

# An Innovative Pedagogical Approach to Managing Japanese Language Anxiety Through Cognitive-Behavioral Strategies

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**Abstract**—This study investigates the prevalence and nature of Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) among Japanese language learners to inform the development of an innovative pedagogical framework grounded in Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) principles. Employing a mixed-methods sequential explanatory design, the research integrates quantitative survey data from 247 participants with qualitative in-depth interviews to provide a comprehensive understanding of anxiety dynamics. Findings indicate a significantly high prevalence of Japanese language anxiety, with nearly 80% of learners experiencing moderate to high levels—substantially higher than those typically reported in European language learning contexts. Communication Apprehension emerged as the most dominant component ( $M = 34.82$ ), particularly in classroom speaking situations and fear of mispronunciation. Fear of Negative Evaluation, strongly influenced by Japanese cultural and linguistic complexities such as keigo (honorific language) and perceived judgment from native speakers, also posed a significant challenge ( $M = 32.46$ ). Although Test Anxiety recorded the lowest mean score ( $M = 31.46$ ), 62.3% of respondents reported experiencing the “mind blank” phenomenon during examinations, significantly impairing academic performance. These findings provide essential insights for the design of CBT-based support materials and highlight the need to integrate anxiety management strategies into Japanese language pedagogy, promoting a more psychologically responsive and learner-centered instructional model.

**Index Terms**—Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA), Japanese language education, Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT), innovative pedagogy, learner-centered instruction

## I. INTRODUCTION

Foreign language anxiety (FLA) has been conceptualized as a situation-specific anxiety that manifests within particular language learning contexts (MacIntyre & Gardner, 2018). The hierarchical model proposed by these researchers distinguishes between trait anxiety, state anxiety, and situation-specific anxiety, with language anxiety falling into the latter category. This framework has been supported by longitudinal research demonstrating that anxiety levels can vary not only between individuals but also within the same individual across different learning contexts (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). Horwitz et al. (1986) define FLA as "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process." This anxiety can transform what should be an enjoyable learning experience into a stressful and demotivating one, thereby limiting students' potential (Dörnyei et al., 2015). In the context of language learning in Japan, silent classrooms are often attributed to student anxiety (Cutrone, 2012), which can transform potentially enjoyable learning experiences into stressful encounters, thereby limiting learners' potential and academic achievement.

Japanese language learning presents unique challenges that may exacerbate anxiety beyond levels typically observed in European language learning contexts. Recent research confirms that learners of Japanese have the highest foreign language anxiety levels compared to learners of other languages (Djafri & Wimbari, 2018). These challenges include the complexity of the writing system incorporating three scripts (hiragana, katakana, and kanji), grammatical structures fundamentally different from Indo-European languages, and intricate sociolinguistic aspects including honorific systems and cultural communication norms (Baldi & Cuzzolin, 2018). The complexity of the writing system, incorporating three distinct scripts with different functions and reading systems, creates cognitive overload that can trigger anxiety responses (Wang et al., 2022). Kanji anxiety has emerged as a specific phenomenon, with research demonstrating that

learners with higher anxiety levels exhibit inefficient cognitive processing patterns during reading tasks (Mori & Mori, 2011).

The Japanese honorific system (*keigo*) represents another significant source of anxiety, as it requires not only grammatical knowledge but also sophisticated understanding of social hierarchies and contextual appropriateness (Pizziconi, 2011). Ethnographic studies have revealed that uncertainty regarding *keigo* usage contributes substantially to communication apprehension, particularly in interactions with native speakers (Shen et al., 2019). Cultural factors also play a crucial role in Japanese language anxiety. The concept of face (*mentsu*) and the emphasis on group harmony can create additional pressure for learners from individualistic cultures, leading to cultural anxiety when attempting to adopt more indirect, group-oriented communicative norms (Morisaki & Gudykunst, 1994). Cross-cultural research has demonstrated positive correlations between cultural distance and anxiety levels among Japanese language learners (Toyama & Yamazaki, 2022).

Despite the well-documented challenges of Japanese language anxiety, traditional pedagogical approaches have been insufficient in addressing the psychological dimensions of language learning. Recent studies in higher education contexts have explored multifaceted perspectives on the causes, impacts, and coping strategies of foreign language anxiety from both learners' and instructors' viewpoints (Kianinezhad, 2024). This research highlights the importance of understanding the complexity of FLA within higher academic environments, where academic pressure and performance expectations can exacerbate learners' anxiety levels. These findings strengthen the argument that innovative, targeted interventions are necessary to address the specific psychological and cognitive challenges faced by Japanese language learners.

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) offers a promising and innovative framework for addressing language anxiety through its focus on the interconnected relationship between thoughts, emotions, and behaviors (Gosch, 2006). CBT has proven effective in addressing various forms of academic anxiety, with meta-analyses demonstrating large effect sizes for CBT interventions in educational contexts (Mursaleen, 2025). The cognitive model underlying CBT explains how cognitive distortions contribute to anxiety through dysfunctional thought patterns and maladaptive behaviors (David & Szentagotai, 2006). In language learning contexts, these might include beliefs such as "I must speak perfectly or I will embarrass myself" or "Making mistakes means I'm not good at languages".

