

A Within-Asia Comparison in English Language Classroom Anxiety

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Abstract

Anxiety in foreign language classrooms is often considered one of the primary sources of students' reticence and shyness, frequently reported as one of the common characteristics of Asian learners. However, do all Asian students share the same characteristics in the setting of language learning? There might be some differences even if they share the primary traits. In order to investigate this question, we have conducted a questionnaire survey in Japan and Indonesia, using the framework of FLCAS (Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale) developed by Horwitz et al. (1986), which employs a five-point Likert scale. Japanese and Indonesian language versions of the questionnaire were prepared and administered online in both countries. Roughly 180 students from different universities in Japan and about 90 students from a university in Indonesia responded to the survey. Our preliminary analyses found no significant difference between the overall means between the two groups. However, comparisons of individual items uncovered some differences. They suggested that Indonesian students seem to be self-aware of embarrassment in the classroom, and Japanese students respond strongly to the negatively worded question items. This is a part of a larger research project that tries to understand the differences in behaviors of language learners in East and Southeast Asian countries. In addition, we are interested in cultural differences such as group orientation, confidence levels in public speaking, or openness to criticisms. In the future, we are looking to study how to overcome the problem of anxiety, hopefully adding more countries in the region to the survey.

Keywords: Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety, East-Asian Comparison, English Classroom, Cultural Difference

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Introduction

Anxiety in the second or foreign language classrooms is defined as specific anxiety that learners experience in a specific situation. People who are usually good learners in other situations have a mental block or feel tongue-tied in foreign language classrooms or in front of a native speaker of the target language. Under the influence of this specific anxiety, a thought block is triggered when asked to speak up, or they might even feel stomach pain before the foreign language classroom (Horwitz et al. 1986). There has been a long history of research and discussions on the nature of foreign language anxiety (FLA) and its relationship with other cognitive processes (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991, 1994).

It is often claimed that Asian students are reluctant to speak up in class. (Tuyen 2017) writes, “it is well-documented that teachers of English and even of other subjects in Asia often complain continually about their students’ reticence in class (p. 179).” Similarly, Cheng (2000) summarizes previous claims at the beginning of his paper as follows:

“In recent ESL/EFL literature, Asian (especially East Asian) learners of English as a foreign/second language have been arguably reported as reticent and passive learners. The most common allegations are that these students are reluctant to participate in classroom discourse; they are unwilling to give responses; they do not ask questions; and they are passive and over-dependent on the teacher (Jones et al., 1993; Braddock et al., 1995; Cortazzi and Jin, 1996; Tsui, 1996). (Chen, 2000, p. 435)

Anxiety should be closely related to this trait of Asian students (IRWanti n.d.; Liu and Jackson 2011; R. S. and H. S. 2013). In fact, there are various reports on FLA among Asian learners; Japanese students (Andrade and Williams 2009; Effiong 2016; Matsumoto et al. 1988; Saito and Samimy 1996; Williams and Andrade 2008), Chinese and Taiwanese students (Cheng and Erben 2012; GUO 2011; Mak 2011; Malik et al. 2020), and Indonesian students (Anandari 2015; Djafri and Wimbarti 2018; Marwan 2007).

However, to what extent do students from different countries in Asia share FLA? Most of the works that studied FLA on Asian students have focused on the learners from one country. This study attempts to identify how and to what extent FLA is manifested in Indonesian and Japanese students learning English at the tertiary level.

In the following, we report on the results of questionnaire surveys conducted in Japan and Indonesia, employing the framework of FLCAS (Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale) proposed by Horwitz et al.(1986).

The results of this research will eventually help researchers determine the role of culture in FLA studies. Beyond, it may help teachers do reflective practice and seek out possible strategies to reduce anxiety among their students while keeping these pathways open for possible evaluations in the future.

Method

Questionnaire Survey

A questionnaire survey was conducted using FLCAS (Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale), which was proposed by (Horwitz et al., 1986), and used widely in the English

pedagogy research (GUO 2011; Kitano 2001; MacIntyre and Gardner 1989; Mak 2011; Marcos-Llinás and Garau 2009; Paredes and Muller-Alouf 2000; Szyszka 2017).

