Exploring Language Learning Anxiety and Anxiety Reducing Strategies of the First-year Students Taking a Foreign Language Course

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Abstract

Anxiety in the classroom is recognized as a negative factor that lessens the learner's proficiency. This study investigated undergraduate students' learning anxiety in a Japanese language course in a government university and examined strategies that students employed to reduce their anxiety. The instrument used for collecting the data was a five-rating scale questionnaire of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope, 1986). Data were collected from 116 first-year students enrolled in JP101 course in the first semester of 2013 academic year and analyzed by SPSS program using mean, standard deviation, Pearson Correlation Coefficient, and Chi-Square. The findings of the study revealed that students had moderate levels of learning anxiety and the use of anxiety reducing strategies. Four factors which were found to be related to students' learning anxiety comprised Japanese language proficiency, experience of learning Japanese language, experience of using Japanese language with native speakers, and experience of traveling to Japan. However, gender and the use of anxiety reducing strategies were found to have no statistical relationship with learning anxiety. The findings encouraged the instructors to enrich their awareness of students' language anxiety and carefully deal with those anxiety-provoking situations in the classroom.

Keywords: learning anxiety, anxiety reducing strategies, foreign language

Introduction

　　　　Studying language might be perceived difficult for some students. They feel worried and anxious in language classroom (Krashen, 2003). The nature of learning languages is different when compared with other subjects. According to Borg (2006), in foreign language teaching, the content and the process for learning the content are the same. In other words, the medium is language itself, and instruction requires interaction patterns such as conversing, discussion, and presentation. Organizing students to do the activities probably gives pressure to some students. With feelings of discomfort and insecurity, they find it difficult to share their opinions and participate in class discussions. These students are afraid of making mistakes, so they avoid doing or saying if they are not sure. Moreover, the task difficulty might be one of the factors leading to anxiety. Other factors such as teacher-students interactions in class and students' own accomplishment are the potential causes of students' second foreign language anxiety. Anxiety can be either facilitating or debilitating. Facilitating anxiety stimulates learners to adopt an approach attitude and is willing to confront the new learning task. Debilitating anxiety motivates learners to assume an avoidance attitude and therefore tends to escape from the learning task (Scovel, 1991).

　　　　As instructors who teach Japanese language courses at higher education level, we have noticed different learning styles of students while they are attempting to acquire and produce a foreign language. The anxiety or nervousness is ordinarily seen when the students are required to speak in class, and during exams and tests. When the students do have anxiety, it eventually leads them to dislike and lack of enthusiasm in learning. This feeling might have something to do with learning outcome. That is, anxiety might be one cause of failure. Therefore, many studies investigated students' learning anxiety and some concerned variables such as the relationship between language anxiety and language proficiency. Several researchers (Gardner, Tremblay, and Masgoret, 1997; and Sa-nguanpong, 2007) have found correlation between anxiety and proficiency. However, proficiency may not be related to tension in different context, and students

may experience anxiety because of other factors. In order to have clear understanding on students' nature, this study was conducted to examine the level of their anxiety, some factors that might be related to anxiety, and the use of anxiety reducing strategies. The first-year students were chosen in this study because they were new in the university, and Japanese language is also a new subject for them. Taking a Japanese course might be perceived difficult for them. With the findings and implications of this study, students and instructors can increase the awareness of foreign language anxiety in class. Accordingly, some better ways of dealing with foreign language anxiety can be adopted, and an enjoyable and effective language-learning environment can therefore be developed. This study reveals useful classroom information for instructors in the language department to find effective approaches, activities, learning tasks that help to create pleasant atmosphere.

Objectives of the Study

1. To investigate to what extent students have anxiety when they are taking Japanese classes

2. To find out students' use of anxiety reducing strategies

3. To study the factors which are related to learning anxiety in Japanese classes

Literature Review

Anxiety in Foreign Language Learning

According to the University of Cambridge Counseling Service (2005), anxiety is defined as a common response to threatening situation in both physical and emotional reactions; the degree of feeling anxious depends on individual past experiences, beliefs, and attitude. Anxiety in the classroom is mostly recognized in a negative factor that lessens the learner's proficiency due to the fact that under the anxious moment, it's difficult to think clearly. This concept was supported by MacIntyre, (1995: 96) who described how anxiety can occur in the language learning process as follows:

"Language learning is a cognitive activity that relies on encoding, storage, and retrieval processes, and anxiety can interfere with each of these by creating a divided attention scenario for anxious students. Anxious students are focused on both the task at hand and their reactions to it. For example, when responding to a question in a class, the anxious student is focused on answering the teacher's question and evaluating the social implications of the answer while giving it."