Recent research demonstrates that CBT techniques can be effectively used to help learners overcome feelings of anxiety and lack of confidence in speaking foreign languages, particularly within Japanese higher education contexts (Curry et al., 2020). The CBT model identifies negative automatic thoughts, dysfunctional assumptions, and core beliefs as key therapeutic targets, making it particularly suitable for addressing the cognitive distortions that contribute to language anxiety. Although CBT applications in language anxiety contexts remain limited, preliminary studies have shown promising results. Baroi and Muhammad (2024) implemented a CBT-based intervention with 45 English language learners, finding significant reductions in FLCAS scores after eight intervention sessions. However, the study's small sample size and lack of long-term follow-up highlight the need for more comprehensive research in this area.

Cultural adaptation of CBT for Japanese contexts has become an emerging area of research, with recent studies exploring family CBT programs for anxiety disorders and school-based prevention programs for anxiety and depression (Kato et al., 2022). Additionally, research on the feasibility of internet-based CBT (ICBT) programs for anxiety disorders in Japan demonstrates potential accessible solutions for addressing therapist shortages and improving intervention accessibility (Kuribayashi, 2019). These developments indicate that CBT can be effectively adapted for Japanese cultural contexts and provide a solid foundation for developing innovative CBT-based pedagogical materials for Japanese language learners.

The development of CBT-based support materials requires systematic integration of learning principles with therapeutic techniques (Cucciare, 2008). Effective materials should include psychoeducation about anxiety, skill-building exercises, real-world practice opportunities, and relapse prevention strategies (Wright, 2017). Recent advances in technology have opened new possibilities for interactive and accessible CBT interventions, with internet-based CBT showing effectiveness comparable to face-to-face therapy (Wright et al., 2019), making this approach particularly suitable for innovative pedagogical applications in language education.

This study aims to develop an innovative pedagogical approach by designing CBT-based support materials specifically tailored for managing Japanese language anxiety. As a foundational step, this research focuses on identifying emotions and thoughts associated with speaking anxiety among Japanese learners. The study operates on the following theoretical assumptions:

1. Language anxiety is a multidimensional phenomenon involving cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects.
2. Cognitive processes (automatic thoughts, assumptions, core beliefs) play a central role in the development and persistence of anxiety.
3. Self-efficacy beliefs and coping strategies influence how individuals respond to challenging learning situations.
4. Anxiety can disrupt essential cognitive processes for effective language acquisition.
5. Understanding these processes can inform the development of effective, innovative CBT-based pedagogical materials.

This integrated theoretical model will guide research instrumentation, data analysis, and the design of tailored CBT-

based materials that represent an innovative pedagogical approach to managing Japanese language anxiety through cognitive-behavioral strategies.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Foreign Language Anxiety Theory

Foreign language anxiety has been conceptualized as a situation-specific anxiety that manifests within particular language learning contexts (Zheng, 2008). The hierarchical model proposed by these researchers distinguishes between trait anxiety, state anxiety, and situation-specific anxiety, with language anxiety falling into the latter category. This framework has been supported by longitudinal research demonstrating that anxiety levels can vary not only between individuals but also within the same individual across different learning contexts (Grant, 2023).

The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz et al. (1986) identifies three core components: communication apprehension (fear of speaking with others), test anxiety (fear of academic evaluation), and fear of negative evaluation (anxiety over being judged by others). A comprehensive meta-analysis by El Shazly (2021) examining 136 studies with 17,728 participants confirmed that language anxiety has a significant negative impact on learning outcomes ( $r = -.36$ ), with stronger effects on productive skills compared to receptive skills.

### B. Japanese Language-Specific Anxiety

Japanese language learning presents unique anxiety-provoking characteristics that distinguish it from European language learning contexts. The complexity of the writing system, incorporating three distinct scripts with different functions and reading systems, creates cognitive overload that can trigger anxiety responses (Speechly, 2019). Kanji anxiety has emerged as a specific phenomenon, with research demonstrating that learners with higher anxiety levels exhibit inefficient cognitive processing patterns during reading tasks (Miyanaga, 2007).

The Japanese honorific system (keigo) represents another significant source of anxiety, as it requires not only grammatical knowledge but also sophisticated understanding of social hierarchies and contextual appropriateness (Pizziconi, 2011). Ethnographic studies have revealed that uncertainty regarding keigo usage contributes substantially to communication apprehension, particularly in interactions with native speakers (Takeuchi, 2023).

