# ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

**Education**

## READING ENGLISH ANXIETY REDUCTION STRATEGY (REARS) FOR THE BILINGUAL LEARNERS WITH READING DIFFICULTY

**KEY WORDS:**

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**ABSTRACT**

The study aimed to determine the effectiveness of expressive writing as a teacher-pupil strategy in reducing the learners' English reading anxiety. It further sought to assess whether the English reading performance of the learners would increase after the intervention. This study employs purposive sampling and is anchored on Vygotsky's sociocultural theory. The participants of this study were fifteen (15) bilingual learners identified as below-grade learners based on the administration of Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (PHIL-IRI) graded passages. To find out their difficulties, the participants took the Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale (FLARS) with the assistance of the researcher. It revealed that these learners manifested high anxiety in reading English as compared to reading Filipino. The anxiety in reading English makes them hesitant to read and eventually refuse to read words in English. To address their reading anxiety, journal writing as an intervention was part of their daily activities wherein they could express their thoughts and feelings using their first language-L1 and eventually their second language-L2. Based on the findings, expressive writing significantly decreased English reading anxiety and consequently improved the learners' reading performance.

## INTRODUCTION

Teaching English as a foreign and second language (L2) is significant in effectively developing the four language skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Reading is one of the most essential language skills for many L2 language learners (Mohammed & Ofori Amponsah, 2018). Reading in any language is vital to our educational system and social lives. Chandran and Shah (2019) pointed out that reading enables writing, vocabulary identification, application, grammar advancement, and excellent spelling. Simply put, learning success depends upon the student's ability to read the written language with relatively good comprehension (Murray,2016; Minoza,2018). However, despite similarities in alphabet knowledge and sounds of some L1 and L2, bilingual learners are hesitant to read due to underlying difficulties. Learners' awkwardness and nervousness are evident during oral reading tests and in simple conversations.

According to Ni (2012), anxiety is one of the factors that could significantly affect students' language acquisition process. When teaching in a foreign language, one issue is language anxiety. Knowing the influence of anxiety and its factors on one's reading performance is essential in the field of FL teaching. Understanding this element can bring significant inferences in teachers' perspectives on the reading process. Reading anxiety is closely related to but distinguishable from the construct of general foreign language (FL) anxiety. Reading anxiety is the anxiety that learners experience during the reading process and, therefore, is associated with the specific language skill of reading (Zhao et al.;J., 2013).

One of the widely recognized factors that impact reading success is anxiety, which has never been correlated as a factor in poor reading performance among the learners of previous researchers at Pedro Guevara Elementary School. However, after the administration of the Phil-IRI Group Screening Test, fifteen Grade 5 pupils among sections Jade, Aquamarine, Ruby, Quartzite, and Topaz were found to be below-grade learners. The English Oral Reading Test revealed a refusal to read among the subjects. Their Filipino Oral Test, however, showed a willingness to read despite being in the frustration level.

The observation showed that students were intimidated whenever they had reading passages to read in English. Learners express the letter in their mother tongue, confusing them about the correct diction. They get upset when encountering words they cannot pronounce. Some get pale and attempt to read in a whisper-like way, fearful of the possibility that their classmates will laugh at them.

This research aims to evaluate whether the English reading performance of the learners would increase after the intervention.

## Theoretical/Conceptual Framework
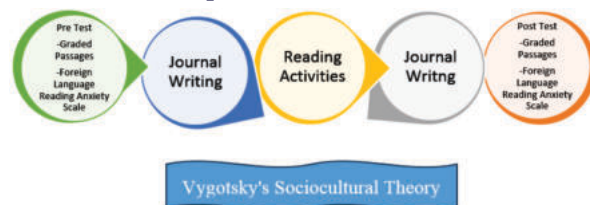


Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory states that journaling with expressive writing reduces anxiety. However, only the study by Ming-Tzu Liao and Chia-Tzu Wong (2005) supported this theory. For this reason, the researcher explored the effectiveness of this theory along with its applications done by other researchers such as Ramirez and Beilock (2012), Emmert (2015), and Meharg (2018).

According to Vygotsky, a journal assists in organizing one's inner thoughts, promoting verbal fluency. In other words, pupils can begin to process anxiety as it can lessen negative experiences, emotions, and thoughts (Vygotsky, 1986).

## Statement of the Problem

The researcher aimed to determine the effectiveness of expressive writing as a teacher-pupil strategy in reducing the learners' English reading anxiety. This research seeks to evaluate whether the English reading performance of the learners would improve after the intervention. The participants of this study were fifteen (15) bilingual learners selected from Grade V Sections Aquamarine, Jade, Topaz, Quartzite, and Ruby of Pedro Guevara Elementary School.

