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A Conceptualization of Strategies for Reducing Students' Language Anxiety

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Abstract

Language anxiety has long been considered to have a negative effect on second language learning. Despite this, only a few studies have been conducted that have focused on possible strategies for reducing students' language anxiety. This current study aims to ascertain: (1) what strategies students believe to be effective in decreasing anxiety in an English classroom, (2) how the strategies can be classified, and (3) the correlations among the different factors. In this study, a questionnaire was compiled based on suggestions and proposals made for reducing language anxieties in previous studies. In addition, the degree of students' language anxiety was measured and the students were divided into groups according to anxiety level. The participants were 114 undergraduate non-English majors at a national university in Sapporo, Japan. Based on these data, item analysis, exploratory factor analysis and correlation analysis were conducted. The questionnaire items that attracted higher mean scores differed slightly from high-anxious students to low-anxious students. From a factor analysis, four factor structures were clarified: cooperation with others; building confidence; assistance from the teacher; and less-stressful teaching methods. The subscale scores were calculated according to these factor structures, and correlation analysis was conducted to compare the results of high-anxious students and low-anxious students. One of the findings from the results is that high-anxious students consider a teacher's assistance to be just as important as cooperation with others. The findings of this study can be applied in future studies in order to reduce the language anxiety of high-anxious students.

1. Introduction

Foreign language anxiety is “a distinct complex of self-conceptions, beliefs, feelings and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process” (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986, p. 128). As one of the factors that influence second language learning, language anxiety has received attention since the 1970s. It is a phenomenon specific to language learning, which could be independent of personality trait anxiety and state anxiety. According to MacIntyre and Gardner (1994), foreign language anxiety is the feeling of tension and apprehension specifically associated with second or foreign language contexts, including speaking, listening, and learning. Studies have shown that a high level of anxiety correlates to a negative outcome in language learning achievement (Aida, 1994; Gregersen, 2003; Horwitz, 2001; Horwitz et al., 1986). Aida (1994) points out that anxious students are more likely to receive lower grades than non-anxious students. MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) argue that those with anxiety find it more difficult to express their views and tend to underestimate their abilities, compared to relaxed students. From past research, it seems reasonable to say that anxious students tend to suffer from unsuccessful language learning. Therefore, reducing students’ language anxiety is a very urgent and important problem.

Compared to studies conducted on causes and effects of foreign language anxiety, studies focusing on how to reduce students’ anxiety are relatively few. The current study attempts to ascertain what strategies are perceived to be effective in order to reduce students’ anxiety in an English classroom in a Japanese context. In order to conceptualize the possible anxiety-reducing strategies, quantitative analyses including factor analysis were performed based on the responses of Japanese EFL learners. The findings are expected to provide a useful insight into decreasing students’ language anxiety.

2. Literature Review

Foreign language anxiety is an affective variable that troubles many students in many situations in foreign language classrooms. For example, students become very anxious when they have to speak in front of others (Young, 1990). Foreign language anxiety frequently shows up in test situations as well (Horwitz et al., 1986). Language anxiety may show up as “distortion of sounds, inability to reproduce the intonation and rhythm of the language, ‘freezing up’ when called on to perform, and forgetting words or phrases just learned or simply refusing to speak and remaining silent” (Young, 1991, p. 430). In addition, being ridiculed or receiving a harsh manner of correction by teachers may induce anxiety among students, that is, stressful classroom experiences lead to anxiety (Price, 1991).

Over the past few decades, many studies have been conducted by many researchers concerning foreign language anxiety. Studies on foreign language anxiety can be broadly classified as: identification of the sources of foreign language anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991; Young, 1990); investigation of the effects of foreign language anxiety on achievements (Aida, 1994; Gregersen, 2003; Saito & Samimy, 1996); and the relationships between foreign language anxiety and other learner factors (Liu & Jackson, 2008; Matsuda & Gobel, 2004; Price, 1991; Young, 1991). Through those studies, the rationale of language anxiety has been explored from many different angles.