Cultural factors also play a crucial role in Japanese language anxiety. The concept of face (mentsu) and the emphasis on group harmony can create additional pressure for learners from individualistic cultures, leading to cultural anxiety when attempting to adopt more indirect, group-oriented communicative norms (Morisaki et al., 1994). Cross-cultural research has demonstrated positive correlations between cultural distance and anxiety levels among Japanese language learners (Toyama et al., 2022).

### C. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Applications

CBT has proven effective in addressing various forms of academic anxiety, with meta-analyses demonstrating large effect sizes for CBT interventions in educational contexts (Ergene, 2017). CBT has proven effective in addressing various forms of academic anxiety, with meta-analyses demonstrating large effect sizes for CBT interventions in educational contexts (Mursaleen, 2025). The cognitive model underlying CBT explains how cognitive distortions contribute to anxiety through dysfunctional thought patterns and maladaptive behaviors (David & Szentagotai, 2006). In language learning contexts, these might include beliefs such as "I must speak perfectly or I will embarrass myself" or "Making mistakes means I'm not good at languages".

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The development of CBT-based support materials requires systematic integration of learning principles with therapeutic techniques (Milne, 2017). Effective materials should include psychoeducation about anxiety, skill-building exercises, real-world practice opportunities, and relapse prevention strategies (Wright et al., 2016). Recent advances in technology have opened new possibilities for interactive and accessible CBT interventions, with internet-based CBT showing effectiveness comparable to face-to-face therapy (Luo et al., 2020).

## III. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a mixed-methods sequential explanatory design following the framework established by Haynes-Brown (2023). The research is designed to comprehensively investigate language anxiety among Japanese language learners while developing foundational data for Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)-based support materials.

The investigation unfolds across two complementary phases. The first phase consists of quantitative survey research

aimed at collecting standardized anxiety measurements and demographic data to establish prevalence patterns and correlational relationships. The second phase involves qualitative in-depth interviews that explore lived experiences, cognitive processes, and specific anxiety-triggering situations to inform CBT material development.

This design enables statistical generalization from the quantitative phase while providing rich contextual understanding through the qualitative phase, aligning perfectly with the study's dual objectives of measuring anxiety prevalence and understanding the underlying cognitive-behavioral patterns that drive these experiences. The quantitative phase targets 247 participants based on power analysis calculations using alpha levels of 0.05, beta of 0.80, and a medium effect size of  $r = 0.30$ . These calculations account for an anticipated 15% attrition rate and provide sufficient power for multiple regression analysis incorporating 8-10 predictors. Participant recruitment employs a multi-pronged approach designed to capture diverse learner populations. Educational partnerships form the primary recruitment avenue, establishing collaborations with Japanese language departments across universities and specialized language schools. Online outreach extends recruitment through Japanese learning forums, social media groups, and language exchange platforms where active learners congregate. Cultural organization partnerships provide access to community-based learners through Japanese cultural centers and community organizations. Finally, snowball sampling leverages referrals from initial participants to reach additional qualified individuals.

#### A. Data Collection Instruments

The quantitative phase employs five carefully selected instruments to capture different dimensions of language anxiety and related factors. The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), developed by Horwitz et al. (1986), serves as the primary anxiety measurement tool. This 33-item instrument uses a 5-point Likert scale to assess three key subscales: Communication Apprehension, Test Anxiety, and Fear of Negative Evaluation. The scale demonstrates excellent reliability with Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.93$  and established construct validity across multiple cultural contexts.

The Japanese Language Anxiety Scale (JLAS) represents a culturally adapted version of the FLCAS, incorporating 15 additional items specifically designed to capture Japan-specific anxiety dimensions including kanji anxiety, keigo (honorific language) anxiety, and cultural anxiety. This adapted instrument underwent rigorous pilot testing with 50 participants to assess reliability and received thorough review by Japanese language education experts to ensure cultural appropriateness and validity.

The Cognitive Anxiety Scale (CAS) measures automatic thoughts and cognitive distortions through 25 items that assess catastrophic thinking patterns, perfectionism, and self-doubt based on Clark and Beck (2016). Participants respond using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Never" to "Always," providing insight into the cognitive patterns underlying their anxiety experiences.

A comprehensive Demographic and Learning History Questionnaire captures essential background information through 35 structured questions covering personal demographics, learning background, motivation, and learning environment variables including age, gender, nationality, proficiency level, learning duration, and learning context.

The Academic Self-Efficacy Scale (ASES) rounds out the quantitative battery by measuring confidence in language learning abilities through 20 items on a 4-point scale. This instrument demonstrates strong reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.89$ ) and established predictive validity for academic performance outcomes.

The qualitative phase employs three complementary data collection approaches to capture the depth and complexity of anxiety experiences. The Semi-Structured Interview Protocol guides 60-90-minute conversations organized around four main sections with carefully crafted probing questions.

