARCS).

The Modified Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale (MFLRAS)

The FLRAS was pioneered by Saito, Horwitz and Garza (1999) and is the most widely known and accepted research instrument in the field of FLRA research. The modified FLRAS was administered to the participants, which is composed of 20 items, each of which is answered on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" (1 point) to "strongly agree" (5 points).

B. The Effects of Reading Anxiety on Reading Comprehension Scale (ERARCS)

By carefully reading the items of the FLRAS, the researcher created a new questionnaire based on the FLRAS. All items were modified and changed with a focus on the self-perception of the effects of reading anxiety and reading comprehension. The newly designed questionnaire was used to assess the effects of English reading anxiety on students' reading comprehension. It consisted of 20 items scored on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "the least" (1 point) to "the most" (5 points).

The Questionnaire

To ensure a high level of content validity of the two sets of the questionnaire, four experts in the field were requested to check the content validity and language use by using Indexes of Objective Congruence (IOC). The result of the experts showed that the IOC score of the MFLRAS ranged from 0.05 to 1 and the IOC score of the ERARCS was 0.75 to 1. Since there was no item with a score lower than 0.50, all items were used in the study.

As all the participants were Cambodian, the questionnaires were administered in the Khmer language for the sake of clarity. To assure the accuracy and appropriateness of the translation, three Cambodians in the field were invited to modify and verify the translation. A few changes to the language used in the questionnaire were made according to the suggestions from the experts. Moreover, to test the reliability of the questionnaire, a pilot study was conducted to a pilot sample of 30 students. The internal consistency reliability of the MFLRAS and the ERARCS showed an Alpha coefficient of .73 and .79.

The questionnaire consisted of three parts: the background information, such as gender, class and telephone number, the MFLRAS and the ERARCS. The participant consent form and an agreement statement as a participant in the English version were also attached as covers of the questionnaire.

Data Collection Procedure

The preparation of data collection was conducted at two different times.

In the first stage on October 1, 2012, the Cambodian versions of the two sets of questionnaire were administered to six selected classes in total of 180 participants as their homework and were collected on the following day. The reason for the survey questionnaires not being completed and collected immediately was that it was the second week of the new academic year, so that the students had enough time to read at home and reflect about their reading experience. As the quality of the

questionnaire depended on the frank responses from the participants, reading and completing the survey questions at home made them feel free to do it without pressure or time limitation. After collecting the questionnaire, only 124 sets of the questionnaire were returned.

Thus, the second stage of data collection started again from four classes and was conducted in the classrooms. At this time, 113 returned survey questionnaires were collected. Therefore, in total, 237 questionnaires were returned, but five questionnaires had to be omitted from the study, as they were not filled out completely, resulting in 232 workable sets of answers.

Data Analysis

To determine a student's reading anxiety level, descriptive statistics of the items of the MFLRAS were employed to find out mean, minimum, maximum, standard deviation and t-test values. Then, the interpretation of the level of reading anxiety was conducted according to the principles adapted from Gonen (2007).

Table 1. Distribution of the level of reading anxiety

Score ranking	Level of anxiety
3.85 – 5: 00	High level
2.86 – 3.84	Moderate level
1:00 – 2.85	Low level

For the significance of the difference between males and females in anxiety levels, t-test analysis was conducted on the reading anxiety mean scores of the two groups: group 1 of 117 female participants and group 2 of 115 male participants.

Moreover, to explore the self-perceptions of the effect of reading anxiety on reading comprehension, the data from part 3 of the questionnaire were used to find the mean, minimum, and maximum values of the items. Then, the interpretation was based on the principles adapted from Gonen (2007).