The following research questions were expected in this study:
1. What is the level of reading anxiety in the second language- L2 of the learners before and after the intervention?
2. Is expressive writing effective in reducing reading anxiety in the second language?
3. What is the learners' reading performance in the second language before and after the intervention?

## Methodology
## Research Design

This study utilized a pre-experimental research design with a quantitative approach. Creswel (2008) stated that quantitative research is a type of educational research in which the researcher decides what to study, asks a specific, narrow question, collects quantifiable data from participants, analyze these numbers using statistics, and conducts the inquiry in an unbiased, objective manner.

This research used such a design as it provides little to no control of extraneous variables through a one-group pre-test-post-test design. The one-group pre-test and post-test design usually involves three steps: (1) administering a pre-test measuring the dependent variable, (2) applying the experimental treatment X to the subjects, and (3) administering a post-test, again measuring the dependent variable. Differences attributed to the application of the experimental treatment are then evaluated by comparing the pre-test and post-test scores (Ary et al., 2010).

## Sampling Design

The study employed purposive sampling, also known as judgmental or subjective sampling. The sample selection is based on the specific characteristics determined by the researchers (Patton, 1990). Purposive sampling is the technique of choosing a sample with a specific purpose (Sukardi, 2012). The expected criteria for the sample were entirely obtained per the research to be conducted via purposive sampling.

## Subjects of the Study

The participants of this study were fifteen (15) bilingual learners who were identified as below-grade learners based on the administration's PHIL-IRI-graded passages. They were selected from the Grade 5 sections Aquamarine, Jade, Topaz, Quartzite, and Ruby of Pedro Guevara Elementary School.

## Data Gathering Instrument

- PHIL-IRI pre-tests and post-tests were utilized to gather data needed in the study.
- The results of modified FLARS supplemented the data gathered by these tests.
- The participants' journals as the medium of expressive writing were also checked.

## Classroom Procedure

First, the students participated in chanting, action songs, letter sound videos, yoga, and breathing exercises. The next part is where children interact with each other. The lessons and activities were designed according to their level and pace. Finally, the children wrote about their previous and current emotions towards reading, learning, difficulties, and other thoughts. This interaction involved the coordination of the student's senses from inward feelings and writing (Vygotsky, 2012). Simply put, the teacher's involvement in reading these journals holds no significance, for this process aims to unleash anxieties and improve working memory function (Chang & Beilock, 2014).

If expressive writing helps free up working memory, it may also help regulate or control emotions, as working memory availability predicts more effective emotion-regulation processes (Schmeichel & Demaree, 2010). This process will enable the teacher to know the root of anxiety, which serves as a springboard for finding preventive ways to curb another occurrence of anxiety. Another benefit is establishing trust and openness through the written signatures of both students and teachers.

## Data Collections and Procedure

With the Approval of the School Head, the data were collected using the Foreign Language Reading Anxiety scale. The researcher assisted the respondents by reading and explaining the questions or indicators using their first language. The respondents then answered by shading the intensity of their agreement or disagreement. The learners' responses to the FLARS were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including the mean (M). There are four levels of anxiety: high (M= 3.26-4.00), moderate (M=2.51-3.25), low (M=1.76-2.50), and no anxiety (M=1.00-1.75). For Level of Reading Performance, the researcher administered the pre and post-test PHIL-IRI graded passages Set A.

## Data Analysis

Descriptive Statistics was used to analyze problems 1 and 3. For problem 3, a T-test was utilized to determine the difference in anxiety level between the pre-test and the post-test.

Results and Discussion. The data gathered to address the questions raised in this study are presented as follows:

**Problem 1: What Is The Level Of Reading Anxiety In The Second Language (L2) Of The Learners Before And After The Intervention?**

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics on the Pupils' Level of Reading Anxiety Before Intervention (n=15)

| Range | Point Value | Description | Interpretation | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 3.26-4.00 | 4 | Strongly Agree | High Anxiety | 15 | 100 |
| 2.51-3.25 | 3 | Agree | Moderate Anxiety | 0 | 0 |
| 1.76-2.50 | 2 | Disagree | Low Anxiety | 0 | 0 |
| 1.00-1.75 | 1 | Strongly Disagree | No Anxiety | 0 | 0 |
| **Total** | | | | **15** | **100** |