Section A explores anxiety experiences through questions like "Can you describe a time when you felt particularly anxious while learning Japanese?" and "How does anxiety affect your body and behavior?" Section B investigates cognitive patterns with inquiries such as "What do you tell yourself when you make a mistake in Japanese?" and "What assumptions do you have about what constitutes 'good' Japanese?" Section C identifies situational anxiety triggers through questions about specific learning situations and interactions with native speakers. Section D examines coping strategies and support needs, asking participants about current management approaches and desired support materials.

A Cognitive Behavioral Assessment Form provides structured documentation of cognitive-behavioral patterns through situation-thought-feeling-behavior mapping. Participants complete structured diary entries over a 2-week period, creating a detailed record of their anxiety experiences in real-world contexts.

#### B. Data Collection Procedures

Online survey administration utilizes the Qualtrics secure survey platform, offering a 25-30-minute completion experience with multi-language support and mobile-friendly design. Data security measures include encrypted transmission and anonymized responses to protect participant confidentiality.

The collection procedure begins with distributing recruitment materials containing survey links, followed by initial eligibility screening questions. Participants then complete a digital informed consent form detailing study information before proceeding to the self-administered questionnaire battery. The process concludes with debriefing that provides anxiety management resources and an optional email collection for Phase 2 participation.

Interview procedures accommodate participant preferences through video conference platforms (Zoom, <https://us04web.zoom.us/j/73099513731?pwd=dKns1aFauTRDSbiKbQJXSGB0I29fCy.1> Teams) or in-person meetings. All sessions include audio recording with explicit participant consent and professional transcription services to ensure

data accuracy.

The interview process involves flexible scheduling to accommodate diverse participant availability, pre-interview completion of demographic forms and anxiety assessments, semi-structured interviews following the established protocol, post-interview participant validation of key themes, and follow-up member checking with transcript summaries to ensure accuracy and completeness.

### C. Data Analysis Plan

Descriptive statistics provide foundational understanding through means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages, accompanied by normality testing and outlier identification. Missing data representing less than 5% of responses will be addressed through multiple imputation techniques.

The inferential statistics approach encompasses several analytical strategies. Correlation analysis examines Pearson correlations between anxiety measures and demographic variables, supplemented by point-biserial correlations for categorical variables. Analysis of variance procedures include one-way ANOVA testing for anxiety differences across proficiency levels and two-way ANOVA examining interactions between gender and proficiency in relation to anxiety levels.

Multiple regression analysis employs a hierarchical approach with anxiety as the dependent variable, entering demographics in Step 1, learning factors in Step 2, and cognitive factors in Step 3. This sequential approach allows examination of how different variable sets contribute to anxiety prediction.

## IV. RESULTS

This study involved 247 Japanese language learners with a fairly representative distribution. The majority of respondents were in their productive years, with 66.8% aged between 18-27 years. Notably, women dominated the sample at 60.3%, reflecting the general trend that women are more interested in learning Japanese language and culture.

The findings revealed that 57.5% of learners experienced moderate-level anxiety, with 21.5% experiencing high anxiety. The mean FLCAS score ( $M = 98.74$ ,  $SD = 22.18$ ) indicated higher anxiety levels compared to European language learning in general.

The normal distribution of anxiety (Skewness = 0.23) suggests that Japanese language anxiety is a phenomenon that is evenly distributed across the learner population, rather than occurring only in specific groups.

Based on the data analysis for identifying language anxiety among Japanese language learners, the following presents a comprehensive narrative of the research findings.

Descriptive statistical analysis of Japanese language anxiety components revealed interesting patterns in the score distribution across each dimension. The Communication Apprehension component showed the highest mean score ( $M = 34.82$ ,  $SD = 8.94$ ) with a score range of 18-55, indicating that communication anxiety represents the most dominant aspect of Japanese language anxiety. The high score variability ( $SD = 8.94$ ) demonstrates considerable individual differences in communication anxiety experiences among learners. The descriptive statistics for anxiety components and Japanese language anxiety components (mean  $\pm$  standard deviation) can be found in Table 1 and Figure 1.

TABLE 1  
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF ANXIETY COMPONENTS

Component	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Cronbach's $\alpha$
Communication Apprehension	34.82	8.94	18	55	0.87
Test Anxiety	31.46	9.12	15	50	0.83
Fear of Negative Evaluation	32.46	10.23	16	55	0.91
Total FLCAS	98.74	22.18	45	154	0.92



Figure 1. Components of Japanese Language Anxiety (Mean  $\pm$  Standard Deviation)

The Fear of Negative Evaluation component obtained a mean score of 32.46 (SD = 10.23) with a range of 16-55, ranking second in anxiety levels. The highest standard deviation (10.23) for this component indicates the greatest variability among respondents, showing that fear of negative evaluation varies considerably across individuals. This may be related to differences in self-confidence, previous learning experiences, or personality factors such as perfectionism. Test Anxiety showed the lowest mean score (M = 31.46, SD = 9.12) with a range of 15-50, indicating that test anxiety is relatively lower compared to the other two components. Nevertheless, the fairly high variability (SD = 9.12) suggests that some learners still experience significant levels of test anxiety. The total FLCAS score showed a mean of 98.74 (SD = 22.18) with a wide range (45-154), confirming substantial variability in Japanese language anxiety levels among learners. The excellent reliability ( $\alpha = 0.92$ ) for the total score provides confidence in the measurement consistency of the overall anxiety construct. The correlations between variables can be found in Table 2.