Table 2. Distribution of the effect of reading anxiety on reading comprehension

Score ranking	Effects of anxiety
3.85 – 5: 00	High effect
2.86 – 3.84	Moderate effect
1:00 – 2.85	Low effect

Qualitative Approach

Research Tool

A semi-structured interview, consisting of open-ended questions, was used to elicit the views and opinions of the participants. For this study, the researcher created the interview questions to elicit the responses from ten bottom and ten top list anxiety score students on the MFLRAS. The seven open-ended interview questions were related to experience and attitudes of participants towards the difficulty in reading English. Data collection procedure

The interview process started two weeks after completing the questionnaire and was conducted in the Cambodian language. Before the interview, the purposes of the research and the interview were stated; the permission to use an audio-recorder was asked; confidentiality and anonymity was informed; and the requests for clarification and follow-up questions after the prepared interview questions were welcomed. During the interview, seven open-ended questions were asked to all

interviewees within 20 minutes due to the break time in their class schedule. Then, the students asked some questions relating to their interests or concerns.

Data Analysis

In analyzing the interviews, the recorded data were transcribed verbatim in the Cambodian language. Then, the main categories of classification of the sources of reading anxiety were identified. The main categories were divided into sub-categories and the subcategories were classified again.

Results and Discussion

Research question one: "What are the English reading anxiety levels of third year EFL students at the Institute of Foreign Languages (IFL)?"

This research question was answered through descriptive statistics, such as the mean, and minimum and maximum scores, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of the MFLRAS (n=232)

Descriptive Statistics	Score
$\bar{x}$	2.79
Min	2.12
Max	3.53

From Table 3, the mean score of reading anxiety was 2.79, with a minimum score of 2.12 and a maximum score of 3.53. According to the findings, one may infer that students typically experienced a low level of English reading anxiety. The answers elicited by the questions relating to the 20 Likert-scale questions of the MFLRAS are presented in Table 4 as means and standard deviations.

Table 4. MFLRAS Questions, Item Means and Standard Deviations (n=232)

No	MFLRAS	$\bar{x}$	SD
1	I get upset when I'm not sure whether I understand what I am reading in English.	3.53	0.98
2	When reading English, I often understand the words but still can't quite understand what the author is saying.	3.19	1.00
3	When I'm reading English, I get so confused I can't remember what I'm reading.	3.16	1.03
4	I feel intimidated whenever I see a whole page of English in front of me.	2.25	0.99
5	I am nervous when I am reading a passage in English when I am not familiar with the topic.	2.62	1.00
6	I get upset whenever I encounter unknown grammar when reading English.	2.60	1.05
7	When reading English, I get nervous and confused when I don't understand every word.	3.18	1.16
8	It bothers me to encounter words I can't pronounce while reading English.	2.66	1.11
9	I usually end up translating word by word when I'm reading English.	2.12	1.04

No	MFLRAS	$\bar{x}$	SD
10	By the time you get past the funny letters and symbols in English, it's hard to remember what you're reading about.	2.97	0.90
11	I am worried about all the new symbols I have to learn in order to read English.	2.53	0.98
12	I enjoy reading English.	2.78	1.25
13	I feel confident when I am reading in English.	2.88	0.91
14	Once you get used to it, reading English is not so difficult.	2.70	1.33
15	The hardest part of learning English is learning to read.	2.69	0.98
16	I would be happy just to learn to speak English rather than having to learn to read as well.	2.94	1.13
17	I don't mind reading to myself, but I feel very uncomfortable when I have to read English aloud.	2.79	1.21
18	I am satisfied with the level of reading ability in English that I have achieved so far.	2.95	1.11
19	English culture and ideas seem very foreign to me.	2.71	0.94
20	You have to know so much about English history and culture in order to read English.	2.48	1.07

In order to clarify this finding, it was useful to discuss some of the items frequently experienced by third year EFL students. Five items belonged to the group of the top list anxiety score ranking from 2.97-3.53. These items were:

Item 10, "By the time you get past the funny letters and symbols in English, it's hard to remember what you're reading about" (2.97); and item 3, "When I'm reading English, I get so confused I can't remember what I'm reading" (3.16); and the means may be interpreted as meaning that low working memory may affect students' reading comprehension. Thus, they might feel overwhelmed.

Moreover, vocabulary might be the cause of reading anxiety among the respondents, according to items 7, "When reading English, I get nervous and confused when I don't understand every word" (3.18). In addition, item 2, "When reading English, I often understand the words but still can't quite understand what the author is saying" (3.19), and item 1, "I get upset when I'm not sure whether I understand what I am reading in English"(3.53) were relevant here. The findings might be interpreted as meaning that a lack of background knowledge related to the text may lead students to suffer increased anxiety.