| Indicators | Mean | Interpretation |
|---|---|---|
| 1. It bothers me to encounter words I can't pronounce while reading to English. | 4.00 | High Anxiety |
| 2. I feel intimidated whenever I have a reading passage in English to read to. | 4.00 | High anxiety |
| 3. I am nervous when I am reading to a passage in English when I'm not familiar with the topic. | 4.00 | High Anxiety |
| 4. When I'm reading English, I get so confused I can't remember what I've read. | 4.00 | High Anxiety |
| 5. The hardest part of learning is reading English. | 4.00 | High anxiety |
| 6. I am worried about all the new words I have to learn to understand written English | 4.00 | High Anxiety |
| 7. I get upset when I'm not sure whether I understand what I'm reading English. | 4.00 | High Anxiety |
| 8. I do not enjoy reading to English. | 4.00 | High anxiety |
| 9. I do not feel confident when I am reading to English | 4.00 | High Anxiety |
| 10. When I read English, I often understand the words but still can't quite understand what the writer is saying | 4.00 | High Anxiety |
| 11 I get upset whenever I read unknown grammar while reading to English. | 4.00 | High anxiety |
| 12. When reading to English, I get nervous and confused when I don't understand every word. | 4.00 | High Anxiety |
| 13. By the time you get past the strange words in English, it's hard to remember what you're reading to. | 4.00 | High Anxiety |
| 14 Once you get used to it, reading English is not difficult. | 4.00 | High anxiety |
| 15. I don't mind reading to English by myself, but I feel very uncomfortable when I have to read to English in a group. | 4.00 | High Anxiety |
| Overall | 4.00 | High Anxiety |

The pupils strongly agreed with all the indicators. It means that the pupils of the fifteen respondents, as reflected in the table, have high anxiety about reading a second language. Based on the table, the overall mean (M=4.00) suggests that pupils have high anxiety towards reading in the second language. Thus, it connotes that the subjects are not reading in English due to their anxiety about reading a foreign language. According to Young (1991), the foreign language defines anxiety as the "worry and negative emotional reaction aroused when learning or utilizing a second language." On the other hand, Horwitz et al. (1986) emphasized that language anxiety is "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process" (English Language Teaching; Vol. 10, No. 7; 2017)

**Table 1.1**
**Descriptive Statistics on the Pupils' Level of Reading Anxiety After Intervention**
**(n=15)**

| Range | Point Value | Description | Interpretation | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 3.26-4.00 | 4 | Strongly Agree | High Anxiety | 0 | 0 |
| 2.51-3.25 | 3 | Agree | Moderate Anxiety | 8 | 53.3 |
| 1.76-2.50 | 2 | Disagree | Low Anxiety | 7 | 46.0 |
| 1.00-1.75 | 1 | Strongly Disagree | No Anxiety | 0 | 0 |
| | | Total | | 15 | 100 |

| Indicators | Mean | Interpretation |
|---|---|---|
| 1. It bothers me to encounter words I can't pronounce while reading to English. | 2.53 | Moderate Anxiety |
| 2.I feel intimidated whenever I have a reading passage in English to read to. | 2.13 | Low anxiety |
| 3. I am nervous when I am reading to a passage in English when I'm not familiar with the topic. | 3.13 | Moderate Anxiety |
| 4.When I'm reading English, I get so confused I can't remember what I've read. | 1.87 | Low Anxiety |
| 5. The hardest part of learning is reading English. | 3.13 | Moderate anxiety |
| 6. I am worried about all the new words I have to learn to understand written English. | 3.33 | Moderate Anxiety |
| 7. I get upset when I'm not sure whether I understand what I'm reading English. | 2.47 | Moderate Anxiety |
| 8. I do not enjoy reading to English. | 2.60 | Moderate Anxiety |
| 9. I do not feel confident when I am reading to English | 2.00 | Low Anxiety |
| 10. When I read English, I often understand the words but still can't quite understand what the writer is saying | 2.53 | Moderate Anxiety |
| 11I get upset whenever I read unknown grammar while reading to English. | 2.93 | Moderate Anxiety |
| 12.When reading to English, I get nervous and confused when I don't understand every word. | 1.87 | Low Anxiety |
| 13. By the time you get past the strange words in English, it's hard to remember what you're reading to. | 2.20 | Low Anxiety |
| 14 Once you get used to it, reading English is not difficult. | 3.07 | Moderate anxiety |
| 15. I don't mind reading to English by myself, but I feel very uncomfortable when I have to read to English in a group. | 3.27 | High Anxiety |
| Overall | 2.60 | Moderate Anxiety |

Table 1.1 presents the level of pupils' anxiety after the REARS intervention. As seen in the table, the overall mean (M=2.60) shows that reading anxiety has decreased from High Anxiety to Moderate Anxiety. There are 8 or 53.3 percent of the learners with Moderate Anxiety and 7 or 46.7 percent of the learners with a Low Anxiety level. Journal based on writing decreased the reading anxiety level of children in English.

