



Japanese Speaking Anxiety in Kaiwa Classes: A Cross-Cohort Study of Japanese Language Education Students at UMY

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Abstract

This study examines speaking anxiety in Japanese kaiwa classes among students in a Japanese Language Education program at a private University in Yogyakarta. Since speaking is a central component of foreign language learning and is often associated with high levels of anxiety, the study investigates whether anxiety differs across student cohorts and identifies the factors contributing to it. Using a quantitative design, data were collected from 70 students drawn from four cohorts within a population of 113 students. The study employed a questionnaire adapted from the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz et al., and the data were analyzed using SPSS. The findings indicate that students across all cohorts experienced a moderate level of speaking anxiety. However, the ANOVA results showed no statistically significant differences among cohorts, suggesting that academic level was not a determining factor in students' speaking anxiety. These findings indicate that speaking anxiety in Japanese language learning is shaped less by cohort membership than by individual and classroom-related factors, such as self-confidence, speaking experience, and perceived evaluation in classroom interaction.

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INTRODUCTION

Speaking is a core component of Japanese language learning because it requires learners to apply vocabulary, grammatical structures, and pragmatic knowledge in real-time interaction. In university settings, speaking competence is closely related to communicative effectiveness and academic success, as students are expected not only to understand Japanese but also to use it appropriately in classroom and social contexts (Devi et al., 2025; Diner, 2023). At the same time, speaking is often one of the most demanding aspects of foreign language learning because it involves immediate processing, limited preparation time, and the possibility of being evaluated by others. For this reason, speaking frequently becomes a source of anxiety that may reduce confidence, limit participation, and negatively affect learning outcomes (Muliadi et al., 2022).

In Japanese *kaiwa* classes, speaking anxiety may arise from several interrelated factors, including limited mastery of vocabulary and sentence patterns, fear of making mistakes, and concern about negative evaluation from lecturers and peers (Inada, 2022; Kitano, 2002). Such anxiety is shaped not only by learners' linguistic limitations but also by the interactional environment in which speaking occurs. Classroom atmosphere, teacher responses, and peer reactions may either support or inhibit students' willingness to speak. In particular, a silent or unsupportive classroom environment can heighten learners' fear of being judged and lead them to avoid oral participation altogether (Bao, 2012; Maher & King, 2022). Previous studies have similarly shown that Japanese language learners often hesitate to speak when they feel linguistically unprepared or worry about producing inaccurate utterances in front of others (Cutrone, 2009; Diner, 2023; Kauzlarić, 2019).

From a theoretical perspective, speaking anxiety can be understood as a form of communication apprehension that constrains oral performance. It includes both internal and external dimensions. Internally, learners may experience fear, tension, uneasiness, or a sense of

losing control, sometimes accompanied by physical symptoms such as trembling, sweating, or increased heartbeat. Externally, anxiety is influenced by situational factors such as oral presentations, classroom evaluation, time pressure, and the overall learning atmosphere. Learners' responses to these conditions are also mediated by self-efficacy, or their belief in their ability to handle speaking tasks successfully. Students with stronger self-efficacy may be better able to cope with stressful speaking situations, whereas lower self-confidence may intensify avoidance and anxiety.

Previous research has identified a variety of causes of speaking anxiety among foreign language learners, including fear of negative judgement, pressure from teachers and classmates, and unsupportive learning environments (Inada, 2021, 2022; Muliadi et al., 2021). However, studies that systematically compare speaking anxiety across different cohorts in university-level *kaiwa* classes remain limited. Much of the existing literature has focused either on classroom interventions or on general descriptions of learner anxiety, rather than asking whether anxiety varies according to students' academic year. This is an important issue because a cross-cohort perspective can clarify whether speaking anxiety develops as learners progress through the program or whether it remains relatively stable across year levels (Aguila & Harjanto, 2016). In the context of Japanese language education in Indonesia, such evidence is still scarce.