The result of the current study was inconsistent with the study of Myanaga (2002) in terms of different language proficiencies of the learners. Japanese university students in Myanaga's study studied English as a required subject, so that they were less involved in the target language and had less chance to use the target language. The low frequency of exposure to English in reading might have made reading English a difficult activity for Japanese students.

The findings of this study conformed to Gonen's (2007) result, that advanced language proficient students had the lowest language reading anxiety level. Deriving from this result, Gonen (2007) claimed that the levels of language reading anxiety had a negative relationship with language proficiency level. This study also supported Bernhardt's (2003) hypothesis that the higher language proficiency of the students, the lower the rate of errors of content knowledge and comprehension knowledge of the students.

In the current study, students were categorized as advanced level learners and were learning English as their major, so that they had a better understanding in reading. Thus, the levels of English reading anxiety decreased due to the lower difficulty perceived by students.

Research question two: "Is there a significant difference of the English reading anxiety level between males and females of third year EFL students at the IFL?"

The results of the independent t-test are shown in Table 5:

Table 5. The significance of differences in mean scores in reading anxiety between male and female participants

$\bar{x}$				
Female	Male	*t*	*df*	*p*
2.81	2.77	0.696	230	0.81

The t value was 0.696, degrees of freedom (df=N-2) was 230, and the p value was 0.81. Thus, the difference in English reading anxiety level between male and female learners was not statistically significant.

This result was inconsistent with the result of Shi and Liu (2006), whose study found a significant negative relationship between male and female Chinese learners. In China, female learners were recognized as better in learning a foreign language than males.

The finding supported the finding of Zhao (2009), who found no significant difference in reading anxiety between male and female students. The finding in the current study may possibly reflect the IFL policy of requiring an entrance examination. Since students at the IFL were selected before being accepted into the school, their English proficiency level may be not much different. Therefore, they appeared to be similar in the level language proficiency and level of English reading anxiety.

Research question three: "How do the levels of English reading anxiety affect reading comprehension of Cambodian EFL students at the IFL?"

In order to uncover the effects of reading anxiety on reading comprehension, descriptive statistics were employed.

Table 6. Descriptive statistics of the ERARCS

Descriptive statistics	Score
$\bar{x}$	3.00
Min	1.45
Max	4.10

According to the mean and standard deviation scores of the items (=3.00), it may be inferred that the participants in this study perceived that reading anxiety moderately affected their reading comprehension. Table 7 illustrates the mean scores and the standard deviation of each item which was responded to on a five-point Likert scale.

Table 7. Items of the Self-Report ERARCS Questionnaire, Item Means and Standard Deviations (n=232)

No	ERARCS	$\bar{x}$	SD
1	Being unsure of understanding what is read affects my reading comprehension.	3.82	0.81
2	If I am not sure what the author is saying when I am reading, this affects my reading comprehension.	3.82	0.77
3	Getting so confused and being unable to remember what I'm reading affect my reading comprehension.	3.70	0.86

No	ERARCS	$\bar{x}$	SD
4	Thing that affects my reading comprehension is the feeling of intimidation whenever I see a whole English page in front of me.	2.17	0.94
5	Being unfamiliar with the topic affects my reading comprehension.	2.93	1.05
6	Encountering unknown English grammar affects my reading comprehension.	2.62	0.91
7	Being unable to understand every word affects my reading comprehension.	3.16	1.15
8	When I cannot pronounce the words in English, this affects my reading comprehension.	2.09	0.98
9	Having to translate word by word affects my reading comprehension.	3.13	1.21
10	Encountering new symbols or funny letters affects my reading comprehension.	2.77	0.88
11	Worrying about new English symbols I have to read English affects my reading comprehension.	2.66	0.93
12	If I do not like reading, this affects my reading comprehension.	3.67	1.18
13	Lack of confidence in reading ability harms my reading comprehension.	3.48	1.01
14	When I am not used to reading, this affects my reading comprehension.	3.54	1.08
15	If I believe that the hardest part of learning English is reading, this affects my reading comprehension.	3.16	1.06
16	Being unable to speak affects my reading comprehension.	2.49	1.03
17	Having to read aloud affects my reading comprehension.	2.51	1.14
18	Being unsatisfied with the levels of reading ability in English affects my reading comprehension.	3.06	0.94
19	Encountering strange English culture and ideas affects my reading comprehension.	2.75	0.98
20	Not knowing English history and culture affects my reading comprehension.	2.56	1.08