### Problem 2. Is Expressive Writing Effective In Reducing Reading Anxiety In The Second Language Of The Learners?

**Table 2.T-value for the Differences in Pupils' Anxiety with**

**Expressive Writing Intervention (n=15)**

| Comparison | Mean | T-Value | P-Value |
|---|---|---|---|
| Pre-Test | 2.8864 | -6.371 | .000 |
| Post-Test | 4.000 | | |

The table shows a significant difference between the anxiety levels of the pupils before and after the intervention, as indicated by the p = 0.000. It reveals that the intervention effectively reduces the pupils' anxiety level in reading the second language.

### Problem 3. What Is The Learners' Reading Performance In The Second Language Before And After The Intervention?

**Table 3**

**Level of Reading Performance Before and After Intervention**

**(n=15)**

| Pre | GRADED PASSAGE | | | | | TOTAL | Post | GRADED PASSAGE | | | | | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| PASSAGE | GRADE LEVEL | | | | | | PASSAGE | GRADE LEVEL | | | | | |
| SET A | II | III | IV | V | VI | | SET A | II | III | IV | V | VI | |
| FRUSTRATION | 13 | | | | | 13 | FRUSTRATION | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 5 |
| INSTRUCTIONAL | 2 | | | | | 2 | INSTRUCTIONAL | | 3 | 3 | 1 | | 7 |
| INDEPENDENT | 0 | | | | | 0 | INDEPENDENT | | | 2 | 1 | | 3 |
| TOTAL | | | | | | 15 | TOTAL | | | | | | 15 |

It is indicated in the table that during the pre-oral graded passage Grade 2 Set A, there were thirteen struggling readers under the frustration level and two for the instructional level.

After the intervention, the reading development of the reading performance of the bilingual readers can be gleaned from the table. There were 5 under frustration level but in different Grade levels: 1 for Grades 3, 4, 5, and 2 for Grade 6. While 7 learners were in Instructional Level 3 for Grades 4 and 5, and only 1 read the Grade 6 passage. For the Independent level, there were 2 pupils under Grade 4 and 1 in Grade 5 passage.

The teacher also noted that the children were more at ease in reading English when they did not feel that they were being forced to do so. When they can express themselves through their journal in their first language-L1 and eventually to second language-L2. They get to condition themselves and try harder to read in English. The result of their reading test showed that they can decode words and have taken the leap to word recognition and comprehension. They may still be classified as below-grade learners, but their grade-level passages have moved from grade 2 to grade 4. Three learners were already at the instructional level in grade 4, meaning they were on their way to grade 5 after only four months of REARs intervention.

### Practical Insights That Can Be Drawn From The Results Of The Study

The influence of reading anxiety on reading performance and factors that influence reading anxiety carry essential applications in the field of FL teaching. With a better understanding of the importance of reading anxiety, there might be significant inferences in teachers' perspectives on the reading process and the practice of reading instructions. For instance, warning students about the possibility of anxiety in the reading process may be a helpful course of action to alleviate some amount of anxiety. Aside from that, other teaching measures, such as providing reading strategy instruction to help students overcome unrealistic expectations for understanding everything they read, assisting students to develop reading processes that are more effective than the word-to-word translation, and careful selection of texts to ensure materials are at an appropriate level of difficulty, can be considered as well to help students cope with anxiety-producing situations. As Zhao, A., Guo, Y., & Dynia, J. (2013) stated in their study of foreign language reading anxiety, participants revealed that they like group reading because other students provided necessary help when a word traps them and because they relate to other students I the FL learning difficulties. Hence, instructors should use some group reading activities to reduce students' reading anxiety.

### CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the results of this study suggest a significant difference between the anxiety level of the pupils before and after the intervention. It reveals that the intervention effectively reduces the learners' anxiety level in reading the second language. The findings indicate that expressive writing as a teacher-pupil strategy can help reduce stress, encourage emotional processing, and promote self-discovery. Psychology Today suggested that "regular writing can reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety, and it can be used as a form of stress and emotional regulation." (https://www.healthline.com/health/benefits-of-journaling). To bridge the gap between the teachers and the learners, teachers should show empathy and must be able to build relationships of trust to open the door of communication between the teacher and the learners. With a better understanding of the importance of reading anxiety, there might be significant inferences in teachers' perspectives on the reading process and the practice of reading instructions.

### Fund

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