The possible relationship between academic year and speaking anxiety remains unclear. On the one hand, increased academic demands may heighten anxiety as students move into more advanced stages of study and face more complex speaking tasks, stronger performance expectations, and greater evaluative pressure (Zhao, 2024). On the other hand, some studies suggest that first-year students may experience higher anxiety because of limited vocabulary, lack of classroom experience, and fear of making mistakes in the target language (Nurhayati & Nuraida, 2020). Other research has found that academic level does not significantly determine

speaking anxiety, suggesting that individual and contextual factors may be more influential (Haroud et al., 2025). These mixed findings indicate the need for further investigation, particularly in Japanese kaiwa learning at the university level.

Against this background, the present study examines Japanese speaking anxiety among students in the Japanese Language Education program at Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta (UMY) across four academic cohorts. The study aims to identify the overall level of speaking anxiety, compare anxiety across cohorts, and determine which dimensions of anxiety are most prominent in kaiwa classes. Accordingly, the study addresses the following research questions: (1) What is the level of Japanese speaking anxiety experienced by students in each cohort? (2) Are there significant differences in speaking anxiety across cohorts? (3) Which dimensions of speaking anxiety are most prominent in kaiwa classes?

By addressing these questions, this study seeks to contribute empirical evidence to research on foreign language speaking anxiety and to provide a clearer understanding of how anxiety operates across cohorts in Japanese language education.

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative descriptive design with a comparative component to examine Japanese speaking anxiety among students in a Japanese Language Education program at a private university in Yogyakarta. A quantitative approach was used because the study aimed to measure anxiety levels statistically and compare them across four academic cohorts. The descriptive design was intended to capture the phenomenon as it occurred naturally, without any experimental treatment, while the comparative element allowed the study to test whether anxiety levels differed by academic year (Creswell, 2014). One-way ANOVA was used to examine differences in speaking anxiety across cohorts.

The population consisted of 113 students enrolled in the Japanese Language Education

program, from which 70 students representing four cohorts, from first to fourth year, were selected through random sampling. This procedure ensured that all students had an equal chance of being included in the study (Sugiyono, 2019). Prior to analysis, the validity and reliability of the instrument were statistically tested, and only items that met the required criteria were retained for further analysis.

Data were collected with a questionnaire adapted from the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz et al. (1986), which served as the main framework for assessing speaking anxiety. The questionnaire measured three dimensions of anxiety: Communication Apprehension, referring to anxiety during oral communication in Japanese; Fear of Negative Evaluation, referring to concern about being judged unfavorably by lecturers or peers; and Test Anxiety, referring to tension experienced in evaluative speaking situations. Although the original FLCAS consists of 33 items, the instrument in this study was adapted to 27 items to better suit the context of Japanese kaiwa learning at UMY. The questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The distribution of items across the three dimensions is presented in Table 1.

Table.1 Distribution of Questionnaire Items across the Three Dimensions of Speaking Anxiety

Dimension	Item Numbers	Number of Items
Communication Apprehension	1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 13, 14, 15, 17, 24, 26	12
Fear of Negative Evaluation	2, 5, 8, 10, 11, 12, 18, 19	8
Test Anxiety	16, 20, 21, 22, 23, 25, 27	7
Total	1-27	27

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS. Means and standard deviations were calculated to describe the level of speaking anxiety across cohorts, while a one-way ANOVA was performed to test for significant differences

among the four academic cohorts. Prior to the main analysis, the reliability of the questionnaire was examined using Cronbach's alpha to ensure the internal consistency of the instrument. In this study, reliability refers to the extent to which the instrument yields consistent results across items and repeated use (Sugiyono, 2019).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Anxiety Levels Across Cohorts

Table 2 presents the mean scores for the three dimensions of speaking anxiety, namely Communication Apprehension, Fear of Negative Evaluation, and Test Anxiety, across the four cohorts. Overall, students in all cohorts experienced a moderate level of Japanese speaking anxiety, with only slight variation in mean scores across year levels. This pattern suggests that speaking anxiety is a shared feature of *kaiwa* learning rather than a problem limited to a particular cohort.

Table. 2

Table 2 presents the average scores of students' speaking anxiety based on anxiety categories and year of study.