To understand the nature of English reading anxiety influencing reading comprehension, some of the items which highly affected the reading comprehension of third year EFL students are discussed.

The lack of background knowledge was generally the most significant reading effect on reading comprehension among third year EFL learners. As shown in Table 7, there were three items with the highest score, ranging from 3.70-3.82: item 3, "Getting so confused and being unable to remember what I'm reading affect my reading comprehension" (3.70); item 1, "being unsure of understanding what is read affects my reading comprehension" (3.82); and item 2, "if I am not sure what the author is saying when I am reading, this affects my reading comprehension" (3.82).

The responses to item 14 ("When I am not used to reading, this affects my reading comprehension") (3.54) and item 12 ("If I do not like reading, this affects reading comprehension") (3.67) suggest that the low interest in reading English manifestly affected reading comprehension among third year EFL students. It seemed that when students did not like reading or become used to reading, they did not build up their habit of reading. As a result, their ability to deal with reading text was low.

According to the items of the ERARCS, the result may indicate that the lack of background knowledge of the students affects reading comprehension the most. According to Alderson (1984), poor reading in second language (L2) was possibly caused by poor reading ability in the first language. The information from an educational forum in Phnom Penh, organized by the National Library of Cambodia and the Australian Embassy in 2010, found that Cambodians had a low level of reading habit, so that they did not build up their reading habit in their first language (L1). When they came to learn English, they had barely mastered reading comprehension skills.

Research question four: "What are the sources of English reading anxiety of third year EFL students at the Institute of Foreign Languages?"

Guided by the seven interview questions, the sources of English reading anxiety were investigated with 20 interviewees (8 females and 12 males). After transcribing and analyzing their answers in Khmer, six main categories of English reading anxiety were identified.

The six main anxiety sources of reading anxiety were linguistic features of texts, environment, personal traits of readers, physical looks of texts, time constraint, and teachers (See Table 8).

Table 8. Categories and sub-categories of the sources of English reading anxiety

Main categories	Sub-categories
Linguistic features of texts	Difficult vocabulary
	Unfamiliar topic
	Uninteresting topic
	Lengthy and detailed text
	Complicated grammatical structure
Environment	Noise
Personal traits of readers	Laziness
	Lack of concentration
Physical looks of texts	Font
	Inappropriate organization format
Time constraint	
Teachers	

Among the sub-categories of linguistic features of texts, difficult vocabulary was reported to be the most frequently mentioned factor that third-year EFL students faced. According to Albader (2007), at a higher level of language learning, the texts increasingly contain low-frequency words that could be found only in course books, textbooks, technical and advanced articles and did not usually occur in ordinary conversational discourse. Moreover, Gilakjani and Ahmadi (2011) pointed out that when the topic was not familiar to the students, or the topic was outside students' existing knowledge, they would be moved to experience an anxious feeling and become bored and lack motivation to read such text. Another factor which could contribute to the anxiety in reading English text was the length with detailed description. Because some texts consisted of extended contextual support and repetition, readers might feel bored and lose their interest to read long and descriptive texts. Albader (2007) claimed that the failure of foreign language reading was caused by some lengthy and complex sentences.

Besides linguistic features of texts, this study also found that the classroom environment, specifically a noisy environment, might distract students from comprehending the texts. Dockrell andShield (2003) asserted that noise had a detrimental effect on reading. Since reading needed high cognitive processing and involved attention, problem solving and memory, the exposure to noise might affect students' reading concentration and comprehension.