FLCAS includes 33 question items that ask various aspects of anxiety in foreign language classrooms. Table 1 has sample questions:

Item No.	Questions
1	I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my foreign language class.
2	I don't worry about making mistakes in language class.
3	I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in language class.
4	It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in the foreign language.

Table 1: FLCAS (Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale) Sample Questions

Each question item uses a five-point Likert scale and asks the participant to choose one among five choices; namely,

1: Strongly disagree, 2: Disagree, 3: Neutral, 4: Agree, 5: Strongly Agree

For most question items, choosing 5, "Strongly Agree," indicates that the respondent has intense anxiety represented by the question. However, there are reversed-polarity items dispersed in the questionnaire. Look at item No. 2 in Table 1. For this question, choosing "Strongly Agree" indicates the least anxiety about making mistakes in language class.

The entire question items are listed in Appendix1.

Participants

The participants were university students from Japan and Indonesia. The Japanese participants study at several universities in the greater Tokyo area in the engineering or the healthcare department. Most Indonesian participants major in business or social science at State Polytechnic of Malang.

Students were invited to participate in the questionnaire survey by the class teachers with explanations that the questionnaire would not affect their course grades. 182 students in Japan and 91 students in Indonesia responded.

4/29/2021 英語学習時の不安についてのアンケート

英語学習時の不安についてのアンケート

必須

アンケート

次の質問に対して、次の5段階で答えてください。

1. 全然そう思わない 2. ややそう思わない 3. どちらとも思えない 4. ややそう思う 5. 非常にそう思う

英語の授業で、英語で話をする時、自信を持って話せたことがない。

1 2 3 4 5

全然そう思わない 非常にそう思う

英語のクラスで間違いをするのは気にしていない。

1 2 3 4 5

全然そう思わない 非常にそう思う

英語の授業でもうすぐ指されると思うとすごく緊張する。

1 2 3 4 5

全然そう思わない 非常にそう思う

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSjeyjULAAsuF0ndawZEB1A8w77SSXpX0EoEERQJ7p69CTg/formResponse>

Figure 1: Google form for FLACS Survey

Procedure

The original English FLACS question items were translated into Japanese and Bahasa Indonesia. The team's translation was checked by other members of the team who speak the same language.

Google form was used to administer the survey in both countries. Students were given the URL and accessed the questionnaire survey site. At the beginning of the form, it was repeated that their participation is optional and voluntary, and no information identifying the participant, such as names or email addresses, would not be asked or collected. After agreeing to take the survey, it first asked the gender and the age range of the respondent, and then they will be presented with the series of questions of LACS. The order of questions was altered from the original version. Figure 1 shows an image of the question page of the questionnaire form.

Surveys were conducted in July 2020 in Japan and November 2020 in Indonesia.

Results and Analysis

Since the questions were all specified as mandatory in the Google form, there was no missing data.

The purpose of this survey was to compare Japanese and Indonesian participants. A sample comparison is shown in Figure 2, and all results can be seen in Appendix 2.

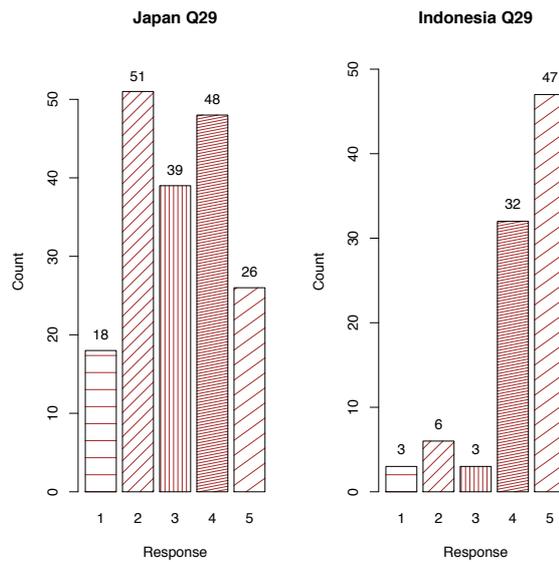


Figure 2: Question Item 2 Comparison

Reversed Polarity Items

The counts of reversed polarity items (also called “reverse coded” or “negatively worded” items) were reversed before analysis and comparison. For example, the original counts for the question item 2 (see Table 1), shown in Figure 3, were reversed around the neutral option (3) to those in Figure 4. All nine reversed polarity items were adjusted in the same way for both countries. The Cronbach’s alpha, the consistency measure, improved from 0.773 to 0.946 for Japan and from 0.8 to 0.913 for Indonesia.