Types of anxiety	2025	2024	2023	2022
Communication Apprehension	37.6	40.7	39.7	38.8
Fear of Negative Evaluation	24	24	22.6	23.5
Test Anxiety	25.2	28.5	25.8	25.6

The mean scores for Communication Apprehension ranged from 37.66 to 40.72, with the 2024 cohort showing the highest mean and the 2025 cohort the lowest. The lower score among first-year students may reflect their still limited exposure to the communicative demands of *kaiwa* classes. As beginning learners, they are generally focused on acquiring basic vocabulary, simple expressions, and introductory interactional skills, and may therefore face less pressure in oral communication than students in higher cohorts. By contrast, more advanced students are likely to encounter greater expectations for spontaneous and accurate

speaking, which may contribute to higher levels of communication-related anxiety. This tendency is consistent with previous research showing that first-year students may report lower speaking anxiety than more advanced learners, even across different foreign language contexts (Frantzen & Magnan, 2005; Saputra, 2019).

Fear of Negative Evaluation

The mean scores for Fear of Negative Evaluation ranged from 22.66 to 24.00 across the four cohorts. The 2024 and 2025 cohorts showed the highest mean scores (24.00), followed by the 2022 cohort (23.57), while the 2023 cohort recorded the lowest mean (22.66). Although the differences were modest, the results suggest that anxiety about being judged by others remained evident across all cohorts. This finding indicates that fear of negative evaluation is a stable feature of *kaiwa* learning rather than a cohort-specific issue. The pattern is consistent with previous research identifying negative judgement as a common source of foreign language anxiety among students (Jingjing, 2023). The limited variation across cohorts may be explained by the similar academic demands and classroom interactional pressures experienced by students throughout the program.

Test Anxiety

Mean scores for Test Anxiety showed slight variation across cohorts, with the 2024 cohort recording the highest mean. This may be related to the greater academic demands and evaluative pressure experienced at this stage of study, particularly in oral performance tasks in *kaiwa* classes. As students move through the program, increasing expectations for accuracy, fluency, and classroom participation may intensify test-related anxiety.

The 2022, 2023, and 2025 cohorts showed slightly lower mean scores. In the case of the 2022 and 2023 cohorts, this may indicate the development of coping strategies for managing classroom assessment. For the 2025 cohort, the lower score may reflect their more limited exposure to high-pressure oral evaluation at the beginning of their studies. Overall, the findings suggest that test anxiety is shaped by both

academic demands and students' familiarity with evaluative speaking situations.

Significance of Cohort Differences

An ANOVA analysis was conducted to determine the statistical significance of these differences (Gillard, 2020). The results are presented in Table 3.

Table. 3

Table 3 presents the results of the ANOVA test on the four cohorts based on each anxiety category.

Types of anxiety	F-statistics	P-value
Comminocation Apprehension	0.295	<u>0.829</u> (not significant > 0.05)
Fear of Negative Evaluation	0.199	0.897 (not significant > 0.05)
Test Anxiety	0.696	0.558 (not significant > 0.05)

Based on the ANOVA results, the Communication Apprehension category has a value of $(3,66) = 0.295$ and $p = 0.829$. There were no significant differences in communication anxiety levels among the four cohorts, as the significance value was greater than 0.05. indicates that each cohort experienced nervousness, tension, or discomfort when speaking in public.

Similarly, the ANOVA results for Fear of Negative Evaluation indicated no significant difference across cohorts, $F(3,66) = 0.199$, $p = 0.897$, suggesting that students' concern about negative judgement was not influenced by academic year. Likewise, Test Anxiety did not differ significantly among the four cohorts, $F(3,66) = 0.696$, $p = 0.558$, indicating that students' worry in evaluative speaking situations was also relatively stable across year levels.

Overall, the ANOVA results in Table 3 show that speaking anxiety did not vary significantly among the four cohorts. This suggests that academic level was not a significant factor in explaining differences in students' Japanese speaking anxiety. In line with Haroud

et al. (2025), the findings indicate that speaking anxiety may be shaped more strongly by individual and classroom-related factors, such as self-confidence, prior speaking experience, and social support, than by cohort differences alone.

Dimensions of Anxiety in Kaiwa Learning Communication Apprehension

The first dimension examined was Communication Apprehension, which included items 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 13, 14, 15, 17, 24, and 26. The analysis showed that several items in this category reflected relatively high levels of anxiety across cohorts, indicating that oral communication remained a challenging aspect of kaiwa learning.