In addition, this finding also indicated that personal traits of the reader became anxiety provoking for some students. Yankelovich (2006) claimed that parents played an important role in shaping children's reading habit. Because Cambodian students are typically brought up by low frequency reading parents, they lacked role models and motivation for reading. Thus, they had low interest in reading. As they did not gain pleasure in reading, they became lazy in reading. As a result, reading made them frustrated and bored. Moreover, a lack of concentration might be the result of insufficient practice in reading. Students might never have their scheduled reading practice, so that they might not have appropriate strategies to deal with their reading problems. Without constant practice in reading, students might feel disrupted in reading (Yankelovich, 2006).

Physical looks of the texts were identified by the students as inducing difficulty in reading English and it was grouped into two sub-categories: font format, especially the small font size, font type, unclear font texts, and narrow spacing created difficulty for students; and inappropriate organization format that was believed by a handful of students to create difficulty in reading. The inconsistency in text organization and no relationship between ideas might discourage students' interest in their reading. Thus, students might feel annoyed in reading such texts.

Another source of English reading anxiety was time constraint. In the Cambodian context, many students studied at more than one place or university and some students both worked and studied at the same time, so that time limitation might influence their reading. They may not have enough time to read all the assigned reading course books, homework and assignment in the school, as well as outside school activities. Moreover, time pressure may occur when students took an examination with a time limitation. According to Walczyk, Kelly, Meche, and Braud (1999), time limitations may discourage reading comprehension. Since students had only a short time to read and they only read to understand chunks of texts, they might feel frustrated and become anxious in reading.

The last source of reading anxiety in the present study experienced by a few students was the teacher. Teachers' teaching manners and methods might be likely to cause anxiety when students were reading the assigned reading tasks.

Suggestions for Further Studies

The findings of the current study not only added new knowledge on reading anxiety in the Cambodian context, but also provided some recommendations for future research.

Firstly, the study excluded first, second and fourth year students. Thus, because of the exclusion of these classes, the findings in this study could not be generalized to the whole population at the IFL, but only to junior class students. Therefore, more research should be conducted to find the possible differences in reading anxiety of students at various course levels at the IFL.

Secondly, in this study, only a survey questionnaire of self-reported perceptions was employed to measure the effect of reading anxiety on reading comprehension, instead of obtaining reading performance scores or standardized reading test scores. Although the questionnaire was considered to have good validity and reliability, it is suggested that future researchers should employ a reading performance test or a standardized reading test to get a more accurate measurement of reading comprehension.

Thirdly, as for the qualitative approach, the findings of the research emerged from seven open-ended questions only. The results may be more reliable, enriched and in greater depth if the research used a wider variety of data sources or triangulation, such as diaries, group discussion, and observation. Also, the length of the interview was an average of only 20 minutes, due to students' break time in their class schedule and a lack of available time of the interviewees because of their busy schedule. It is recommended that further research should spend a longer time for the interview, as more in-depth interview questions might reveal many interesting sources of reading anxiety.

Conclusion

In the Cambodian context, reading is a challenging task for many students, specifically higher education students. Thus, this paper aimed to find out the levels of their difficulties in reading English

and its relationship with gender and reading comprehension. Moreover, the sources of reading anxiety which were experienced by the students were figured out. Even though the study reported that students perceived they had a low level of reading anxiety, their anxiety on reading moderately influenced their reading comprehension. Moreover, students reported that the most significant source of reading anxiety was linguistic features of texts including difficult vocabulary, unfamiliar topics, uninteresting topics, lengthy and detailed texts and complicated grammatical structure.

Acknowledgements

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AUTHOR'S INFORMATION

Samphors Um is a graduate student of Master of Education in Teaching English as a Second Language (M.Ed in TESL) at the International Graduate Studies Human Resource Development Center, Faculty of Education, Burapha University.

The Semi-Structured Interview Questions

    How do you feel about having to read the assigned reading coursebooks?

    While reading the coursebooks, what are the factors that make you not understand?

    Do you think that teachers or classmates affect your reading?

    Do you think that the classrooms or atmosphere affect your reading?

    While reading in English, what are the text factors that distract you from reading?

    While reading in English, what do you think are your personal factors that negatively affect your reading?

    Is there anything else you want to mention more about your experience in reading English?