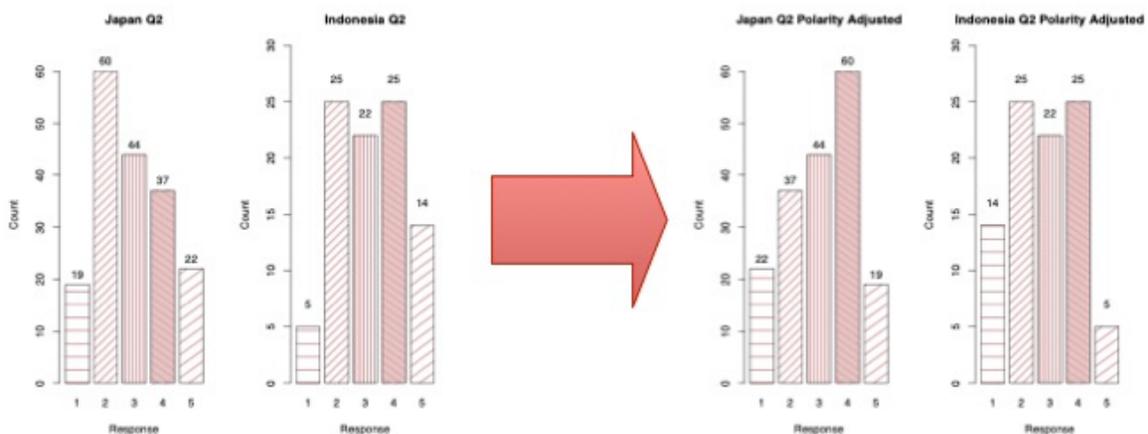


Figure 3: Original Counts for Item No. 3

Figure 4: Polarity Adjusted Counts

Overall Comparison

After the polarity adjustments, the averages for each question item were calculated for each country. Figure 5 shows the bar graph for all 33 items, comparing the two countries side by side. It is possible to see that Japanese students have higher anxiety for some items, and Indonesian students show higher values for some other items.