For the item *"I never feel confident when speaking Japanese,"* the mean score was lower in the 2025 cohort (3.25, SD = 1.368), increased in the 2024 cohort (3.55, SD = 1.368) and the 2023 cohort (3.50, SD = 1.087), and then decreased slightly in the 2022 cohort (3.23, SD = 1.262). This pattern suggests that first-year students may initially experience lower communication-related anxiety because they are still in the early stages of learning and have not yet been fully exposed to more demanding communicative situations. As students progress through the program, however, greater linguistic and interactional expectations may increase their sense of pressure when speaking.

A similar tendency appeared in the item *"I do not mind learning more about Japanese,"* which showed a gradual decline across cohorts, from 4.58 (SD = 0.515) in the 2025 cohort and 4.55 (SD = 0.688) in the 2024 cohort to 3.75 (SD = 1.215) in the 2023 cohort and 3.54 (SD = 1.172) in the 2022 cohort. Although this item reflects motivation rather than anxiety directly, the decline may indicate that enthusiasm for learning Japanese becomes less stable as students encounter increasing academic and communicative demands.

In contrast, the item *"During kaiwa classes, I often think about things unrelated to the lesson"* produced the highest mean in the 2023 cohort (3.58, SD = 0.900), followed by the 2022 cohort (3.43, SD = 0.900), while the 2025 cohort

recorded the lowest mean (2.58, SD = 0.996). This finding suggests that students in the earliest cohort were better able to maintain concentration during kaiwa learning, whereas students in the middle and later cohorts may have experienced greater cognitive or emotional distraction during classroom interaction.

A related pattern was found for the item *"I can get so nervous that I do not want to attend class."* The mean was highest in the 2023 cohort (3.17, SD = 1.030) and lowest in the 2025 cohort (2.08, SD = 2.08). This result may indicate that the 2023 cohort experienced a stronger form of avoidance-related anxiety, in which nervousness affected not only classroom participation but also willingness to attend kaiwa classes.

For the item *"I feel unconfident when speaking Japanese,"* the 2023 cohort again showed a higher mean than the 2025 cohort, suggesting that confidence may decline as learners move into more demanding stages of study. One possible explanation is that students in higher cohorts become more aware of the linguistic accuracy and fluency expected in oral communication, which may heighten their self-consciousness and reduce their confidence.

The item *"I feel nervous when I do not understand what my lecturer is saying"* also showed relatively high mean scores, particularly in the 2024 cohort (3.91, SD = 0.944), compared with 3.50 (SD = 1.314) in the 2025 cohort and 3.50 (SD = 1.243) in the 2023 cohort. This suggests that difficulty understanding the lecturer's Japanese may be an important source of linguistic anxiety. The finding points to the importance of instructional support that helps students develop listening comprehension and interpret classroom discourse more confidently.

A further pattern emerged in the item *"I may feel comfortable around native speakers of that foreign language."* The 2022 cohort showed a lower mean (2.77, SD = 1.031) than the earlier cohorts, which reached around 3.33 (SD = 0.778). This may indicate that students in the later stages of study become more aware of their own linguistic limitations and of the demands of speaking appropriately with more proficient speakers, which in turn may increase discomfort and anxiety. By contrast, students in earlier cohorts may still approach such situations with relatively high motivation and less awareness of potential errors.

Finally, the responses of the 2022 cohort suggest comparatively higher levels of anxiety in relation to the items *"I do not feel confident when speaking in kaiwa classes"* and *"I feel very inferior when I have to speak Japanese in front of other students."* This pattern indicates that communication apprehension in the later cohort may be associated not only with linguistic difficulty but also with stronger feelings of inferiority and heightened awareness of classroom performance.

Overall, the Communication Apprehension results suggest that anxiety in kaiwa learning is not simply linear across cohorts. While first-year students tend to show lower anxiety and stronger enthusiasm, students in the middle and later cohorts appear to experience greater self-doubt, distraction, and communication pressure. This pattern suggests that as learners progress, increased linguistic awareness and classroom expectations may contribute to more complex forms of speaking anxiety.