There are many types of anxiety, and there are particular characteristics of formal foreign language learning that hold the potential for provoking anxiety in learners who in other learning situations would not experience it (Andrade and Williams, 2009). One of them is state (situational) anxiety, which is nervousness or tension at a particular moment in response to some outside stimulus such as communication anxiety, which may occur when people interact verbally (Daly, 1991). Another type is fear of negative evaluation, which may be present when people worry about what others think of them (Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope, 1986). Anxiety was mainly related to fear of negative evaluation while speaking in front of others. In classrooms, a number of anxieties may be observed. Learners may feel cognitive tension when their expectations about the content and organization of a course are not met, and affective tension when there is unsatisfactory interaction with other learners or the instructor (Spielmann and Radnofsky, 2001). Other classroom anxieties are test anxiety, which is fear of poor performance on tests (Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope, 1986), and specific subject or task anxieties such as the nervousness and tension associated with grammar, listening, public speaking, reading, and writing (Arnold, 2000). This debilitative anxiety can lead to poor performance and low achievement. In contrast to this debilitative anxiety, there is indication that a certain degree of anxiety may be beneficial to some learners (Scovel, 1991). Anxiety can be facilitative when it motivates learners to study harder. As a result, learners will make stronger efforts to perform better on classroom tasks.

Factors Related to Language Learning Anxiety

Many factors are the potential sources of students' foreign language

anxiety. One factor that can be used to determine when measuring anxiety is language proficiency. Regarding the first factor "language proficiency," Yu-ching and Wu (2004) conducted a study to investigate foreign language anxiety of EFL 601 elementary school fifth graders students from the 18 classes in Taiwan. In this study, questionnaires, interviews, classroom observations, and document collection were applied as instruments. The finding indicated that low proficiency, fear of negative evaluation, competition of games, anxious personality, and pressure from students themselves and their parents were the five sources of language anxiety. In addition, tests, speaking in front of others, spelling, incomprehensible input, and speaking to native speakers were the five anxiety-provoking situations. Hashimoto's (2002) studied 56 Japanese students at a university in the United States and found that anxiety exerted a strong influence on perceived competence and negatively affected their willingness to communicate. In another study, low proficient students tended to be anxious and nervous in class because of their restriction of language use while students with high anxiety seemed to have low achievement too (Sa-nguanpong, 2007). In other words, the more proficiency learners gained, the less anxiety they experienced. In Wu's work (2007), there were significant differences between foreign language anxiety and language proficiency in both types of instruction. High-anxiety level students tended to have low language proficiency, and vice versa. Kondo & Yang (2003) employed the language anxiety scale to investigate the students' anxiety of 148 universities in Japan. The study collected the data through a questionnaire and a speaking test. The finding showed that classroom anxiety was associated with three main factors: low proficiency, speaking activities, and fear of negative evaluation by classmates. Similarly, Zhao (2007) conducted a study to explore high school students' English learning anxiety in 115 Chinese students in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classrooms in China. The results indicated that students indeed had comparatively high anxiety in English learning, and high anxiety played a somewhat debilitative role in high school students' language learning.

Gender is another factor that might relate students' anxiety. Overall,

females were reported to be more subject to test anxiety than males; and females experienced higher worry than emotionality, while males reported little difference between the two dimensions (Everson, Millsap, and Rodriquez, 1991; cited in Rezzadeh and Tavakdi (2009). In contrast, the factor of gender examined in the study of Zhao (2007) showed that males had higher anxiety of English classes than females.