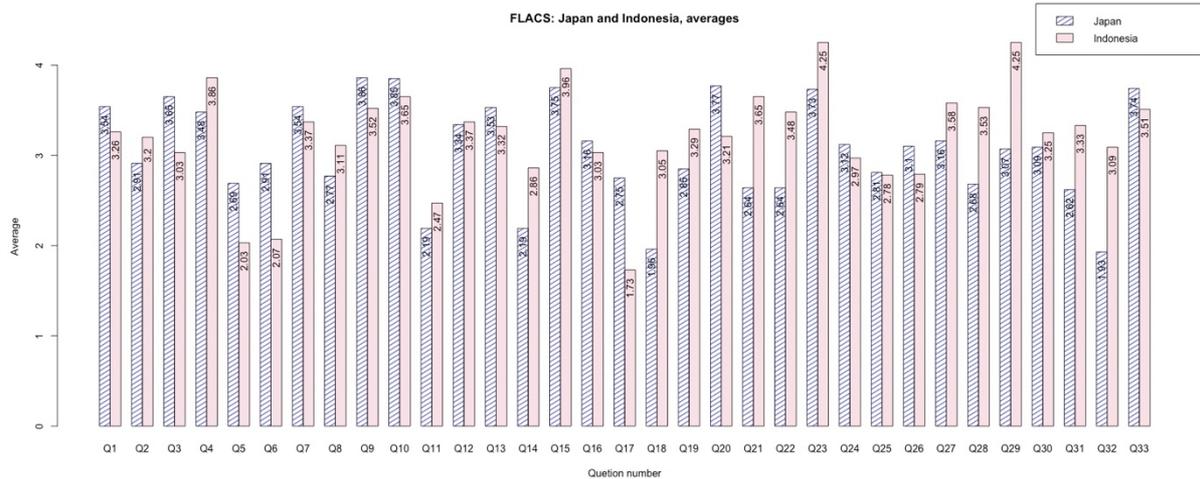


Figure 5: Average Scores for Each Item: Japan and Indonesia

The bar graph is not easy to see an overall picture. Figure 6 is a scatter plot with the average values of Japanese students on the horizontal axis and Indonesian values on the vertical axis. The correlation between the average values of the two countries was not statistically significant, $r = .29$, $p = .10$). The regression line shown in red in the plot was significant at the 5% level, though the R-squared value is .14, which means that the regression line can explain only 14% of the data variation.

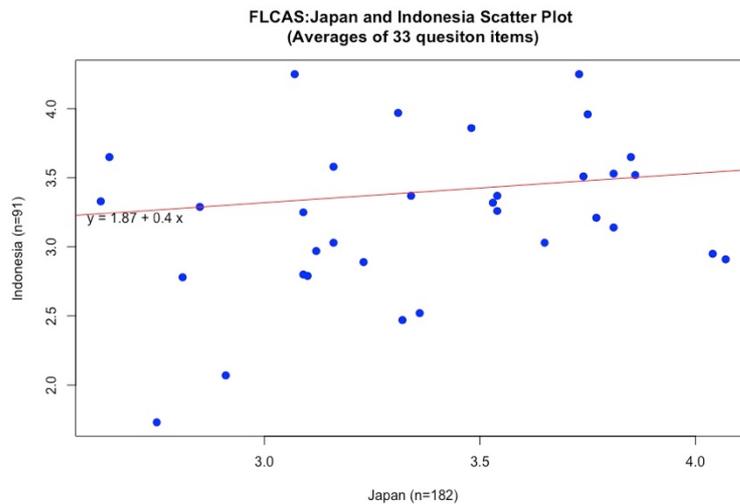


Figure 6: Correlation of average values for Japan and Indonesia

The overall average or mean for Japan was 3.36, and 3.22 for Indonesia. A comparison by Welch t-test did not reach significance between the means of the two groups ($t(58.44) = 1.23$, $p = .22$).

Item-wise Comparison

For each question item, a t-test was applied to compare the averages of the data sets from the two countries. The comparison was conducted in the R 4.1 environment using the Welch Two Sample t-test for all question pairs. The following shows the output for the comparison of question item 29, which had the greatest difference between the average values of anxiety scales of the two countries.

Sample Output from the t.test function of R 4.1:
Welch Two Sample t-test

Data: AnxJap\$q29 and AnxInd\$q29t = -8.3653, df = 211.17, p-value = 8.14e-15
alternative hypothesis: true difference in means is not equal to 0
95 percent confidence interval: -1.4596936 -0.9029437
sample estimates: mean of x mean of y 3.071429 4.252747

Among the total 33 items, Japanese students had significantly higher averages for 11 items, Indonesian students had higher values for eight items, and there were no significant differences for the remaining 14 items. The following is the summary of comparisons. The asterisks are the standard significance codes, and the question numbers in brackets indicate they are reversed polarity items.

Results of item-wise comparisons:

- 19 out of 33 items had significant differences
 - 11 items: Japanese students had higher averages
 - Q3***, Q6***, [Q8]*, Q9*, [Q14]***, Q17***, [Q18]***, Q20***, [Q22]***, [Q28]***, [Q32]***
 - 8 items: Indonesian students had higher averages
 - Q4**, [Q5]***, Q19**, Q21***, Q23***, Q27*, Q29***, Q31***
 - 14 items did not reach significance
 - Q1, [Q2], Q7, Q10, Q11, Q12, Q13, Q15, Q16, Q24, Q25, Q26, Q30, Q33
- (Significance codes: 0 '***' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05 ; [Q#]: Qs with reversed polarity)

In order to see the question items together with the comparison results of average values of the two countries, three tables were prepared. The first one, Figure 7, shows the items for which Japanese students scored higher in the anxiety scale based on t-tests.