Table. 4

Table 4 contains the distribution of statement items in the communication apprehension category across the four cohorts

No	Questions	2022 cohort		2023 cohort		2024 cohort		2025 cohort	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
1	I never feel confident when speaking Japanese.	3.23	1.262	3.50	1.087	3.55	1.368	3.25	0.866
3	I do not mind learning more about Japanese.	3.54	1.172	3.75	1.215	4.55	0.688	4.58	0.515
4	During kaiwa classes, I often think about things unrelated to the lesson.	3.43	1.267	3.58	0.900	3.09	1.044	2.58	0.996
6	I don't understand why some people feel nervous in class.	2.49	1.040	2.83	1.267	3.18	1.250	2.92	0.669
7	I can get so nervous that I do not want to attend class	2.80	1.132	3.17	1.030	2.55	1.508	2.08	0.900
9	I feel unconfident when speaking Japanese.	3.51	1.197	3.58	0.900	3.64	1.206	2.92	0.900
13	I feel more tense and nervous in the kaiwa class than in other classes.	3.11	1.105	3.17	1.467	2.73	1.009	2.92	1.084
14	I get nervous and confused when speaking in kaiwa class.	3.37	1.087	3.17	1.193	3.36	1.120	3.08	1.084
15	I feel nervous when I don't understand what my lecturer is saying.	3.60	1.143	3.50	1.314	3.91	0.944	3.50	1.243
17	I may feel comfortable around native speakers of that foreign language.	2.77	1.031	3.25	0.965	3.36	0.924	3.33	0.778
24	I don't feel confident when speaking in kaiwa classes.	3.49	1.121	3.25	1.138	3.36	1.120	3.17	0.835
26	I feel very inferior when I have to speak Japanese in front of other students.	3.46	1.221	2.92	1.311	3.45	1.440	3.33	1.231

Fear of negative evaluation.

Table 5 presents the results for Fear of Negative Evaluation, a dimension of anxiety related to students' concern about being judged by lecturers or peers during classroom interaction. The findings show that evaluative pressure remained an important source of anxiety across cohorts, although the intensity varied slightly depending on the item.

or the item "I will feel nervous speaking with people who are proficient in Japanese," the highest mean score was found in the 2023 cohort (3.67, SD = 1.231), followed closely by the 2024 cohort (3.64, SD = 1.206), the 2025 cohort (3.42, SD = 1.374), and the 2022 cohort (3.37, SD = 1.374). This pattern suggests that students in the middle cohorts experienced greater nervousness when interacting with more proficient speakers. One possible explanation is that these students are in a transitional stage: they are expected to participate more actively in Japanese, yet may still feel uncertain about their own speaking ability. Increased linguistic awareness, combined with academic pressure and concern about others' evaluations, may therefore heighten anxiety in such interactions.

Table. 5

A similar tendency appeared in the item related more directly to fear of being evaluated by others. The highest mean score was recorded by the 2024 cohort (3.45, SD = 1.293), followed by the 2022 cohort (3.43, SD = 1.243), the 2023 cohort (3.33, SD = 1.303), and the 2025 cohort (2.92, SD = 1.311). This finding suggests that students who are more frequently exposed to oral performance tasks and classroom assessment may become increasingly sensitive to peer and lecturer judgement. In this sense, evaluative pressure appears to function as a central component of speaking anxiety in kaiwa learning.

Overall, the results in this dimension indicate that fear of negative evaluation is closely related to students' awareness of their own speaking performance in comparison with others. Anxiety in kaiwa classes is therefore shaped not only by linguistic difficulty itself but also by the social and evaluative conditions under which speaking takes place. This finding reinforces the view that foreign language speaking anxiety is inherently interpersonal, especially in classroom settings where oral production is visible, immediate, and open to judgement.

Table 5 shows the distribution of statement items in the fear of negative evaluation category across the four cohorts.

