

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL COMPARISON AND JAPANESE LANGUAGE ANXIETY AMONG JAPANESE LANGUAGE EDUCATION STUDENTS AT JAKARTA STATE UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the relationship between social comparison and Japanese language anxiety among students of the Japanese Language Education Program at Jakarta State University. This study employed a quantitative correlational approach with a sample of 73 respondents. Data were collected using the Iowa-Netherlands Comparison Orientation Measure (INCOM) to measure social comparison and the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) to measure Japanese language anxiety. The descriptive analysis showed that the respondents had a high level of social comparison and a high level of Japanese language anxiety. The results of the hypothesis test revealed a correlation coefficient of 0.611 with a significance value of 0.000. These findings indicate a positive and strong relationship between social comparison and Japanese language anxiety. In other words, the higher the level of social comparison among students, the higher their level of Japanese language anxiety.

Keywords: *Social Comparison; Japanese Language; Anxiety; FLCAS; INCOM*

INTRODUCTION

Language is the primary means through which people communicate, exchange ideas, and build relationships with others. However, using a language effectively involves more than simply memorizing vocabulary. It also requires the development of essential language skills. Tarigan (2008) states that language proficiency comprises four fundamental skills, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Mastery of these skills provides the foundation for effective communication, enabling individuals to comprehend and convey information successfully.

In practice, developing language skills at the university level, particularly in the context of foreign language learning, can be challenging. Humaera (2015) argues that university students encounter both cognitive and affective difficulties in learning a foreign language. From an affective perspective, students may experience fear of making mistakes, lack of self-confidence, and anxiety when using the target language during the learning process.

One of the most common affective issues identified in foreign language learning at the tertiary level is language anxiety. Horwitz et al. (1986) define foreign language anxiety as a form of anxiety that arises specifically within the context of foreign language learning in the classroom. This anxiety affects learners' communication strategies, leading them to avoid expressing complex or personally meaningful messages in the target language. Horwitz et al. (1986) further classify foreign language anxiety into three dimensions: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety.

The present study specifically focuses on language anxiety in Japanese language learning. Aida (1994) demonstrated that language anxiety is a phenomenon experienced by learners of Japanese. Likewise, Kitano (2001) explained that Japanese language anxiety shares many characteristics with foreign language anxiety in other languages. However, because Japanese presents unique linguistic challenges, the patterns of anxiety experienced by learners differ from those associated with several other foreign languages. These findings suggest that foreign language anxiety is also a relevant phenomenon in the context of Japanese language learning.

A number of previous studies have investigated the phenomenon of foreign language anxiety, including anxiety experienced by learners of Japanese. However, these studies have primarily focused on identifying and describing the levels of foreign language anxiety among learners. Research examining the affective factors associated with foreign language anxiety, particularly in the context of Japanese language learning, remains relatively limited.

One affective factor that may be associated with language anxiety is social comparison. Festinger (1954) defines social comparison as the process through which individuals evaluate themselves by comparing their abilities and opinions with those of others, particularly when objective standards are unavailable. In the context of language learning, social comparison is likely to occur because students are able to observe and compare their classmates' language abilities throughout the learning process. Buunk and Gibbons (2007) argue that social comparison is inherently a neutral process, and its consequences depend on how individuals interpret the outcomes of these comparisons.

Based on the review of previous studies, no research has specifically examined the relationship between social comparison and Japanese language anxiety among students enrolled in a Japanese Language Education program. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the level of social comparison, the level of Japanese language anxiety, and the relationship between social comparison and Japanese language anxiety among students of the Japanese Language Education Study Program at Jakarta State University.

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative approach using a correlational research design. The research sample consisted of 73 students enrolled in the Japanese Language Education Study Program at Jakarta State University. The sampling technique used was proportionate stratified random sampling. Data were collected using questionnaires. The social comparison variable was measured using the Iowa–Netherlands Comparison Orientation Measure (INCOM) developed by Gibbons and Buunk (1999). The Japanese language anxiety variable was measured using the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz et al. (1986).