When considering the effect of language anxiety on learning, it is necessary to consider the distinction between debilitating and facilitative anxiety (Kleinmann, 1977). According to MacIntyre (2002), facilitating anxiety can lead to better performance as a result of increased effort, but the more common use of the term “anxiety” is the debilitating sense in which the negative effects of anxiety are harmful to performance. Traditionally, a negative relationship between language anxiety and performance has been established in most studies, thus “it is intuitive that anxiety would inhibit the learning and/or production of a second language” (Horwitz, 2010, p. 154). MacIntyre (1999) mentions that low course grades and impaired performance on exams is one of the effects of language anxiety.

In spite of the empirical findings of language anxiety in the literature, there is still room for investigation in terms of how to reduce students’ language anxiety. Although there are a few studies that have cited strategies for decreasing students’ language anxiety, the number of such studies is limited. Therefore, more detailed research is called for.

One of the studies that considered strategies to help students cope with anxiety is Williams and Andrade (2008). They investigated the situations that provoke anxiety in EFL classes in Japanese universities, and sought to identify the ways in which students perceive and cope with different situations. According to the findings, most students said that they should have taken some form of action during the anxiety-provoking situation, but nearly the same number of students did not think they could positively influence the situation. Many of the students felt that they should do something, but at the same time they felt that whatever they might do would be ineffective (Williams & Andrade, 2008, pp. 187-188). They also found that these desperate feelings were especially true in students with a low perceived ability. It is notable that these students perceive themselves as low-ability learners, although they might, in fact, not have low ability. This leads to the conclusion that Williams and Andrade (2008) could not find possible ways of coping with anxiety from the responses of their participants. In particular, for those who lack confidence in their English ability and have no idea as to handle their anxiety, helping them overcome anxiety is necessary.

On the contrary, there are studies which found effective strategies for reducing

students' language anxiety. The study by Tsui (1996) is based on a classroom action research project, which aimed to examine teachers' perceptions of the factors that contribute to students' reticence and language anxiety. The teachers videotaped their lessons to review their problems while teaching, and then designed a list of strategies to overcome the problems. They tried out the strategies for four weeks, and at the end of the try-out period, they videotaped another lesson and evaluated the effectiveness of the strategies. As a result, successful and unsuccessful strategies became clear. "Lengthening wait time" after a question proved not to be effective, in fact, it exacerbated anxiety rather than alleviated it. As for "improving questioning techniques," some teachers reported success, but others report that it only made a minimal difference. The effective strategies were found to be: "accepting a variety of answers" (i.e. let students know there is not always a right answer), "peer support and group work" (i.e. allowing students to check their answers with their peers before presenting to the whole class), "focus on content" (i.e. activities that focus students on content rather than form), and "establishing good relationships" with students. Tsui (1996) concluded that the successful strategies minimized language anxiety and the unsuccessful ones exacerbated language anxiety. Thus it can be seen that helping students overcome their anxieties takes time.

Kondo and Yang (2004) gathered open-ended questionnaire responses from EFL students in Japan in order to collect a broad sample of tactics for coping with language anxiety. Seventy tactics were identified, which were divided into five clusters according to hierarchical cluster analysis. The five strategies were: "Preparation" (attempts at controlling the threat by improving studying strategies); "Relaxation" (tactics aiming at reducing somatic anxiety symptoms); "Positive Thinking" (suppressing problematic cognitive processes that underlie students' anxiety); "Peer Seeking" (students' willingness to look for other students who seem to have trouble controlling their anxiety); and "Resignation" (minimizing the impact of anxiety by refusing to face the problem). In addition, they measured the respondents' levels of anxiety using Kondo's English Language Classroom Anxiety Scale to identify the relationship between language anxiety and frequencies of strategy use. However, they could not find a significant relationship between anxiety scores and frequencies of the five strategies.