No	Questions	2022 cohort		2023 cohort		2024 cohort		2025 cohort	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
8	I will feel nervous speaking with people who are proficient in Japanese.	3.37	1.374	3.67	1.231	3.64	1.206	3.42	1.084
11	I'm afraid other students will laugh at me when I speak Japanese.	3.43	1.243	3.33	1.303	3.45	1.293	2.92	1.311
19	I keep thinking that other students are better than me at Japanese	3.49	1.292	3.17	1.267	3.82	0.982	4.00	0.853
20	I feel embarrassed when I have to answer questions in Japanese class voluntarily.	3.17	0.985	3.17	1.193	3.27	1.191	3.08	0.669
23	I often feel reluctant to attend kaiwa classes.	2.63	1.140	2.42	1.240	2.00	0.894	2.58	0.669
25	I feel that other students give better answers in Japanese than I do.	3.63	1.190	3.33	1.231	3.91	0.701	4.17	0.718
27	I feel nervous when the lecturer asks questions that I haven't prepared for beforehand.	3.54	1.172	3.58	1.379	4.27	0.647	3.92	1.084

Students' anxiety was also shaped by their tendency to compare their own performance with that of their peers. For the item *"I keep thinking that other students are better than me at Japanese,"* the highest mean score was found in the 2025 cohort (4.00, SD = 0.853), followed by the 2024 cohort (3.82, SD = 0.982), the 2022 cohort (3.49, SD = 1.292), and the 2023 cohort (3.17, SD = 1.267). A similar pattern appeared in the item *"I feel that other students give better answers in Japanese than I do,"* with mean scores declining from the 2025 cohort to the 2022 cohort (4.17, 3.91, 3.63, and 3.33, respectively). These results suggest that first-year students were more likely to evaluate their own ability negatively in relation to their classmates. This may reflect the early stage of language learning, in which students are still developing confidence and are especially sensitive to visible differences in performance. This interpretation is consistent with Kusfitasari and Nurhayati (2025), who argue that low self-confidence and concern about classroom comparison are among the most influential internal sources of speaking anxiety.

A related pattern appeared in the item *"I feel embarrassed when I have to answer questions in Japanese class voluntarily,"* which recorded the highest mean score in the 2024 cohort (3.27, SD = 1.193). This suggests that students in the middle cohort may experience stronger embarrassment in voluntary speaking situations, possibly because they are increasingly aware of

their own errors but have not yet developed full confidence in their speaking ability. In this sense, emotional barriers may reduce willingness to speak even when students possess sufficient linguistic resources, as suggested in Krashen's (1985) discussion of affective factors in language learning.

A different tendency emerged in the item *"I often feel reluctant to attend kaiwa classes."* The 2022 cohort showed the highest mean score (2.63, SD = 1.190), whereas the 2024 cohort recorded the lowest (2.00, SD = 0.894). Although the overall level of reluctance remained relatively low, the result suggests that students in the final cohort may experience greater withdrawal from kaiwa classes, possibly due to accumulated academic workload and end-of-study pressure.

Overall, the findings indicate that fear of negative evaluation in kaiwa learning is shaped by a combination of peer comparison, public performance, and students' stage of academic development. Rather than reflecting a single source, this dimension of anxiety appears to emerge through the interaction between self-perception, classroom evaluation, and the broader demands of Japanese oral communication.

Test Anxiety

The Test Anxiety dimension in this study was adapted from the original FLCAS framework to better reflect the specific demands of kaiwa learning. Because oral communication

classes involve spontaneous speaking, immediate comprehension, and performance under evaluative conditions, several items were adjusted to capture anxiety more directly related to Japanese classroom interaction.

The item “I feel afraid when I do not understand what the lecturer says in Japanese” reflects anxiety arising from difficulty processing classroom instructions or spoken input during learning activities. The highest mean score for this item was found in the 2024 cohort (3.82, SD = 0.874). This suggests that students at this stage may feel particularly anxious when they are unable to follow the lecturer’s Japanese in real time, especially in situations where immediate response is expected. In the context of foreign language anxiety, such difficulty in understanding input under evaluative conditions can intensify apprehension and reduce learners’ sense of control (Horwitz et al., 1986).

A similar pattern appeared in the item “*I panic when I have to speak Japanese without preparation,*” which reflects anxiety related to spontaneous oral production. The 2024 and 2025 cohorts recorded similarly high mean scores (4.18 and 4.17, respectively), indicating that both intermediate and first-year students experienced considerable anxiety in unprepared speaking situations, such as oral tests or impromptu classroom responses. By contrast, the 2023 and 2022 cohorts showed slightly lower means (3.75 and 3.74). This pattern suggests that greater experience in Japanese language learning may help reduce anxiety in unexpected speaking situations, although it does not eliminate it entirely. Overall, the findings indicate that test-related anxiety in *kaiwa* classes is closely tied to the demands of immediate comprehension and spontaneous oral performance.