TABLE 2  
CORRELATION BETWEEN VARIABLES

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Total FLCAS	-					
2. Level of Learning	-.42**	-				
3. Duration of Study	-.34**	.56**	-			
4. Teacher Support	-.45**	.23*	.19*	-		
5. Intrinsic Motivation	-.38**	.41**	.33**	.28**	-	

Correlation analysis revealed significant relationships among research variables. FLCAS total score showed significant negative correlations with all learning variables, confirming that language anxiety reduces performance and motivation. The strongest correlation was between FLCAS and Cultural Anxiety ( $r = .67, p < .01$ ), indicating cultural aspects contribute most to overall language anxiety in Japanese learning. FLCAS negatively correlated with teacher support ( $r = -.45, p < .01$ ), showing instructor support significantly reduces anxiety. Learning level ( $r = -.42, p < .01$ ) and length of study ( $r = -.34, p < .01$ ) also negatively correlated with FLCAS, suggesting experience and exposure reduce anxiety. The negative correlation with intrinsic motivation ( $r = -.38, p < .01$ ) reveals a bidirectional relationship between anxiety and motivation. Learning support variables showed positive intercorrelations: learning level positively correlated with length of study ( $r = .56, p < .01$ ), teacher support ( $r = .23, p < .01$ ), and intrinsic motivation ( $r = .41, p < .01$ ), indicating mutual reinforcement. Cultural Anxiety negatively correlated with teacher support ( $r = -.39, p < .01$ ), intrinsic motivation ( $r = -.35, p < .01$ ), and length of study ( $r = -.22, p < .01$ ), representing a significant barrier to Japanese language learning. Anxiety comparison based on learning levels and skill level effects (ANOVA) are presented in Table 3 and Figure 2.

TABLE 3  
COMPARISON OF ANXIETY BASED ON LEARNING LEVELS

Level	N	Mean FLCAS	SD	95%CI	F	$p \eta^2$
Beginner	124	104.67	20.45	[101.07, 108.27]	12.85	< .001
Intermediate	97	95.21	22.78	[90.63, 99.79]		
Advanced	26	87.89	24.12	[78.17, 97.61]		

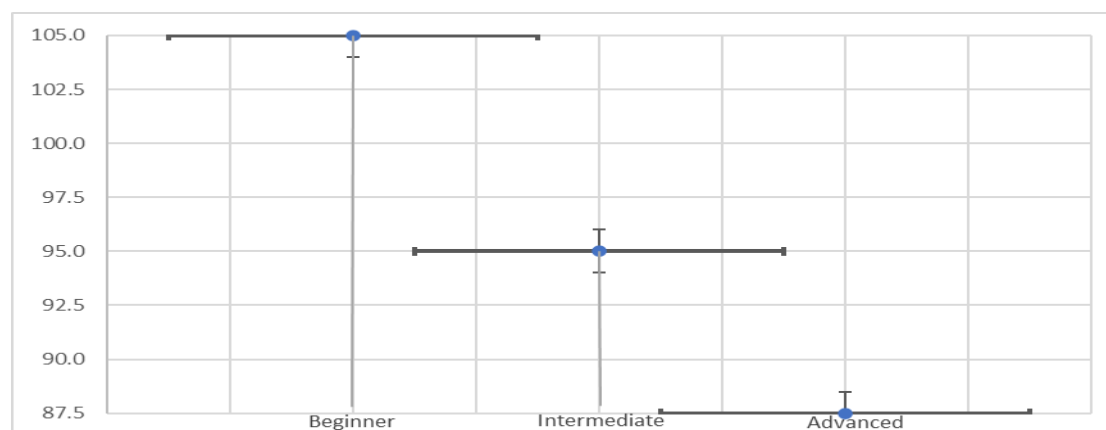


Figure 2. Effect of Skill Level on Anxiety (ANOVA)

One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) examining anxiety level differences based on learning proficiency revealed highly significant patterns consistent with second language acquisition theory. Results showed statistically significant differences among proficiency groups ( $F = 12.85, p < .001, \eta^2 = .095$ ), with a medium to large effect size, indicating that learning level has a substantial practical influence on Japanese language anxiety.

Beginner learners demonstrated the highest anxiety levels with a mean score of 104.67 (SD = 20.45, 95% CI [101.07, 108.27],  $n = 124$ ). The elevated anxiety at the beginner level can be explained through several theoretical and practical

factors. First, limited linguistic competence leaves beginner learners feeling they lack adequate control in communicative situations, thereby triggering high anxiety responses. Second, unfamiliarity with the complex Japanese linguistic system, including three writing systems (hiragana, katakana, kanji) and varied formality levels, creates cognitive overload that contributes to increased anxiety.