In addition, having experiences of using Japanese language would effectively reduce their anxiety of speaking to native Japanese speakers. From those experiences, they could expect problems they would face. As a result, they were able to handle any difficult situations which might occur. As to those who had no experiences of speaking to native Japanese speakers, they would be very excited and nervous when they were to communicate in Japanese. This phenomenon implies that the best way to reduce the learners' fear is to offer more chances to speak to native speakers (Yu Ching & Wu, 2004). Similarly, Tajima (2002) found in a study of 84 Japanese university students that differences in anxiety levels between English majors and non-majors, and students whose previous experiences included having native-speaking friends, traveling abroad, and passing standardized achievement tests. Wu (2007) did a study to find out how the factor of language learning experience correlated with foreign language anxiety of 519 Taiwanese elementary school students taught in traditional EFL instruction versus bilingual instruction. The findings revealed that there were significant differences in foreign language anxiety for elementary school students involved in traditional EFL instruction versus bilingual instruction. Students in bilingual instruction had lower foreign language anxiety than students in traditional EFL instruction.

Moreover, there was a study conducted by Kwan (2004) who examined the relationship between the sources of language anxiety (communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation and general anxiety towards English) and the motivational intensity of English learning among 117 secondary schools students. The levels of sources of language anxiety were measured and compared with the level of motivational intensity of English learning. The results indicated that students had

moderate levels of language anxiety of English learning and motivational intensity of English learning. Language anxiety and motivational intensity of English learning were moderately and negatively correlated. The results imply that language anxiety in fact weakened the motivational level of second language learners slightly.

Methods

1. Respondents

The respondents in this study were 116 first-year students in a government university in Thailand. They were enrolled in JP101 course in the first semester of 2013 academic year. The questionnaire was administered in 4 classes during class time by instructors in week 5. The students were informed that the survey would gather information about how they felt in their Japanese language class and would have no effect on their grade. The questionnaire was anonymous and did not reveal any information that could be used to identify individual students.

2. Instrument

This study employed a questionnaire comprising three main parts as follows:

The first part asked about the students' personal data such as gender, learning experience of Japanese language, experience of using Japanese language with native speakers, experience of traveling to Japan. The second part was a questionnaire of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) measurement created by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986). The FLCAS is a standardized 33-item survey that assesses levels of anxiety related to three areas: (1) communication apprehension, (2) test anxiety, and (3) fear of negative evaluation. It was in a five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree and strongly disagree consisting of 33 items. The items 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 29, 30, 31 and 33 are positive statements; therefore, strongly agree rates 5 points, agree is 4 points, neither agree nor disagree is 3 points, disagree is 2 points and strongly disagree is 1 point. In contrast, items 2, 5, 8, 11, 14, 18, 22, 28,

and 32, which were negatively keyed for anxiety, were calculated using a 5-point scale with 1 being "strongly agree" and 5 being "strongly disagree" (e.g., Item 2 "I don't worry about making mistakes in my English class."). Higher scores indicated a higher level of anxiety. The third part was a 10-item questionnaire exploring the use of strategies to reduce anxiety in learning foreign language.

Constructing the Questionnaire

Regarding the FLCAS questionnaire, the researcher translated an original English version of the questionnaire into Thai in order to avoid misinterpretation when the respondents did the questionnaire. To be sure that all translated items remained intact, three experts specialized in language teaching were asked to check the meaning in Thai. A meeting was conducted to review, reconcile and harmonize the translation. After that, the backward translation technique was used to ensure its accuracy. This reconciled translation was then translated back into English by two translators. Next, the researcher together with the three experts reviewed and compared the backward translation with the original English questionnaire. In addition, the draft of a questionnaire in the third part was examined by three experts specialized in TEFL. They were asked to rate the relevance of all items to its category by means of IOC: Index of item objective congruence with the score of +1, 0,-1 assessment. Then the scores were taken to calculate for its value. The items containing IOC value from 0.50-1.00 were acceptable. The items passed the criteria with value between 0.66-1.00. After that the questionnaire was piloted with 40 undergraduate students who were not the target group and calculated for proper reliability value by Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The reliability value was .821 implying that the questionnaire is reliable.

3. Data Analysis

The Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) program was used to record and analyze the received data. Personal data of the respondents were calculated for frequency and percentage. The FLCAS score and the use of anxiety reducing strategies were analyzed quantitatively for means and standard deviations and presented in tables based on the following

ranges: 1.00-1.50 = very low, 1.51-2.50 = low, 2.51-3.50 = moderate, 3.51-4.50 = high, 4.51-5.00 = very high. Pearson's Correlation was applied to find out the relationship between anxiety and two factors: grade received in the Japanese course and the use of anxiety reducing strategies. Chi-Square was used to find out the relationship between anxiety and four factors: gender, experience of learning Japanese language, experience of using Japanese with native speakers, and experience of traveling to Japan.