Table. 6

Table 6 shows the distribution of statement items in the test anxiety category across the four cohorts

No	Questions	2022 cohort		2023 cohort		2024 cohort		2025 cohort	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
2	I feel afraid when I don't understand what the lecturer says in Japanese.	3.49	1.292	3.67	1.155	3.82	0.874	3.50	1.243
5	I panic when I have to speak Japanese without preparation.	3.74	1.358	3.75	1.357	4.18	0.751	4.17	0.937
10	I feel compelled to prepare myself before kaiwa classes.	2.89	1.022	2.83	1.267	3.18	1.168	2.33	0.985
12	The pace of Japanese language learning is so fast that I am afraid I will not be able to keep up.	3.17	1.098	3.08	1.084	3.73	0.786	3.00	1.206
16	I feel overwhelmed by the many rules that must be mastered for learning in kaiwa class.	3.11	1.051	3.08	1.240	3.27	0.905	2.50	0.798
18	I tremble when I know I will be called on in kaiwa class.	3.14	1.192	3.17	1.115	3.73	1.009	3.33	0.778
21	I feel upset when I do not understand the mistakes corrected by my lecturer.	2.83	1.098	3.00	1.206	3.36	1.120	3.33	0.778
22	I feel that other students give better answers in Japanese than I do	3.23	1.140	3.25	1.138	3.27	1.104	3.08	0.793

For the item *"I feel compelled to prepare myself before kaiwa classes,"* the 2024 cohort recorded the highest mean score (3.18, SD = 1.168), while the 2025 cohort showed the lowest (2.33, SD = 0.985). This pattern suggests that students in the 2024 cohort experienced greater pressure to prepare before class, possibly because they were facing higher expectations for oral performance and felt a stronger sense of academic responsibility in kaiwa learning.

A similar tendency appeared in the item *"The pace of Japanese language learning is so fast that I am afraid I will not be able to keep up."* The 2024 cohort again showed the highest mean score (3.73), followed by the 2022 cohort (3.17), the 2023 cohort (3.08), and the 2025 cohort (3.00). This finding indicates that students in the 2024 cohort were more likely to perceive the pace of instruction as difficult to manage. Such concern may reflect academic anxiety related to increasingly complex learning demands and the pressure to keep up with oral tasks and classroom expectations.

The same pattern was found in the item *"I feel overwhelmed by the many rules that must be mastered for learning in kaiwa class."* The highest mean score was again found in the 2024 cohort (3.27), followed by the 2022 cohort (3.12), the 2023 cohort (3.08), and the 2025 cohort (2.50).

This suggests that students in the 2024 cohort experienced greater cognitive pressure, as they were required to manage not only grammatical knowledge but also speaking conventions and classroom performance demands. In this sense, test anxiety in kaiwa classes appears to be closely related to the increasing complexity of what students are expected to control during oral interaction.

This tendency is further supported by the item *"I tremble when I know I will be called on in kaiwa class."* The 2024 cohort recorded the highest mean score (3.73, SD = 1.009), followed by the 2025 cohort (3.33, SD = 0.778), the 2023 cohort (3.17, SD = 1.115), and the 2022 cohort (3.14, SD = 1.192). These results indicate that physical symptoms of anxiety, such as trembling, were present across all cohorts, but were most pronounced in the 2024 cohort. This suggests that oral participation in front of the lecturer remained a particularly stressful experience for students at this stage.

A comparable pattern emerged in the item *"I feel upset when I do not understand the mistakes corrected by my lecturer."* The highest mean was again found in the 2024 cohort (3.36, SD = 1.120), while the lowest was recorded in the 2022 cohort (2.83, SD = 1.098). This finding suggests that students in the 2024 cohort were

more sensitive to lecturer feedback during oral evaluation, particularly when they were unable to interpret corrections clearly. Such responses may reflect anxiety related to self-assessment, performance monitoring, and concern about evaluation outcomes.

For the item *"I feel that other students give better answers in Japanese than I do,"* the differences across cohorts were relatively small. The 2024 cohort still showed the highest mean (3.27), followed closely by the 2023 cohort (3.25), the 2022 cohort (3.23), and the 2025 cohort (3.08). Although variation was limited, the result suggests that social comparison remained a common feature of evaluative speaking situations across all year levels.