Williams and Andrade (2008) attempted to discover the strategies that students use for coping with anxiety, but they could not obtain satisfactory results. Tsui (1996) proposed strategies that could decrease students' anxiety from the teacher's perspective. These strategies might have been successful for these teachers, but it is not clear whether the students felt that those strategies were actually effective for them. Kondo and Yang (2004) found five categories of strategies that could be implemented by students themselves, but they did not find strategies containing teachers' roles. Therefore, this study aims to conceptualize strategies for reducing language anxiety,

which includes both student-oriented and teacher-oriented strategies. In this study, anxiety-reducing strategies were chosen from several previous studies (Crookall & Oxford, 1991; Oxford, 1999; Phillips, 1999; Young, 1999), which are based on empirical research proposals for alleviating students' anxiety, and itemized. Furthermore, by dividing students into high-anxious and low-anxious groups, it is expected that the differences in the anxiety-reducing strategies the students choose will be uncovered. For this purpose, the following research questions were proposed:

- (1) What kinds of strategies do students believe to be effective in reducing anxiety in an English classroom?
- (2) How could the anxiety-reducing strategies be classified?
- (3) How are the anxiety-reducing strategies correlated among factors?
- (4) What are the differences between high-anxious and low-anxious students?

3. Method

3.1 Participants

The participants in this study were 44 female and 70 male ($N=114$) first-year undergraduate students at a national university in Sapporo, Japan. The students were all taking general education courses, which include prospective humanities courses and science courses majors. The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 20 years old. General information about the participants is summarized in Table 1. All the participants took the English I class, which is a compulsory subject for first-year students, and all responses for the survey were gathered during this class period. Prior to the survey collection, all participants signed a consent form indicating that the participation was voluntary and that their responses to the survey will be used for research purposes only.

Table 1
General information about participants

Participants	Male	Female	Age range	Average age	The length of studying English (Year)
114	70	44	18-20	18.7	6-14

3.2 Instruments

The first survey instrument of the study was a questionnaire specifically developed concerning strategies for reducing language anxiety. The items were chosen

based on the proposals given in Crookall and Oxford (1991), Oxford (1999), Phillips (1999), and Young (1999). There are 20 items in all, and every item is to be answered on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The questionnaire asks students whether the statements are effective in decreasing their language anxieties (e.g., “My anxiety decreases if the competition in the classroom is reduced.”)

To measure the anxiety levels of the participants, the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) was administered. The FLCAS consists of 33 items related to three areas: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation (Horwitz et al., 1986). The participants were asked to answer each item on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). All the questionnaire items were translated into Japanese based on Nagahashi (2007), and the expressions of some items were modified by the author to clarify the intentions of the original FLCAS. Among the 33 items of FLCAS, nine items (2, 5, 8, 11, 14, 18, 22, 28, and 32) are negatively worded items. Therefore, these items were reverse scored when calculating the scores.

Finally, a third questionnaire was compiled to gather background information on the survey respondents such as age, gender, and number of years they had been studying English.

3.3 Procedure

The study was conducted in July 2015 during the first term of the academic year. The purpose of the survey was explained to the students beforehand, and they were then asked to sign a consent form stated a willingness to participate in the study. Survey instruments were distributed during the English I class, and were collected in class the following week. The return rate of the questionnaire survey was 80.5%. Among the responses to the questionnaires, six were incomplete and thus have been excluded. The final number of questionnaires constituting the collected data was 114.

3.4 Data analysis

The results of the study were computed using IBM SPSS Statistics 20. Item analysis was conducted in order to ascertain the questionnaire items associated with the highest mean scores, which were the possible strategies students believe to be effective in reducing language anxiety. To clarify the factor structures of strategies for reducing language anxiety, exploratory factor analysis (unweighted least square solution with promax rotation) was performed. The reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach's α . According to the factor structures revealed from factor analysis, subscale scores were also calculated. Using these subscale scores, correlation analysis was performed. The FLCAS scores were used to identify the anxiety levels of students, and the students were divided into two groups by median value.