Results

Part 1: Personal Data

Table 1: Personal Information of Respondents Shown in Frequency and Percentage

	Frequency	Percentage
1. Gender		
- Male	23	19.8
- Female	93	80.2
2. Japanese grade (JP101)		
- F	9	7.8
- D	13	11.2
- D+	18	15.5
- C	23	19.8
- C+	19	16.4
- B	11	9.5
- B+	12	10.3
- A	11	9.5

Table 1: Continued

	Frequency	Percentage
3. Experience of using Japanese with native speakers		
- Yes	56	48.3
- No	60	51.7
4. Experience of learning Japanese language		
- Yes	86	74.1
- No	30	25.9
5. Experience of traveling to Japan		
- Yes	21	18.1
- No	95	81.9

Demographic characteristics of the overall sample are presented in Table 1. 19.8% of the surveyed respondents were male while 80.2 % were female. In terms of the grade that students received in JP 101 course, 16.4% of them got C+ while 19.8% of the respondents got grade C and 15.5% got D+. In addition, the table illustrates that 18.1% of them had a good opportunity to travel to Japan. About half of them (48.3%) had a chance to use Japanese language with native speakers while 51.7% never did. Interestingly, 74.1% of them had studied Japanese language while 25.9 % had never taken a Japanese course before.

Part 2: Levels of Students' Learning Anxiety in Japanese Language Classes
Research Question 1: To what extent did the students have anxiety when they were studying in a Japanese language class?

To answer this question, the data of students' learning anxiety

were analyzed by mean and standard deviation and the results were presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of Students' Learning Anxiety

	Items	Mean	SD	Meaning
1	I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my language class.	3.00	1.04	moderate
2	I don't worry about making mistakes in language class.	3.02	1.07	moderate
3	I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in language class.	3.22	1.09	moderate
4	It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in the foreign class.	2.85	1.06	moderate
5	It wouldn't bother me at all to take more foreign language class.	1.83	1.03	low
6	During language class, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course.	2.07	.82	low
7	I keep thinking that other students are better at language than me.	3.92	.98	high
8	I am usually at ease during test in my language class.	3.55	1.00	high
9	I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class.	3.81	.90	high

Table 2: Continued

	Items	Mean	SD	Meaning
10	I worry about the consequence of failing my foreign language class.	4.29	.97	high
11	I don't understand why some people get so upset over foreign languages.	3.19	.99	moderate
12	In language class I can get so nervous I forget things I know.	2.36	.93	low
13	It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my language class.	2.97	.97	moderate
14	I would not be nervous speaking the foreign language with native speakers.	3.26	1.01	moderate
15	I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting.	2.63	1.20	moderate
16	Even if I am well prepared for language class, I feel anxious about it.	3.12	1.14	moderate
17	I often feel like not going to my language class.	1.72	.81	low
18	I feel confident when I speak in foreign language class.	3.15	.87	moderate
19	I'm afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.	4.30	.74	high
20	I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in language class.	3.55	1.02	high
21	The more I study for a language test, the more confused I get.	2.52	1.02	moderate

Table 2: Continued

	Items	Mean	SD	Meaning
22	I don't feel pressure to prepare very well for language class.	2.70	1.04	moderate
23	I always feel that the other students speak the foreign language better than I do.	3.88	.94	high
24	I feel very self-conscious about speaking the foreign language in front of other students.	3.68	.93	high
25	Language class moves so quickly I worry about getting behind.	3.07	1.12	moderate
26	I feel more tense and nervous in my language class than in my other class.	2.72	1.24	moderate
27	I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my language class.	2.82	1.06	moderate
28	When I'm on my way to language class, I feel very sure and relaxed.	2.93	.89	moderate
29	I get nervous when I don't under-stand every word the language teacher says.	3.46	1.04	moderate
30	I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules you have to learn to speak a foreign language.	2.94	.99	moderate
31	I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language.	2.55	1.17	moderate