Intermediate learners showed a substantial reduction in anxiety with a mean score of 95.21 (SD = 22.78, 95% CI [90.63, 99.79],  $n = 97$ ). The approximately 9.46-point decrease from beginner to intermediate level indicates that increased linguistic competence and familiarity with the target language provides a significant positive impact on anxiety reduction. The slightly higher variability (SD = 22.78) at the intermediate level may reflect individual differences in the transition process from basic to intermediate proficiency, where some learners experience plateau effects or temporary anxiety spikes when encountering more advanced grammatical and pragmatic complexities.

Advanced learners exhibited the lowest anxiety levels with a mean score of 87.89 (SD = 24.12, 95% CI [78.17, 97.61],  $n = 26$ ). Although the sample size for advanced learners was relatively small, the 7.32-point decrease from intermediate to advanced level reinforces the hypothesis that increased proficiency contributes to anxiety reduction. The highest variability at the advanced level (SD = 24.12) may reflect greater heterogeneity in advanced learners' learning experiences, where some have reached a comfort zone while others still face challenges with sophisticated aspects such as cultural nuances and highly specific registers. The multiple regression analysis for anxiety prediction is presented in Table 4.

TABLE 4  
MULTIPLE REGRESSION MODEL FOR PREDICTING ANXIETY

Predictors	B	SE B	$\beta$	t	p	95% CI
Constants	142.67	8.45	-	16.88	< .001	[125.98, 159.36]
Teacher Support	-2.89	0.52	-.35	-5.57	< .001	[-3.91, -1.87]
Learning Level	-8.34	2.13	-.28	-3.92	< .001	[-12.54, -4.14]
Learning Duration	-3.45	1.34	-.19	-2.57	.002	[-6.09, -0.81]
Age	-0.78	0.45	-.12	-1.73	.085	[-1.67, 0.11]

The constant of 142.67 (SE = 8.45,  $t = 16.88$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [125.98, 159.36]) indicates baseline anxiety remains elevated without protective factors. Teacher support was the strongest predictor ( $\beta = -.35$ ,  $t = -5.57$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [-3.91, -1.87]), with each unit increase reducing FLCAS scores by 2.89 points, confirming teachers' central role in reducing language anxiety through linguistic and emotional support. Learning level showed substantial contribution ( $\beta = -.28$ ,  $t = -3.92$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [-12.54, -4.14]), reducing anxiety by 8.34 points per level increase, consistent with ANOVA findings that competence development enhances self-efficacy and control. Length of study was significant ( $\beta = -.19$ ,  $t = -2.57$ ,  $p = .002$ , 95% CI [-6.09, -0.81]) but modest (coefficient = -3.45), suggesting duration alone is insufficient without quality learning and proficiency progression. Age was non-significant ( $\beta = -.12$ ,  $t = -1.73$ ,  $p = .085$ , 95% CI [-1.67, 0.11]), indicating experiential factors matter more than demographic variables in determining Japanese language anxiety. The results of the qualitative analysis of anxiety themes are displayed in Table 5.

TABLE 5  
QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF ANXIETY THEMES

Main Theme	Sub-theme	Frequency (%)	Example Expression
Technical Anxiety	Kanji complexity	78.5%	Kanji is like a puzzle that never ends.
	Stroke order	67.2%	I'm afraid of writing it wrong because of the stroke order.
	Multiple readings	71.3%	One kanji can be read in so many ways—it's confusing.
Social Anxiety	Keigo usage	71.7%	I'm scared of being rude if I get keigo wrong.
	Cultural faux pas	54.3%	I'm afraid of breaking unwritten rules.
Academic Anxiety	Native speaker judgment	74.1%	I feel like I'm being watched because I'm a foreigner.
	Test performance	62.3%	My mind goes blank during tests even though I studied.
	Speaking assessment	68.4%	I get nervous when I have to present in front of the class.
	Comparison with peers	45.7%	I feel like I'm falling behind my classmates.

Technical anxiety related to the structural aspects of Japanese language shows remarkably high frequency, with kanji complexity dominating at 78.5% of all respondents. The expression "Kanji is like a puzzle that's never finished" reflects the ongoing frustration learners experience when confronting a logographic writing system containing thousands of characters with multiple readings and contextual meanings. This high percentage indicates that kanji isn't merely a technical challenge, but a persistent source of anxiety that can undermine long-term learning motivation.

Difficulty with multiple kanji readings reaches 71.3%, as reflected in the expression "One kanji can be read many different ways it's confusing." This phenomenon is unique to Japanese language learning, where a single character can have different on-yomi (Chinese readings) and kun-yomi (Japanese readings) depending on context. This complexity

creates high cognitive load and generates uncertainty that contributes to technical anxiety.