Both instruments are standardized questionnaires originally developed in English and were translated into Indonesian. The translated versions were subsequently evaluated



for readability by a professional translator and 10 students from the Japanese Language Education Study Program who were not included in the research sample. The data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 25. Descriptive statistics were employed to determine the levels of social comparison and Japanese language anxiety. The relationship between social comparison and Japanese language anxiety was analyzed using the Pearson Product–Moment correlation test.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. LEVELS OF SOCIAL COMPARISON

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Social Comparison

N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
73	27	54	38.78	5.422

As shown in Table 1, the social comparison variable included data from 73 respondents. The observed scores ranged from 27 to 54, with a mean of 38.78 and a standard deviation of 5.422. The mean score indicates that the respondents generally exhibited a high level of social comparison. The standard deviation suggests a reasonable degree of variability in the data, indicating that the scores were normally distributed across respondents. To provide a more detailed description of the respondents' social comparison levels, the data were classified into five categories. The frequency distribution of each category is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Levels of Social Comparison

Level	Frequency	Percentage
Low	1	1.4%
Moderate	30	41.1%
High	35	47.9%
Very High	7	9.6%

As shown in Table 2, the distribution of social comparison levels among the respondents is presented. Among the 73 respondents, 1 respondent (1.4%) was categorized as having a low level of social comparison, while 30 respondents (41.1%) were classified as moderate. The high category consisted of the largest proportion, with 35 respondents (47.9%), followed by the very high category with 7 respondents (9.6%). These findings indicate that the majority of respondents demonstrated a high level of social comparison, with a cumulative percentage of 57.5% in the high and very high categories.

The findings support Festinger's (1954) Social Comparison Theory, which proposes that individuals possess an inherent drive to evaluate themselves by comparing their opinions and abilities with those of others, particularly when objective standards are unavailable. Gibbons and Buunk (1999) further explained that

social comparison is a psychological mechanism through which individuals assess their own characteristics and abilities in relation to others.

The high level of social comparison observed among the respondents can also be understood from a developmental perspective. University students are generally in the stage of emerging adulthood, during which they experience identity formation and adjustment to new social expectations (Hurlock, 1996; Jahja, 2011). Therefore, social comparison becomes an important process for self-evaluation and understanding one's position within a social environment. This interpretation is consistent with Yoshikawa and Sato (2010), who stated that social comparison serves different functions across developmental stages. While comparison during childhood primarily helps individuals adjust their behavior to social norms, comparison in adulthood is more strongly associated with self-evaluation.

Social comparison is considered a neutral psychological process (Buunk & Gibbons, 2007). Its impact depends on how individuals interpret the results of the comparison. When interpreted positively, social comparison may serve as a source of self-improvement and motivation. However, when interpreted negatively, it may lead individuals to focus on perceived shortcomings in relation to others. Furthermore, the dominant dimension of social comparison among the respondents is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Dominant Dimensions of Social Comparison

Ability Comparison	Opinion Comparison
3.41	3.64

As shown in Table 3, the opinion comparison dimension was more dominant than the ability comparison dimension. This finding indicates that students were more likely to compare their opinions than their abilities. According to Festinger (1954), opinion comparison tends to occur when objective standards are unavailable, causing individuals to seek validation by comparing their views with those of others. The dominance of this dimension is also consistent with the characteristics of emerging adulthood, a developmental period in which individuals continue to form personal values and adjust to their social environment (Hurlock, 1996; Jahja, 2011).

2. LEVELS OF JAPANESE LANGUAGE ANXIETY

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics of Japanese Language Anxiety

N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
73	72	152	115.34	16.785

As shown in Table 4, the Japanese language anxiety variable consisted of 73 respondents. The observed scores ranged from 72 to 152, with a mean score of 115.34 and a standard deviation of 16.785. The mean score indicates that the respondents generally demonstrated a high level of Japanese language anxiety. The standard deviation reflects a reasonable variation in respondents' Japanese language anxiety scores.



To further examine the distribution of Japanese language anxiety levels among respondents, the data were classified into several categories. The frequency distribution of these categories is presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Levels of Japanese Language Anxiety

Level	Frequency	Percentage
Low	1	1.4%
Moderate	30	41.1%
High	35	47.9%
Very High	7	9.6%

As shown in Table 5, the level of Japanese language anxiety among active students of the Japanese Language Education Study Program at Jakarta State University was generally categorized as high. Specifically, 47.9% of respondents were classified as having a high level of anxiety, while 9.6% were classified as very high, resulting in a cumulative percentage of 57.5%. These findings indicate that many students continue to experience significant anxiety during the process of learning Japanese in the classroom.