4. Results and discussion

4.1 Anxiety levels

According to the FLCAS scores of the students, the mean, standard deviation and median were calculated. Most of the items were calculated due to the responses ranging from “Strongly Disagree” (1) to “Strongly Agree” (5). The scores for negatively worded items (2, 5, 8, 11, 14, 18, 22, 28, and 32), however, were calculated as 1 being “Strongly Agree” and 5 being “Strongly Disagree.” Therefore, the total score of the FLCAS indicated the language anxiety levels of students in the English classrooms. The higher the score, the more anxious the students felt. As FLCAS consists of 33 items, the possible highest score is 165, and the possible lowest score is 33. The overall results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2
Statistical analysis of the FLCAS (N=114)

<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mimimum</i>	<i>Median</i>	<i>Mode</i>	<i>Maximum</i>
98.72	20.43	53.00	101.00	102.00	161.00

As shown in Table 2, the mean score was 98.72, with a minimum score of 53.00 and a maximum score of 161.00. As the median was 101.00, this value was used in dividing the students into two groups: high-anxious students ($N=60$) and low-anxious students ($N=54$), as shown in Table 3.

Table 3
Groups according to the anxiety levels

<i>High-anxious</i>	<i>Low-anxious</i>	<i>Total</i>
60	54	114

4.2 Strategies for reducing language anxiety

An item analysis was conducted to clarify the questionnaire items that attracted the highest mean scores among high-anxious and low-anxious students. The purpose of this analysis was to work out strategies that students believe are effective in reducing anxiety.

The summarized results of the high-anxious students are shown in Table 4. The item that obtained the highest mean score among high-anxious students was Item 12, “I feel relieved if the English test follows the same format I was taught in class.” Anxious students were greatly concerned about their English exam, which might result from worries about their grades. Assuming so, it is quite natural for students to hope that the English test would be implemented in the same fashion they had been taught in class. There were three items that obtained the second-highest mean scores ($M=3.97$), items 13, 20 and 8. Item 8, which states “I feel more relaxed when making presentations in small groups than by myself,” is distinctive of high-anxious students. It seems that an oral presentation is one of the most anxiety-provoking tasks for those who generally feel anxious in the English classroom. In fact, according to Woodrow (2006), giving oral presentations and performing in front of classmates are the most reported stressors for in-class situations. Therefore, if there is someone else taking part in a presentation, anxiety may well decrease. In addition, the fifth item that was chosen by these students was, “My anxiety decreases when I am told it is OK to speak English with a less than perfect performance (Item 3).” This item is related to speech anxiety, and might stem from a misconception by high-anxious students that speaking English accurately is always necessary in the English classroom. Therefore, if they are told that speaking English with perfect performance is not required, their stress will decrease.

Table 4
Top five strategies for high-anxious students (N=60)

Rank	Questionnaire items	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1	12. I feel relieved if the English test follows the same format I was taught in class.	4.10	.81
2	13. My anxiety decreases if I prepare thoroughly for the English test.	3.97	.92
2	20. I feel relieved if my teacher cares for my own anxiety.	3.97	.88
2	8. I feel more relaxed when making presentations in small groups than by myself.	3.97	.90
5	3. My anxiety decreases when I am told it is OK to speak English with less than perfect performance.	3.82	1.07