Stroke order in kanji writing also becomes a source of anxiety for 67.2% of respondents, with the expression "I'm afraid of writing incorrectly because of stroke order" showing that the motor and procedural aspects of kanji learning add another layer of complexity that can trigger anxiety. This concern relates not only to accuracy but also to cultural appropriateness, where writing that doesn't follow conventions can be perceived as lacking respect for Japanese culture.

## V. DISCUSSION

Social anxiety encompasses interpersonal interactions within Japanese cultural contexts. Keigo (honorific language) constitutes a significant anxiety source for 71.7% of respondents, extending beyond grammatical considerations to represent complex social hierarchies where errors may cause social offense. Fear of native speaker judgment affects 74.1% of participants, indicating heightened self-consciousness during native interactions. Cultural faux pas concerns 54.3% of respondents, demonstrating awareness of pragmatic complexity and implicit communicative rules.

Test performance anxiety affects 62.3% of respondents, manifesting as cognitive blocking during examinations despite adequate preparation. Speaking assessment triggers anxiety in 68.4% of participants, involving linguistic competence, pronunciation accuracy, and real-time processing. Comparative anxiety with peers affects 45.7%, generating competitive feelings and inadequacy perceptions. Test anxiety demonstrates strong negative correlation with academic achievement ( $r = -0.41$ ).

Japanese language anxiety prevalence is exceptionally high, with mean FLCAS score of 98.74. Approximately 80% of learners experience moderate to high anxiety—substantially higher than European language contexts (60-65%). Only 21.1% demonstrate low anxiety levels.

Communication anxiety recorded the highest score ( $M = 34.82$ ), with 68.4% reporting presentation anxiety and 71.3% expressing pronunciation concerns. Social anxiety ( $M = 32.46$ ) reflects substantial social pressure, with 74.1% fearing native speaker evaluation. Test anxiety ( $M = 31.46$ ), despite lowest scores, significantly impacts academic performance.

Younger learners (18-22 years) demonstrate significantly higher anxiety than older cohorts. Gender differences are pronounced: females show higher levels ( $M = 101.89$ ) versus males ( $M = 94.23$ ). An inverted U-pattern characterizes proficiency-anxiety relationships: beginners ( $M = 104.67$ ), intermediate ( $M = 95.21$ ), advanced ( $M = 87.89$ ). Advanced learners experience qualitatively different anxiety, including imposter syndrome and language attrition concerns.

Kanji writing system constitutes the primary anxiety source (78.5% of respondents): stroke order (87.1%), multiple readings (82.5%), and similar characters (71.6%). Keigo system generates anxiety in 71.7%: kenjougo application (82.1%), sonkeigo usage (78.5%), and contextual appropriateness with superiors (89.3%).

Beginners experience comprehensive anxiety: pronunciation (76.6%), writing systems (82.3%), basic communication (68.5% use avoidance), and over-preparation tendency (47.6%). Intermediate learners show peak Fear of Negative Evaluation ( $M = 35.12$ ), keigo concerns (69.1%), and learning plateau experiences (58.8%). Advanced learners demonstrate paradoxical anxiety: imposter syndrome (73.1%), cultural nuance concerns (65.4%), skill attrition fear (57.7%), with perfectionism correlation ( $r = 0.48$ ).

The findings of this study indicate that Japanese language anxiety is multifaceted and requires targeted pedagogical intervention. Since communication anxiety and fear of negative evaluation were the most dominant dimensions, Japanese language instruction should emphasize low-threat learning environments. Gradual exposure to speaking tasks through pair and small-group activities before whole-class performance can help reduce apprehension and build communicative confidence. Such scaffolding strategies are consistent with research emphasizing supportive classroom interaction to lower foreign language anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014).

The high level of anxiety related to keigo use and fear of social offense highlights the importance of explicit pragmatic instruction. Contextualized role-plays, situational dialogues, and authentic interaction tasks allow learners to practice hierarchical expressions in realistic communicative settings, reducing uncertainty in social language use. This approach aligns with studies on Japanese sociopragmatic complexity and honorific usage in intercultural communication (Pizziconi, 2011; Shen et al., 2024).

Kanji-related anxiety suggests the need for incremental and multisensory teaching strategies. Visual mnemonics, spaced repetition, and digital writing tools can lower cognitive load and enhance retention, particularly in managing the orthographic complexity of Japanese writing systems (Mori & Mori, 2011; Wang et al., 2024).

Test anxiety and its negative relationship with academic performance indicate that formative assessment strategies, such as low-stakes quizzes and reflective learning journals, should be incorporated to reduce performance pressure and support self-monitoring of progress (Zheng, 2008; Djafri & Wimbari, 2018).

Finally, the presence of perfectionism and imposter feelings among advanced learners supports the integration of CBT-informed activities, such as guided reflection and cognitive restructuring of negative self-beliefs. CBT-based techniques have been shown to be effective in managing anxiety and developing emotional self-regulation in educational contexts (David & Szentagotai, 2006; Curry et al., 2020; Baroi & Muhammad, 2024). Embedding these practices within Japanese language instruction can help learners manage anxiety while sustaining motivation.