The findings are consistent with previous which reported that foreign language anxiety is commonly experienced by university students. This supports Horwitz et al.'s (1986) concept of foreign language anxiety as a situation-specific form of anxiety that arises during language learning. Drawing on Spielberger's (1966) concept of state anxiety, the anxiety experienced by the respondents is temporary rather than a stable personal characteristic. Furthermore, Kleinmann (1977) classified this type of anxiety as debilitating anxiety, which interferes with learning by directing students' attention toward fear of making mistakes rather than language acquisition.

According to Horwitz et al. (1986), foreign language anxiety differs from anxiety experienced in other academic subjects because language learning challenges learners' self-perceptions as competent communicators. The discrepancy between students' perceived communicative competence in their native language and their actual proficiency in Japanese contributes to heightened anxiety. These findings also support Aida (1994), who reported that higher levels of Japanese language anxiety are associated with lower learning performance. In addition, Motoda (2005) suggested that classroom anxiety is largely influenced by pressure to use Japanese accurately, high personal expectations, and insufficient interest in the learning process. Kawada (2024) further emphasized that classroom practices, including instructional clarity and error correction, can either increase or reduce students' anxiety depending on how mistakes are perceived.

The high level of Japanese language anxiety may also be explained by the developmental characteristics of emerging adulthood. During this stage, individuals experience emotional adjustment and increased sensitivity to academic and social demands (Hurlock, 1996; Jahja, 2011), making them more vulnerable to anxiety, particularly when they fear negative evaluation from others. Furthermore, the

dominant dimension of Japanese language anxiety among the respondents is presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Dominant Dimensions of Japanese Language Anxiety

Communication Apprehension	Fear of Negative Evaluation	Test Anxiety
3.57	3.65	3.34

Based on Table 6, the communication apprehension dimension obtained a mean score of 3.57, followed by fear of negative evaluation with a mean score of 3.65. Meanwhile, test anxiety obtained the lowest mean score of 3.34. The mean score of fear of negative evaluation was higher than those of communication apprehension and test anxiety. Therefore, it can be concluded that fear of negative evaluation was the dominant dimension of Japanese language anxiety among students of the Japanese Language Education Study Program at Jakarta State University. This suggests that students' anxiety is primarily driven by concerns about being negatively judged by lecturers and classmates. This finding is consistent with Horwitz et al. (1986) and Kitano (2001), who reported that students with greater fear of negative evaluation tend to experience higher levels of anxiety, perceive their language ability as inferior to that of their peers, and become more concerned about making mistakes during Japanese language learning.

3. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL COMPARISON AND JAPANESE LANGUAGE ANXIETY

Before conducting the Pearson Product Moment correlation test, normality and linearity tests were performed as prerequisite tests. The results of these tests are presented in Table 7 and Table 8.

Table 7. Normality Test

Nilai Signifikansi
0.078

Based on the results of the normality test presented in Table 7, the significance value obtained was 0.078. This value is greater than the predetermined significance level of 0.05. Therefore, the results indicate that the data in this study followed a normal distribution. Thus, the normality assumption was fulfilled, allowing the analysis to proceed using the Pearson Product Moment correlation test.

Table 8 Linearity Test

Deviation From Linearity

Based on Table 8, the significance value of Deviation from Linearity was 0.889. This value is greater than 0.05, indicating that the relationship between social comparison and Japanese language anxiety was linear. These results suggest that the pattern of relationship between the two variables remained within an acceptable linear form. Therefore, the linearity assumption in this study was fulfilled, allowing the analysis to proceed using the Pearson Product Moment correlation test.

After fulfilling the assumptions of normality and linearity, the analysis was continued using the Pearson Product Moment correlation test to examine the relationship between social comparison and Japanese language anxiety. This analysis was conducted to determine the significance, direction, and strength of the relationship between the two variables. The results of the Pearson Product Moment correlation test are presented in Table 9.