Q No	mean Japan	J >< Ind	mean Indonesia	Reversed	t-value	df	p-value	Sig.	questions
3	3.65	>	3.03		3.851	147	0.000	***	I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in language class.
6	2.91	>	2.07		6.148	191	0.000	***	During language class, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course.
8	3.23	>	2.89	1	2.493	205	0.013	*	I am usually at ease during tests in my language class.
9	3.86	>	3.52		2.085	158	0.039	*	I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class.

14	3.81	>	3.14	1	4.543	188	0.000	***	I would not be nervous speaking the foreign language with native speakers.
17	2.75	>	1.73		7.107	227	0.000	***	I often feel like not going to my language class.
18	4.04	>	2.95	1	7.687	165	0.000	***	I feel confident when I speak in foreign language class.
20	3.77	>	3.21		3.477	156	0.001	***	I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in language class.
22	3.36	>	2.52	1	5.566	184	0.000	***	I don't feel pressure to prepare very well for language class.
28	3.32	>	2.47	1	6.778	230	0.000	***	When I'm on my way to language class, I feel very sure and relaxed .
32	4.07	>	2.91	1	7.530	157	0.000	***	I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of the foreign language.

Table 2: Anxiety scale comparison: Japanese > Indonesia

Note the reversed polarity items in Table 2. There are nine reversed polarity items in total, and six of them appear in this table.

Next, there were eight items for which Indonesian students had higher anxiety values. Table 3 has the details. Note that there is only one reversed polarity item.

Q No	mean Japan	J <> Ind	mean Indonesia	Reversed	t-value	df	p-value	Sig.	questions
4	3.48	<	3.86		-2.678	212	0.008	**	It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in the foreign language.
5	3.31	<	3.97	1	-4.482	208	0.000	***	It wouldn't bother me at all to take more foreign language classes.
19	2.85	<	3.29		-2.778	180	0.006	**	I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.

21	2.64	<	3.65		-6.422	193	0.000	***	The more I study for a language test, the more confused I get.
23	3.73	<	4.25		-3.932	193	0.000	***	I always feel that the other students speak the foreign language better than I do.
27	3.16	<	3.58		-2.551	171	0.012	*	I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my language class.
29	3.07	<	4.25		-8.365	211	0.000	***	I get nervous when I don't understand every word the language teacher says.
31	2.62	<	3.33		-3.956	152	0.000	***	I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language.

Table 3: Anxiety Scale Comparison: Indonesian Students > Japanese Students

For the remaining 14 items, there were no significant differences between the two countries. Table 4 has the details.

Q No	mean Japan	J >> Ind	mean Indonesia	Reversed	t-value	df	p-value	Sig.	questions
1	3.54		3.26		1.795	168	0.074		I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my foreign language class.
2	3.09		2.80	1	1.928	184	0.055		I don't worry about making mistakes in language class.
7	3.54		3.37		0.925	162	0.356		I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages than I am.
10	3.85		3.65		1.210	189	0.228		I worry about the consequences of failing my foreign language class.
11	3.81		3.53	1	1.921	180	0.056		I don't understand why some people get so upset over foreign language classes.
12	3.34		3.37		-0.235	163	0.815		In language class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know.

13	3.53		3.32		1.347	154	0.180		It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my language class.
15	3.75		3.96		-1.592	183	0.113		I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting.
16	3.16		3.03		0.848	209	0.398		Even if I am well prepared for language class, I feel anxious about it.
24	3.12		2.97		1.052	166	0.294		I feel very self-conscious about speaking the foreign language in front of other students.
25	2.81		2.78		0.169	175	0.866		Language class moves so quickly I worry about getting left behind.
26	3.10		2.79		1.812	190	0.072		I feel more tense and nervous in my language class than in my other classes.
30	3.09		3.25		-0.969	168	0.334		I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules you have to learn to speak a foreign language.
33	3.74		3.51		1.555	161	0.122		I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance.

Table 4: Anxiety Scale Comparison: Items with No Difference between Japan and Indonesia

Observations and Discussion

Although the overall difference between the anxiety levels between Japanese and Indonesian students was not significant, item-wise analyses revealed that Japanese students had higher anxiety levels for some items and Indonesian students had higher anxiety levels for some other items.