Overall, integrating CBT-based principles into Japanese language pedagogy can enhance both linguistic competence and learner well-being, supporting the growing recognition of psychological factors in foreign language education

(Dewaele et al., 2019; Toyama & Yamazaki, 2022).

## VI. CONCLUSION

This study reveals that anxiety in Japanese language learning is a highly significant and widespread phenomenon. Among 247 participants, 79% experienced various levels of anxiety, with 57.5% reporting moderate anxiety and 21.5% experiencing high anxiety. The average Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) score of 98.74 substantially exceeds anxiety levels typically observed in European language learning, indicating that Japanese presents unique and complex psychological challenges. Communication apprehension emerged as the most dominant anxiety dimension with a mean score of 34.82, particularly manifesting in classroom speaking situations. This anxiety creates detrimental avoidance cycles where fear of mispronunciation leads learners to avoid speaking practice, which perpetuates the anxiety. Fear of negative evaluation extends beyond linguistic concerns to encompass worries about cultural appropriateness and social acceptance. Test anxiety demonstrates the "mind blank" phenomenon experienced by 62.3% of learners, creating a gap between possessed competence and demonstrated performance under evaluative pressure.

The kanji writing system and honorific language system (keigo) emerged as the most significant anxiety sources. 78.5% of learners experienced kanji-related anxiety due to stroke order complexity, motor precision requirements, and multiple readings per character. Regarding keigo, 82.1% struggled with humble language (kenjougo), 78.5% felt uncertain about respectful language (sonkeigo), and 89.3% experienced anxiety when speaking with higher-status individuals. These findings confirm that Japanese language learning is inseparable from cultural learning, requiring internalization of complex social hierarchies and contextual appropriateness. Regression analysis identified teacher support ( $\beta = -.35$ ) as the strongest predictor of anxiety reduction, emphasizing educators' crucial role in creating psychologically safe learning environments. Learning level ( $\beta = -.28$ ) indicates that genuine competence development, not merely time spent studying, provides the most reliable path to anxiety reduction. The theoretical framework reveals that anxiety operates through predictable cognitive patterns where Negative Automatic Thoughts trigger emotional responses that influence behavior, creating avoidance cycles that maintain initial fears. Understanding these cognitive patterns provides the foundation for developing targeted Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)-based interventions.

This research confirms that anxiety in Japanese language learning is not a character flaw but a predictable response to genuinely complex learning challenges. The linguistic complexity of the writing system, cultural intricacies of appropriate communication, and high-stakes nature of cross-cultural interaction create anxiety-inducing factors. However, understanding these challenges provides a roadmap for addressing them through supportive teaching approaches, anxiety-informed curriculum design, and CBT-based intervention strategies, transforming Japanese language learning from chronic stress into an empowering journey of personal and linguistic growth where learners can pursue their studies with confidence, enjoyment, and success.

This study establishes that anxiety in Japanese language learning is not a peripheral issue but a fundamental challenge shaped by linguistic complexity, sociocultural demands, and evaluative learning environments. The high prevalence of anxiety among learners confirms that Japanese language education must extend beyond grammatical and lexical instruction to address learners' psychological and emotional experiences. Anxiety, as revealed in this research, is not a personal deficiency but a predictable response to the demanding processes of mastering kanji, navigating keigo, and performing culturally appropriate communication.

Building on these diagnostic findings, this study proposes an innovative pedagogical framework that integrates Japanese language instruction with Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)-informed practices. This approach reconceptualizes the Japanese language classroom as a space for both linguistic development and emotional regulation. Structured communicative scaffolding and supportive feedback reduce communication apprehension, while explicit sociopragmatic instruction and contextualized role-play enable learners to practice keigo and social conventions without fear of social offense. Multisensory and incremental kanji instruction lowers cognitive load and supports sustainable character acquisition. Formative and low-stakes assessment practices further minimize test anxiety and promote reflective learning.

In addition to pedagogical strategies, the integration of CBT-based micro-interventions such as cognitive restructuring of negative self-beliefs, guided reflection, and anxiety-monitoring journals equips learners with practical tools to manage avoidance behaviors and negative automatic thoughts. By embedding these psychological supports into daily instruction, educators can foster emotionally safe classrooms where mistakes are reframed as learning opportunities and self-confidence replaces fear of evaluation.

This integrated pedagogical model transforms Japanese language learning from a potential source of chronic stress into a process of personal growth, cultural engagement, and communicative empowerment. The future of Japanese language education, therefore, lies in holistic and anxiety-sensitive pedagogy that recognizes learners as whole individuals cognitively, socially, and emotionally. Through such an approach, Japanese language learning can become not only a pathway to linguistic proficiency but also a foundation for lifelong resilience and intercultural competence.

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