As for the low-anxious students, the item that obtained the highest mean score was, “My anxiety decreases if I prepare thoroughly for the English test (Item 13).” Even for low-anxious students, preparation is very important to keep maintain their confidence level for English tests. Tsui (1996) states that test anxiety stems from fear of failure, which is closely related to fear of a negative evaluation. Performing well in English tests may be a major problem for students. However, it is interesting that this item had higher mean scores than Item 12, “I feel relieved if the English test follows the same format I was taught in class,” which was the highest among high-anxious students. It thus can be said that students with less anxiety want to gain confidence by making an effort themselves. One characteristic of the low-anxious students is that items 7 and 18 ranked in the top five strategies. Low-anxious students believe that speaking English in front of a small group is less stressful than speaking to a large group, and working together with classmates would decrease their anxiety. This might be because they feel a sense of safety while doing group work with their classmates. When they are taking part in discussion or performing tasks in groups, low-anxious students may be able to express their opinions easier than in front of all their classmates. Compared to high-anxious students, low-anxious students tended to answer that “doing more small group and pair works reduces my anxiety (Item 11, $M=3.69$),” the seventh highest ranking item.

Table 5
Top five strategies for low-anxious students (N=54)

Rank	Questionnaire items	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1	13. My anxiety decreases if I prepare thoroughly for the English test.	4.07	.84
2	20. I feel relieved if my teacher cares for my own anxiety.	3.98	.79
2	12. I feel relieved if the English test follows the same format I was taught in class.	3.98	.93
4	7. Speaking English in front of a small group is less stressful than speaking to a large group.	3.93	.80
5	18. My anxiety decreases if I work together with classmates.	3.91	.93

In generalizing the data of both groups of students, although there were differences between the groups, there were also similarities. Item 10, “I feel relieved if I can discuss successful language learning periodically with my teacher” had very low mean scores in both high-anxious ($M=2.90$) and low-anxious students ($M=3.06$). This result is very interesting because Item 20, which refers to the relief students feel when their teacher cares for their anxiety, ranked in the top five strategies in both groups. Students might have the state of mind that they want their teacher to understand their concerns, but they do not need a formal discussion related to their English learning. This result may indicate that students’ anxiety sources does not always relate to the learning method, instead, the anxiousness might have come from their mentally associated problems. According to Crookall and Oxford (1991), it is important for both the teacher and students to consider themselves as a partnership and view themselves as trying together to overcome the problem of anxiety, so that neither would see the other as a source of difficulty, and both could work together to deal with the common problem. Instead of just giving advice on how to improve English skills, teachers might need to have a careful discussion with students about their existing problems related to their anxious feelings.

4.3 The factor structures of strategies

To investigate the structure of effective strategies for reducing anxiety, exploratory factor analyses using unweighted least square solution with promax rotation were conducted. From these analyses, items with factor loadings smaller than .35 were excluded. The results are displayed in Table 6. According to the scree plot and eigenvalue, four factor structures were assumed. The four factors referring to anxiety-reducing strategies were positively and moderately correlated. In addition, the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of all the items was $\alpha=.85$, therefore high reliability was obtained.

In the first factor, items with high loadings included “My anxiety decreases if I work together with classmates.”, “I feel relieved if my classmates and I teach each other.” and “I feel more relaxed when making presentations in small groups than by myself.” Items in this factor are related to anxiety-reducing strategies that can be implemented by cooperating with other people, such as classmates and teachers. Therefore, the first factor was named, *cooperation with others*.

In the second factor, there were items such as, “I feel relieved if I am told being able to understand is more important than being able to speak.”, “My anxiety decreases if I prepare thoroughly for the English test.” and “My anxiety decreases when I am told it is OK to speak English with less than perfect performance.” These items are associated with strategies for gaining confidence in their English abilities, skills and performances. The second factor was therefore named, *building confidence*.