Taken together, these findings indicate that the 2024 cohort showed the strongest tendency toward test anxiety across several aspects of *kaiwa* learning, including preparation pressure, difficulty keeping pace with instruction, cognitive overload, physical tension, and sensitivity to lecturer correction. By contrast, the 2025 cohort generally showed lower anxiety on several items, which may be related to their more limited exposure to academic and evaluative speaking demands at the beginning of their studies. Overall, the results suggest that test anxiety in *kaiwa* classes is shaped not only by formal assessment itself but also by the broader demands of oral performance, classroom pacing, and students' perceptions of their ability to meet increasingly complex expectations.

Pedagogical Implications for Reducing Speaking Anxiety

The findings of this study suggest several pedagogical implications for reducing speaking anxiety in *kaiwa* classes. Because anxiety was evident across cohorts, support strategies should not be limited to a particular year level but integrated throughout the program. One important strategy is **preparation**. Adequate preparation can reduce anxiety by increasing students' confidence and lowering their fear of making mistakes. Learners who are given sufficient time to prepare are generally more able to speak fluently and respond more calmly,

whereas lack of preparation may lead to confusion and heightened anxiety during oral performance (Juli Astria Mariani et al., 2023; Rizkiya & Pratolo, 2023).

A second strategy involves relaxation techniques. Previous research suggests that students often manage speaking anxiety by engaging in activities that help calm their nerves, such as taking deep breaths, drinking water, remaining silent briefly before speaking, or using small physical objects to reduce tension. Other forms of self-regulation, such as briefly distracting themselves or maintaining a calm posture, may also help students cope with anxiety before or during speaking tasks (Nuraeni et al., 2024). Although simple, such techniques may help students regain a sense of control in stressful speaking situations.

Another important implication concerns the role of the classroom environment and feedback practices. A supportive classroom atmosphere can reduce the interpersonal pressure associated with oral performance. Cooperative learning activities, such as pair work and small-group interaction, may help create a less intimidating context for speaking and encourage constructive peer support (Riyadi et al., 2024; Zhang, 2024). In addition, the form of feedback provided by instructors is important. Feedback expressed as supportive comments rather than solely in the form of grades may strengthen students' intrinsic motivation and promote more positive speaking experiences (Yang et al., 2021).

Finally, reducing speaking anxiety also requires attention to self-efficacy and confidence building. Students who believe in their ability to manage speaking tasks are more likely to cope effectively with anxiety and participate more actively in oral communication. Developing self-efficacy therefore becomes an important part of language instruction. This may be supported by encouraging students to recognize small improvements, focus on gradual progress, and evaluate their development in relation to their own learning rather than through constant comparison with more proficient speakers (Rindi, 2024).

Overall, these strategies suggest that reducing speaking anxiety in kaiwa classes requires a combination of instructional support, emotional regulation, and confidence-building practices. Rather than treating anxiety as an individual weakness, it should be addressed as a pedagogical issue that can be managed through thoughtful classroom design and supportive teaching practices.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated Japanese speaking anxiety among students in the Japanese Language Education program at UMY across four cohorts in kaiwa classes. The findings showed that students in all cohorts experienced a moderate level of speaking anxiety, with no statistically significant differences across academic years. These results indicate that speaking anxiety is not primarily determined by cohort or year level, but is more likely shaped by individual and classroom-related factors such as self-confidence, prior speaking experience, perceived evaluation, and social support.

Although the overall differences were not significant, the item-level analysis suggested that the 2024 cohort tended to show relatively higher anxiety across communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. This pattern may reflect the greater linguistic and performative demands faced at this stage of learning. More broadly, the results confirm that speaking anxiety remains a persistent challenge in kaiwa learning.

The study therefore points to the importance of pedagogical support, including preparation before speaking tasks, confidence-building efforts, and a supportive classroom environment. Since anxiety may hinder students' oral participation and learning performance, it should be addressed as an important part of Japanese language teaching practice. This study contributes empirical evidence to research on foreign language speaking anxiety and offers practical implications for creating more supportive kaiwa classrooms.

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