Table 9. Correlation Test

		SOCIAL COMPARISON	JAPANESE LANGUAGE ANXIETY
SOCIAL COMPARISON	Pearson Correlation	1	.611
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	73	73
JAPANESE LANGUAGE ANXIETY	Pearson Correlation	.611	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	73	73

Based on Table 9, the Pearson Product Moment correlation analysis showed a correlation coefficient of 0.611 with a significance value of 0.000. Since the significance value was lower than 0.05, H_0 was rejected and H_1 was accepted, indicating that there was a significant relationship between social comparison and Japanese language anxiety among students of the Japanese Language Education Study Program at Jakarta State University . The positive correlation coefficient indicates a direct relationship, meaning that higher levels of social comparison were associated with higher levels of Japanese language anxiety. Furthermore, the correlation coefficient of 0.611 indicates that the relationship between the two variables was strong.

These findings are consistent with previous studies by which emphasized the important role of affective factors in foreign language anxiety. Students with positive self-concepts, strong intrinsic motivation, and high self-efficacy tend to experience lower anxiety when facing academic challenges. Conversely, negative self-perceptions may increase emotional stress and anxiety. Although social comparison is considered a neutral process for self-evaluation (Festinger, 1954; Buunk & Gibbons, 2007), its effects depend on how individuals interpret the comparison. Adaptive social comparison can encourage motivation and healthy competition. while destructive comparison may reduce self-confidence and increase anxiety.

Social comparison is particularly relevant in language learning contexts because students often use their peers as reference points for evaluating their abilities and opinions. According to Festinger (1954), individuals tend to compare themselves with those who share similar characteristics, making classmates an ideal comparison group due to similarities in academic background, age range, and learning demands. In foreign language classrooms, students can easily observe their peers' abilities and use them as benchmarks for evaluating their own performance.

The relationship between social comparison and Japanese language anxiety can be explained through the role of self-concept. Destructive comparison may cause students to perceive their Japanese language abilities as inferior to those of their peers, resulting in negative self-concept and increased anxiety. This finding supports Kitano (2001), who stated that frequent comparisons with other learners can distort self-perceptions and increase anxiety due to excessive focus on perceived ability gaps. Similarly, Hidayati et al. (2014) reported that lower self-concept is associated with higher levels of anxiety.

Furthermore, based on the correlation analysis between the dimensions of social comparison and Japanese language anxiety, ability comparison was found to have the strongest relationship with Japanese language anxiety. This finding supports Schneider et al. (2025), who argued that ability comparison tends to produce negative emotional outcomes because it involves competition and perfectionistic standards. In contrast, opinion comparison is less associated with anxiety because it is more related to discussion and achieving shared understanding (Fakhri, 2017).

Among the dimensions of Japanese language anxiety, fear of negative evaluation showed the strongest relationship with social comparison. Continuous comparison increases students' awareness of their position relative to others, leading to concerns about being negatively judged when their language abilities are perceived as lower than their peers. Kitano (2001) further confirmed that fear of negative evaluation is positively and significantly associated with anxiety in Japanese language learning contexts.

The strongest relationship among the dimensions was found between ability comparison and fear of negative evaluation, with a correlation coefficient of 0.673, indicating a strong positive relationship. This result suggests that students who frequently compare their Japanese language abilities with their classmates tend to experience greater concern about receiving negative evaluations. Meanwhile, the weakest relationship was found between opinion comparison and fear of negative evaluation, with a correlation coefficient of 0.146, indicating a very weak positive relationship. These findings suggest that ability comparison is more closely related to Japanese language anxiety than opinion comparison, as it directly involves evaluations of individual competence and performance.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, the level of social comparison among students of the Japanese Language Education Study Program at Jakarta State University was categorized as high. This indicates that most students tend to evaluate themselves by comparing their abilities and characteristics with others, which is a common process among individuals in emerging adulthood. The level of Japanese language anxiety was also categorized as high, indicating that many students still experience psychological barriers during



Japanese language learning, particularly related to communication, academic evaluation, and fear of negative judgment.

The Pearson Product Moment correlation analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between social comparison and Japanese language anxiety ($r = 0.611$, $p < 0.05$). This means that higher levels of social comparison are associated with higher levels of Japanese language anxiety. Further analysis showed that ability comparison had the strongest relationship with Japanese language anxiety, while fear of negative evaluation was the anxiety dimension most strongly associated with social comparison.

Overall, this study demonstrates that social comparison is closely related to Japanese language anxiety through students' self-perceptions. Negative interpretations of comparison may reduce self-confidence and increase anxiety, whereas positive interpretations can encourage motivation and self-improvement. Therefore, affective factors such as self-concept, emotional regulation, and confidence play an important role in supporting successful Japanese language learning.

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