Table 6

Results of factor analysis

Questionnaire items	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
18. My anxiety decreases if I work together with classmates.	.848	.098	.026	-.125
17. I feel relieved if my classmates and I teach each other.	.832	-.023	-.020	.019
11. Doing more small group and pair works reduces my anxiety.	.773	-.130	.103	-.020
7. Speaking English in front of a small group is less stressful than speaking to a large group.	.660	-.025	-.035	-.029
8. I feel more relaxed when making presentations in small groups than by myself.	.631	-.034	-.064	.142
20. I feel relieved if my teacher cares for my own anxiety.	.486	.008	.038	.194
15. I feel relaxed if my pronunciation will not be expected to be perfect.	.164	.938	-.122	-.211
14. I feel relieved if I am told being able to understand is more important than being able to speak.	-.296	.633	.073	.098
13. My anxiety decreases if I prepare thoroughly for the English test.	.054	.398	-.002	.318
3. My anxiety decreases when I am told it is OK to speak English with less than perfect performance.	-.009	.360	.136	.273
10. I feel relieved if I can discuss successful language learning periodically with my teacher.	-.074	.030	.990	-.099
9. If I have individual tutoring from the teacher, my anxiety is reduced.	.168	-.054	.669	-.006
2. My anxiety decreases if the competition in the classroom is reduced.	-.064	-.080	-.166	.659
12. I feel relieved if the English test follows the same format I was taught in class.	.153	.018	.012	.569
5. If there are activities meeting various learning styles, I do not feel anxious.	.088	.167	.094	.393
Correlations among factors				
Factor 1	—			
Factor 2	.359	—		
Factor 3	.481	.294	—	
Factor 4	.333	.436	.203	—

Note. Factor 1 = cooperation with others, Factor 2 = building confidence,

Factor 3 = assistance from the teacher, Factor 4 = less-stressful teaching method.

In the third factor, the items included, “I feel relieved if I can discuss successful language learning periodically with my teacher.” and “If I have individual tutoring from the teacher, my anxiety is reduced.” It can be seen that these items consist of coping strategies involving the help of the teacher, thus the factor was named, *assistance from the teacher*.

The fourth factor included items such as, “My anxiety decreases if the competition in the classroom is reduced.”, “I feel relieved if the English test follows the same format I was taught in class.” and “If there are activities meeting various learning styles, I do not feel anxious.” The items in this factor are related to how the students’ anxiety can be removed in terms of teaching methods and learning activities in the English classroom. Thus, the fourth factor was named, *less-stressful teaching methods*.

In summary, a four-dimensional conceptualization of strategies for reducing language anxiety was formulated. The four dimensions were broadly classified in two types: student-oriented strategies and teacher-oriented strategies. Factor 1 (cooperation with others) and Factor 2 (building confidence) are mainly concerned with coping strategies that can be performed by students themselves, or sometimes with a little help from someone else. These two factors can be compared to the results of Kondo and Yang’s (2004) strategies for coping with language anxiety. Among the five strategies found in Kondo and Yang (2004), “Peer Seeking” and “Positive Thinking” are closely related to Factor 1, “cooperation with others” and Factor 2, “building confidence” of the present study. Factor 1 explains the method of decreasing anxiety by working with others. Factor 2 demonstrates the importance of changing the point of view, from negative to positive mindedness. On the other hand, Factor 3 (assistance from the teacher) and Factor 4 (less-stressful teaching methods) mainly refer to strategies that are feasible with the consideration of teachers vis-à-vis their students. Items in Factor 3 definitely indicate the importance of teachers helping to lessen students’ anxiety. Factor 4 also reveals the role of teachers in designing an anxiety-free English learning atmosphere. In order to decrease language anxiety, there are many things that can be done by both students and teachers.

4.4 Correlations among strategies

For the purpose of comparing the differences in the correlations of anxiety-reducing strategies among high-anxious and low-anxious students, the Pearson product-moment correlations coefficient was computed. Before conducting the correlation analysis, the subscale scores of the four dimensions were calculated. Using these subscale scores, the correlations were examined. The overall results of the analyses of the high-anxious students (N=60) and low-anxious students (N=54) are displayed in Table 7 and Table 8, respectively.