If we look at Table 3, which shows the items Indonesian students had significantly higher anxiety levels, it seems possible that they are aware of what others think in an embarrassing situation. Question items 23 and 31 have reference to "other students" in the questions, and question 31 makes us imagine an embarrassment when other students are laughing after saying something in English in class. Question 19 reminds us of a situation in which the teacher corrects each mistake made by a student. Questions 4 and 29 also refer to "teacher," and even though it does not refer to an embarrassment directly, one can easily imagine those situations can lead to a humiliating situation. Thus, it seems that Indonesian students tend to be self-conscious and avoid embarrassment in the classroom.

On the other hand, question items in Table 2, which shows higher anxiety items for the Japanese students, do not show an apparent reference to embarrassment or humiliation.

Questions 3, 9, and 20 refer to the nervousness and frightening sensations, which are understandable as a direct reflection of language class anxiety.

However, there is another intriguing characteristic for the Japanese participants. In Table 2, six of the items, namely q8, q14, q18, q22, q28, and q32, are all reversed polarity items. There are only nine reversed items, and six of them appear in this list, suggesting that the Japanese participants respond strongly to some feature of reversed items. The reversed items negate the nervousness and use words contrary to anxiety, such as “confidence” or “relaxed.” It is not clear whether this phenomenon indicates that Japanese students feel more anxiety related to these items since they might be responding to these expressions that reject the existence of anxiety when they are taking a survey on foreign language class anxiety.

For the question items in Table 4, it is not easy to find a common feature among the 14 items. The questions include reference to nervousness (q13, q26, q33) and embarrassment and self-consciousness (q13, q24), the difficulty of the subject (q30), and test anxiety (q10). The existence of these factors makes it difficult to give a simple characterization of these question items. Still, even though the averages of some items go down below 3.0, such as q26 for both countries, q2 and q26 for Indonesia, the averages for all other items were above 3.0. This shows that students from both countries are having intense anxiety about these items.

Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the differences between Japan and Indonesia in English language classroom anxiety. A questionnaire survey framework of FLCAS (Foreign language Classroom Anxiety Scale) was used to measure the levels of students' anxiety. When the overall means of both countries for all survey items were compared, there was no statistically significant difference. When individual items were compared, there were 11 items for which Japanese students had higher anxiety levels among 33 items. Indonesian students felt more anxiety than their Japanese counterparts for eight items, while no significant differences were detected for the remaining 14 items. Those items that Indonesian students scored higher on the anxiety scale seemed to indicate that they are self-conscious of embarrassment in the classroom. For the items that Japanese students had more substantial anxiety than Indonesian students, they seemed to respond strongly to the negative expression or refer to confidence and being relaxed in the reversed polarity items in the questions.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: FLACS Question Items

Item No.	Question
1	I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my foreign language class.
2	I don't worry about making mistakes in language class.
3	I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in language class.
4	It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in the foreign language.
5	It wouldn't bother me at all to take more foreign language classes.
6	During language class, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course.
7	I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages than I am.
8	I am usually at ease during tests in my language class.
9	I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class.
10	I worry about the consequences of failing my foreign language class.
11	I don't understand why some people get so upset over foreign language classes.
12	In language class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know.
13	It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my language class.
14	I would not be nervous speaking the foreign language with native speakers.
15	I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting.
16	Even if I am well prepared for language class, I feel anxious about it.
17	I often feel like not going to my language class.
18	I feel confident when I speak in foreign language class.
19	I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.
20	I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in language class.
21	The more I study for a language test, the more confused I get.
22	I don't feel pressure to prepare very well for language class.
23	I always feel that the other students speak the foreign language better

	than I do.
24	I feel very self-conscious about speaking the foreign language in front of other students.
25	Language class moves so quickly I worry about getting left behind.
26	I feel more tense and nervous in my language class than in my other classes.
27	I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my language class.
28	When I'm on my way to language class, I feel very sure and relaxed.
29	I get nervous when I don't understand every word the language teacher says.
30	I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules you have to learn to speak a foreign language.
31	I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language.
32	I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of the foreign language.
33	I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance.