Table 2: Continued

	Items	Mean	SD	Meaning
32	I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of the foreign language.	3.20	.85	moderate
33	I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance.	3.53	.92	high
	Total	**3.08**	**.51**	**moderate**

From Table 2, the overall mean score of language learning anxiety was at a moderate level ($\bar{x}$ = 3.08). Among 33 items of anxiety, the third highest mean scores were "I'm afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make," "I worry about the consequence of failing my foreign language class," and "I keep thinking that other students are better at language than me." respectively ($\bar{x}$ = 4.30, 4.29, and 3.92). These items were at a high level. The lowest mean score was no. 17 ("I often feel like not going to my language class.") which was at a low level ($\bar{x}$ = 1.72).

Part 3: Levels of Students' Use of Anxiety Reducing Strategies
Research Question 2: To what extent did the students use anxiety reducing strategies when they experienced learning anxiety in a Japanese language class?

In this case, the data of students' use of anxiety reducing strategies were analyzed by mean and standard deviation, and the results were presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation of Students' Use of Anxiety Reducing Strategies

	Strategies Used to Reduce Anxiety	Mean	S.D.	Meaning
1	Discuss your feelings with other students.	3.25	1.20	moderate
2	Tell your teacher how you feel.	1.64	.83	low
3	Do something fun and relaxing before attending the class.	2.92	1.24	moderate
4	Make sure you are prepared before attending the class.	3.28	.96	moderate
5	Attend every class to learn a little bit every week.	4.58	.65	very high
6	Seek out opportunities to practice the foreign language.	3.49	.88	moderate
7	Try to take risks in language learning such as guessing meaning of words or trying to speak in class.	4.03	.97	high
8	Remember that error is a natural part of language learning.	2.82	1.12	moderate
9	Ask friends or ask for help from friends.	3.87	1.05	high
10	Take additional English courses in the tutorial school or with a person.	2.44	1.37	low
	Total	**3.23**	**.47**	**moderate**

The student's use of anxiety reducing strategies was also presented in mean and standard deviation. From Table 3, the overall mean score was at a moderate level ($\bar{x}$ = 3.23). Among 10 anxiety reducing strategies, the third highest strategies students used were "Attend every

classtolearnalittlebiteveryweek,""Trytotakerisksinlanguagelearningsuchas guessing meaning of words or trying to speak in class", and "Ask friends or ask for help from friends," respectively ($\bar{x}$ = 4.58, 4.03 and 3.87). These strategies were at very high and high levels. The lowest mean score was no. 2. (Tell your teacher how you feel), which was at a very low level ($\bar{x}$ = 1.64).

Part 4: Relationships between Some Factors and Learning Anxiety in a Japanese Language Class
Research Question 3: What factors are related to learning anxiety in a Japanese language class?

In this case, Pearson Correlation Coefficient and Chi-Square were used to find out the relationship between some factors and learning anxiety. The six factors which were investigated whether they had a relationship with the anxiety included Japanese grade, the use of anxiety reducing strategies, gender, experience of learning Japanese language, experience of using Japanese language with native speakers, and experience of traveling to Japan. The information was presented in Table 4-8.

Table 4: The Relationship between Learning Anxiety in a Japanese Language Class, Language Proficiency, and the Use of Anxiety Reducing Strategies

	Learning Anxiety	Using Anxiety Reducing Strategies	Japanese Grade
Learning Anxiety	-	-.002	-.328***
Using Anxiety Reducing Strategies	-	-	.040
Japanese Grade	-	-	-

*** P < .001

From Table 4, it was found that there was a negative relationship between students' anxiety and their Japanese proficiency (-.328, P = .000). This means that the higher language proficiency the students had, the less anxiety they experienced. However, the use of anxiety reducing strategies had no relationship with learning anxiety and Japanese proficiency.

In order to find the relationship between students' anxiety and other factors such as gender, experience of learning Japanese language, experience of using Japanese language with native speakers, and experience of traveling to Japan, the data of anxiety were transformed into three groups, namely high, moderate, and low based on the criteria of mean $\pm$ .5 SD. The mean score of anxiety was 3.08, and standard deviation was .51. As a result, three groups of anxiety could be separated as shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Students' Number and Percentage Shown in Three Groups of Anxiety

Group	Number	Percentage
Low	37	31.9
Moderate	37	31.9
High	42	36.2

When 116 students were grouped based on their scores, it was found that 37 students had a moderate level of anxiety, 37 students were in a low anxiety group, while 42 students had a high level of anxiety.

