

## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 Research Background**

Reading goes beyond simply pronouncing individual words; it also requires the capacity to understand the meaning of sentences when combined, which is often referred to as reading comprehension. According to Gilakjani and Sabouri (2016), reading aims to grasp the overall text rather than to obtain meaning solely from individual words or sentences. However, comprehending the material can be quite challenging for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students due to the linguistic differences between their native languages and English. This difficulty often leads to anxiety among EFL students, as they fear failure in the learning process.

When learning a foreign language, anxiety is a common issue faced by EFL students during the learning process. According to Brown (2000), students are influenced by three types of emotional factors during the learning process: self-anxiety, self-confidence, and accomplishment motivation (as cited in Mahdalena & Muslem, 2021). Linguistic differences between EFL students' native languages and English can decrease their confidence, as many students fear making mistakes. This anxiety often stems from concerns about potential adverse outcomes, such as making errors, being judged, facing ridicule, or experiencing embarrassment.

In the context of reading, EFL students are not required to develop phrases or express their thoughts; instead, they are asked to repeat sentences from their English

teaching materials verbally. It does not appear to be a particularly tough process. However, many EFL students still experience anxiety when asked to read in English, particularly in reading academic English text. Regardless of the student's capability to read English, various anxieties restrain their abilities, causing significant difficulties when reading academic texts (Ahmad et al., 2013). In English reading classes, factors such as encountering an "unfamiliar topic" can heighten anxiety due to the fear of making mistakes. This often leads students to struggle with comprehension. Under certain conditions, EFL students may lose their motivation to learn English and may intentionally avoid using it due to the pressure they feel. This can result in their English skills stagnating. This is also in line with Jalongo and Hirsh (2010); certain students avoid activities in English reading classes, cutting the classes, postpone taking English courses until their final year, or they are not passionate about reading in English, they may even avoid reading English materials altogether (as cited in Ahmad et al., 2013).

Previous studies have identified various factors contributing to reading anxiety. Al Faruq (2019) stated that reading anxiety is often attributed to the increased difficulty of reading materials, which may include unfamiliar vocabulary, unfamiliar topics, and unfamiliar cultures, along with concerns about reading effects and potential errors. Similarly, Mardianti et al. (2021) mentioned that students who lack vocabulary knowledge will have difficulties identifying the main idea because they need to understand the whole text. On the other hand, some EFL students experience high anxiety due to feeling nervous and afraid, which makes it difficult for them to comprehend the material (Rama, 2021). Lack of motivation is

also one of the causes of reading anxiety among EFL students (Hezam et al., 2022). In addition, a related study by Mawardah et al. (2019) pointed out that even students majoring in English language education can still encounter language anxiety. However, Tsai and Lee (2018) revealed that students who possess more experience and higher proficiency in English tend to experience less anxiety.

Reading anxiety remains an ongoing issue among EFL students, yet there is insufficient research on reading anxiety, particularly during comprehension. As noted by Saito et al. (1999), the causes of foreign language reading anxiety have rarely been investigated. Most studies have concentrated on speaking skills since it is considered the most demanding task, and the other skills have been largely overlooked (Alharbi, 2019). For that reason, the topic of anxiety, especially reading anxiety, is still worth researching. Upon reviewing several studies on reading anxiety, the researcher observed that the six previous studies collected data by distributing questionnaires (Tsai & Lee, 2018; Al Faruq, 2019; Mawardah et al., 2019; Mardianti et al., 2021; Rama, 2021; Hezam et al., 2022). Meanwhile, this research was conducted without employing questionnaires, as the researcher collected data through in-depth interviews.

## **1.2 Research Questions**

This research is guided by the two following research questions:

1. What factors cause reading anxiety in reading comprehension among EFL students?
2. How do EFL students overcome their reading anxiety?

By raising these questions, this research aims to gain a deeper understanding of student's experiences and the strategies they employ to manage their anxiety.

### **1.3 Research Objectives**

This research investigates the factors causing reading anxiety among EFL students when they attempt reading comprehension and examines what EFL students do to overcome their anxiety.

### **1.4 Limitation of the Research**

Three limitations were established for this research. First, the study focuses solely on the factors causing reading anxiety among EFL students during reading activities, particularly in academic contexts, and investigates how they manage to overcome their anxiety. Second, only 10 participants took part in the study, meaning the findings cannot be generalized to the broader population. Lastly, the participants who participated were drawn from a specific learning environment, namely first-semester students enrolled in the English Education study program at a state university in Jambi, all of whom were taking the 'Reading and Writing for General Purposes' course. This means that the findings may not apply to different contexts, such as EFL students from other countries, institutions, or academic levels.

### **1.5 Significance of Research**

This research investigates the factors contributing to EFL students experiencing reading anxiety when attempting to understand their reading materials. It also examines how EFL students manage to overcome their anxiety. The findings of this

research will assist teaching instructors in recognizing the factors behind their students' anxiety, allowing them to create a more comfortable learning environment that may help reduce their students' anxiety levels. Furthermore, EFL students who experience the same thing, which is reading anxiety, can learn from their fellow EFL students' regarding the strategies to cope with this issue, as revealed by the participants who participated in this research. Finally, this research can serve as a reference for future researchers interested in exploring this topic further.

## **1.6 Definition of Key Term**

### **1.6.1 English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Students**

English as a Foreign Language students or EFL students refer to those who learn English in non-English speaking countries or whose first language is not English. They usually learn English to achieve certain goals, such as studying abroad or working abroad where their first language is not relevant.

### **1.6.2 Foreign Language Reading**

Foreign language reading refers to reading activities with text written in a language different from the reader's native language. For EFL students, this activity could be challenging due to the significant differences between their native language and the language used in the text due to significant grammatical differences.

### 1.6.3 Anxiety

Anxiety is an excessive fear. Anxiety arises from fear of uncertain things or things that may not necessarily happen. In the general run of things, anxiety appears at certain times, such as tense moments (taking a test, taking an exam, giving a speech, or making a presentation in front of many people).

### 1.6.4 Reading Anxiety

Reading anxiety is a type of anxiety that occurs when a person is asked to read, particularly when reading aloud in front of a large audience or during stressful situations.

### 1.6.5 Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension is an activity in which students strive to understand what they are reading and grasp the meaning of the text. In other words, they aim to understand, interpret, and analyze the meaning of the text they engage with.

### 1.6.6 Coping Strategies

Coping strategies refer to strategies or methods used by students to deal with their problems, in this case, anxiety. By finding effective and suitable coping strategies, students can rely on them to reduce their anxiety.