Table 7
Results of correlation analysis among high-anxious students (N=60)

	1.Cooperation with others	2.Building confidence	3.Assistance from the teacher	4.Less-stressful teaching method
1.Cooperation with others	—	.214	.483 **	.130
2.Building confidence		—	.029	.316 *
3.Assistance from the teacher			—	-.101
4.Less-stressful teaching method				—

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 8
Results of correlation analysis among low-anxious students (N=54)

	1.Cooperation with others	2.Building confidence	3.Assistance from the teacher	4.Less-stressful teaching method
1.Cooperation with others	—	.429 **	.370 **	.558 **
2.Building confidence		—	.486 **	.508 **
3.Assistance from the teacher			—	.379 **
4.Less-stressful teaching method				—

Note. ** $p < .01$

As can be seen in Table 7, Factor 1 (cooperation with others) and Factor 3 (assistance from the teacher) had significant correlations. In addition, the correlation between Factor 2 (building confidence) and Factor 4 (less-stressful teaching method) was significant. These two pairs were the only pairs which had consistent correlations.

Among the high-anxious students, those who regard cooperation with others as important also consider that assistance from the teacher is indispensable. In relation to this result, Williams and Andrade (2008) mention that majority of students in their study attributed the cause of anxiety to the teacher or other people. Therefore, it is interesting that the relationship with teachers or classmates could be either a source of anxiety or a solution of anxiety. In addition, among the high-anxious students, building confidence was interrelated with less-stressful teaching methods. High-anxious students who try out strategies to gain their confidence also calls for teachers to support them in creating a less-stressful classroom atmosphere. On the other hand, Factor 2, building confidence had hardly any correlations with Factor 3, assistance from the teacher. Although the data for high-anxious students revealed very low correlations in each factor, the data for low-anxious students tended to have moderate correlations among all of the factors (Table 8). In particular, for low-anxious students, less-stressful teaching methods are essential in decreasing their anxiety, which is connected to all of the other anxiety-reducing strategies. Compared to the low-anxious students, high-anxious students tend to consider the strategies separately, as in each factor structure.

5. Conclusions

This study sought to conceptualize strategies for reducing students' language anxiety in the context of EFL classrooms in Japan. From an analysis of the findings, a four-dimensional conceptualization of anxiety-reducing strategies was formulated. The four dimensions were: cooperation with others; building confidence; assistance from the teacher; and less-stressful teaching methods. The results indicated that high-anxious students who called for assistance from the teacher also needed other people to cooperate with them. Help from classmates and teachers seemed to reduce students' anxiousness. On the other hand, among low-anxious students, all of the strategies were consistently correlated with each other. Although these students were low-anxious students, they still seemed to be in need of these strategies. As Kondo and Yang (2004) state, "considering the adverse effects that anxiety has on language learning, in addition to the fact that anxiety itself is an unpleasant experience, it is reasonable to assume that most students, irrespective of their anxiety level, will want to minimize its impact" (p. 263). It is important for students to alleviate their anxiousness as much as possible, by utilizing anxiety-reducing strategies.

To reduce students' language anxiety, it is necessary for both teachers and students themselves to take action in a number of ways. The strategies presented in this study are mainly based on what could be done by students to alleviate their own anxiety, but include suggestions for teachers. As "knowing what to do to reduce stress

in the classroom is the issue of primary concern to most practitioners” (Phillips, 1999, p. 127), being aware of these strategies as teachers would be a reasonable requirement.

In summary, this study has demonstrated the structure of possible anxiety-reducing strategies, together with interrelations among factors. In addition, strategies that students perceive to be effective were investigated, in terms of high-anxious and low-anxious participants. However, these results were based on students’ beliefs and assumption, thus they might not always be true in actual anxiety-provoking situations. Future study on this topic might seek to verify the validity of the strategies of the current study, by having students try out the strategies and then asking them whether their anxiety decreased. Classroom-intervention studies and semi-structured interviews may also be efficient in confirming the findings of this study. It is essential to continue to research and explore how to combat students’ anxiety, and alleviate their concerns and stress about language learning. Further research is necessary to help students overcome their anxiety in various learning contexts.

Note

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