Table 6: Chi-Square Results for Gender and Learning Anxiety of Students

Gender	Anxiety				Chi-Sq.
	Low	Moderate	High	Total	
Male	11	6	6	23	3.397
	(47.8)	(26.1)	(26.1)	(100.0)	
Female	26	31	36	93	
	(28.0)	(33.3)	(38.7)	(100.0)	
Total	37	37	42	116	
	(31.9)	(31.9)	(36.2)	(100.0)	

Table 6 indicates that female students tended to have more anxiety than male students. That is, out of 93 female students, 36 had a high level of anxiety followed by moderate (31), and low (26). For the male students, 11 out of 23 had a low level of anxiety. The rest were at moderate and high levels (6,6). However, the result from a Chi-Square test might be assumed that gender was not related to learning anxiety ($\chi 2 = 3.397$, P = .183).

Table 7: Chi-Square Results for Students' Experience of Learning Japanese and Learning Anxiety

Experience of Learning Japanese	Anxiety				Chi-Sq.
	Low	Moderate	High	Total	
Yes	32	29	25	86	7.968*
	(37.2)	(33.7)	(29.1)	(100.0)	
No	5	8	17	30	
	(16.7)	(26.7)	(56.7)	(100.0)	
Total	37	37	42	116	
	(31.9)	(31.9)	(36.2)	(100.0)	

*P< .05

Table 7 shows that there was a relationship between language learning experience and learning anxiety at the significance level of .05 ($\chi 2 = 7.968$, P = .019). This means that students with learning experience of Japanese language tended to have less anxiety than those without experience. Students who had been studying Japanese language were found to have low anxiety the most (32), followed by moderate anxiety (29), and high anxiety (25). For students without prior knowledge of Japanese language, they were in the group of high anxiety the most (17), followed by moderate anxiety (8), and low anxiety (5).

Table 8: Chi-Square Results for Students' Experience of Using Japanese Language with Native Speakers and Learning Anxiety

Exp. of Using Language with Native Speakers	Anxiety				Chi-Sq.
	Low	Moderate	High	Total	
Yes	26 (46.4)	15 (26.8)	15 (26.8)	56 (100.0)	10.709*
No	11 (18.3)	22 (36.7)	27 (45.0)	60 (100.0)	
Total	37 (31.9)	37 (31.9)	42 (36.2)	116 (100.0)	

*P < .05

Table 8 shows that there was a relationship between experience of using Japanese language with native speakers and learning anxiety at the significance level of .05 ($\chi 2$ = 10.709, P = .005). Students with an experience of using Japanese language with native speakers could be put into three groups of anxiety as follows: 15 high-anxious, 15 moderate-anxious, and 26 low-anxious students. For students without an opportunity to use Japanese language with native speakers, they were separated into three groups as follows: 27 high-anxious, 22 moderate-anxious, and 11 low-anxious students. This means that students with experience of using Japanese language with native speakers tended to have less anxiety than those without experience.

Table 9: Chi-Square Results for Students' Experience of Traveling to Japan and Learning Anxiety

Experience of Traveling to Japan	Anxiety				Chi-Sq.
	Low	Moderate	High	Total	
Yes	12	5	4	21	7.735*
	(57.1)	(23.8)	(19.0)	(100.0)	
No	25	32	38	95	
	(26.3)	(33.7)	(40.0)	(100.0)	
Total	37	37	42	116	
	(31.9)	(31.9)	(36.2)	(100.0)	

Table 9 shows that there was a relationship between experience of traveling to Japan and learning anxiety at the significance level of .05 ($\chi2$ = 7.735, P = .021). This means that students who used to travel to Japan had less anxiety than those who did not have a chance to visit Japan. Students with experience of traveling to Japan were found to have low anxiety the most (12), followed by moderate anxiety (5), and high anxiety (4). For students without experience of visiting Japan, they were in the group of high anxiety the most (38), followed by moderate anxiety (32), and low anxiety (25).