(Note: The highlighted are reversed polarity items.)

Appendix 2: FLCAS survey results
(The percentages of response choices to each question item.)

Japan						Indonesia					
Option	1	2	3	4	5	Option	1	2	3	4	5
q1	5.5	14.8	22.0	35.2	22.5	q1	6.6	27.5	18.7	27.5	19.8
q2	12.1	20.3	24.2	33.0	10.4	q2	15.4	27.5	24.2	27.5	5.5
q3	3.8	9.9	25.8	37.9	22.5	q3	15.4	26.4	13.2	29.7	15.4
q4	7.1	17.6	20.3	30.2	24.7	q4	2.2	11.0	14.3	44.0	28.6
q5	8.2	19.8	28.0	20.3	23.6	q5	3.3	7.7	15.4	36.3	37.4
q6	10.4	28.6	27.5	26.9	6.6	q6	35.2	36.3	17.6	8.8	2.2
q7	8.2	17.6	17.6	24.7	31.9	q7	14.3	20.9	12.1	18.7	34.1
q8	7.1	20.3	30.2	27.5	14.8	q8	7.7	28.6	34.1	26.4	3.3
q9	3.8	12.1	15.9	30.2	37.9	q9	11.0	18.7	4.4	39.6	26.4
q10	8.2	10.4	14.3	22.5	44.5	q10	9.9	12.1	5.5	48.4	24.2
q11	6.0	7.7	18.7	34.1	33.5	q11	5.5	13.2	28.6	28.6	24.2
q12	6.0	22.0	22.5	31.3	18.1	q12	11.0	19.8	12.1	35.2	22.0

q13	6.0	10.4	25.8	39.6	18.1		q13	12.1	17.6	16.5	34.1	19.8
q14	6.0	8.8	17.6	33.5	34.1		q14	9.9	16.5	33.0	30.8	9.9
q15	3.3	8.8	19.8	45.6	22.5		q15	4.4	3.3	14.3	48.4	29.7
q16	14.8	19.8	18.1	28.6	18.7		q16	11.0	23.1	24.2	35.2	6.6
q17	21.4	24.2	26.4	13.7	14.3		q17	54.9	27.5	11.0	3.3	3.3
q18	2.7	5.5	18.7	30.8	42.3		q18	12.1	27.5	18.7	37.4	4.4
q19	13.7	30.2	26.9	15.9	13.2		q19	6.6	26.4	17.6	30.8	18.7
q20	6.0	6.6	19.8	39.6	28.0		q20	11.0	26.4	12.1	31.9	18.7
q21	22.5	27.5	24.2	14.8	11.0		q21	2.2	22.0	14.3	31.9	29.7
q22	7.1	18.7	24.7	30.2	19.2		q22	22.0	34.1	17.6	23.1	3.3
q23	3.3	9.9	26.4	31.3	29.1		q23	3.3	4.4	7.7	33.0	51.6
q24	4.4	25.8	32.4	28.6	8.8		q24	6.6	34.1	26.4	22.0	11.0
q25	17.0	26.4	25.8	20.3	10.4		q25	18.7	29.7	15.4	27.5	8.8
q26	16.5	22.0	14.8	28.6	18.1		q26	16.5	31.9	22.0	15.4	14.3
q27	9.3	23.6	26.9	22.0	18.1		q27	8.8	19.8	3.3	40.7	27.5
q28	7.1	17.6	28.0	30.2	17.0		q28	11.0	44.0	33.0	11.0	1.1
q29	9.9	28.0	21.4	26.4	14.3		q29	3.3	6.6	3.3	35.2	51.6
q30	9.9	22.5	33.0	17.6	17.0		q30	9.9	24.2	18.7	25.3	22.0
q31	22.0	28.0	23.1	20.3	6.6		q31	17.6	15.4	14.3	22.0	30.8
q32	2.7	7.7	13.7	31.9	44.0		q32	13.2	31.9	16.5	27.5	11.0
q33	4.4	8.8	21.4	39.0	26.4		q33	8.8	15.4	13.2	41.8	20.9