Discussion

Finding that undergraduate students had a moderate level of language anxiety was in accordance with the research result of Kwan(2004) who found the moderate levels of students' anxiety too. This was probably because more than half of them had prior knowledge of Japanese language before they entered the university. Another reason may be from the adjustment of activities in the course to increase students' motivation to learn and involvement. Take a pair peer review as an example; it is one activity that helps to decrease students' anxiety in writing papers as well

as promote their collaboration and social interaction. This was believed to make them feel more comfortable and forget the feeling of working alone.

The ways some factors were found significantly related to learning anxiety, but some were not, can be discussed as follows. Based on the finding, Japanese proficiency had a negative relationship with students' language learning anxiety. Students with much anxiety might not do well in their learning. This relationship might be explained that foreign language anxiety has a particular characteristic due to the nature of subject itself (Borg, 2006), so language anxiety which interferes with the reception of comprehensible input might be related to overall learning outcome (Krashen, 2003). In addition, the data in this study were collected in a government university where competitive environment existed more than in a private university. The more students put effort and enthusiasm in their study, the more they experience anxiety. In this regard, instructors should not put too much pressure on students. To lessen students' learning anxiety, instructors may observe their performance in classes or ask them to give feedback on their learning problems. This finding can be supported by the result of Kwan's study (2004) on language anxiety and motivational intensity in language learning, stating that language anxiety weakens the motivational levels of second language learners. Moreover, many students could experience varied language anxiety that could affect their language proficiency. The result was also found to be in accordance with many previous studies (Yu-ching & Wu, 2004; Zhao, 2007; Kondo & Yang, 2003).

It is interesting to find out that students with opportunity of using Japanese with native speakers had lower anxiety than those without it. The finding is consistent with the previous study of Yu Ching & Wu (2004) who found that those without experience of speaking to native speakers would be very nervous if they spoke to native speakers. For those with experience of using Japanese language with native speakers, they could imagine and expect some problems they would face. This phenomenon implied that the best way to reduce the students' anxiety is to offer more chances to speak to native speakers. The result also showed that students

with good experience of learning Japanese language as well as having an opportunity to travel to Japan had less anxiety than those without these experiences. The finding was found to be in accordance with Tajima (2002) in that students having native-speaking friends and traveling abroad could better handle the difficult situation they were encountering. Therefore, it implies that prior experience can help them quickly learn, adopt and develop their language proficiency, so they are ready to cope with anxiety.

However, this study found that gender was not related to learning anxiety. That is, female students had similar anxiety to male students. This might be because both male and female students had to fulfill the same requirement of the course. Everyone needed to pay attention to the given tasks and assignments. The finding was found to be in contrast with the previous ones. For instance, females were reported to be more subject to anxiety than males (Rezzadeh & Tavakdi, 2009), and Zhao's (2007) found that males had higher anxiety of English classes than females.

Concerning correlation between learning anxiety and the use of anxiety reducing strategies of students, as the significance for these two factors was greater than .05, there appeared to be no statistically significant relationship. That is, anxiety was not related to the use of anxiety reducing strategies. This might be due to the fact that undergraduate students learned to adjust themselves in difficult situations. When they had a moderate level of anxiety, they also had a moderate level of strategy usage too. According to Scovel (1978), having a certain degree of anxiety can motivate students to learn and try in order to reach the goal. So, strategy usage might not be much necessary to them.

Conclusion

The implications of this exploratory study include an awareness that should be enhanced by both instructors and students. The findings encouraged the instructors to enrich their awareness of students' language anxiety and carefully deal with those anxiety-provoking situations. For example, to make them have a good perception of learning Japanese language, instructors need to provide variety to language learning and

create an environment for stimulating classroom activities to make students feel like participating in them. To encourage students to feel successful in using Japanese, instructors should avoid providing activities that enhance the chances for them to fail. They should be sure that the given activities and tasks are really suitable for the target group. In addition, if students understand that anxiety is a rather common problem in a foreign language classroom, they may realize that others may likely share the same fears and feelings of discomfort. It is better to make mistakes in order to acquire communication skills. In this case, familiarity with the language using can be created by instructors or students themselves. For example, students can expose themselves to communication with native speakers outside class. It enables them to use the target language more often and encourages communication with others in real-life situations. Although at first they may be worried and feel uncomfortable, they will become confident in using language with native speakers soon.

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