Pedagogical Implications for Coping with Reading Anxiety Among Korean as a Foreign Language University Students

Wattanasak Fuengbangluang

Faculty of Liberal Arts, Rajamangala University of Technology Rattanakosin

Corresponding Author:

Wattanasak Fuengbangluang

Faculty of Liberal Arts, Rajamangala University of Technology Rattanakosin

96 Village No.3, Phutthamonthon 5th Road, Phutthamonthon District, Nakhon Pathom, 73170, Thailand

E-mail: Wattanasak.fue@rmutr.ac.th

Pedagogical Implications for Coping with Reading Anxiety Among Korean as a Foreign Language University Students

Abstract

This study analyzed research implications from journal articles to discern pedagogical implications for coping with reading comprehension anxiety among Korean as a foreign language (KFL) university students. In April 2024, 15 articles were chosen from online journal databases in South Korea, including Korean Studies Information Service System (KISS) and Korea Citation Index (KCI). Content analysis was used to analyze articles following the pedagogical implications of emotional control and instructional design. Results were that most discussed was de-stressing the learning context by teaching student reading strategy and redesigning appropriate instructional contents to suit target KFL students, followed by emotional control. Two pedagogical implications were suggested: a) giving appropriate feedback to student responses; and b) sequencing the instructional design based on pre-reading, while reading, and post-reading.

Keywords: pedagogical implications, KFL student reading anxiety, reading comprehension, foreign language anxiety

1. Introduction

In classrooms, foreign language (FL) anxiety is described as apprehension or uneasiness about learning an unfamiliar language. (Zeidner & Matthews, 2011; Gkonou et al., 2017). It may impede FL study (Horwitz et al., 1986).

Reading anxiety is a feeling of stress felt by readers in processing and interpreting FL texts (Copan & Pektas, 2013). Over the past decade, anxiety research has examined variables for pedagogical purposes (Saito et al., 1999).

Korean is ranked eleventh or twelfth among the major Asian languages used by native speakers and migrants. It is taught at tertiary settings in 41 countries (Song, 2005). Many universities in FL contexts provide additional FL programs as options for students who may choose Korean as a full degree or elective subject. These programs aim to develop student Korean language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing) for further study and work. Some courses include Korean language (Korean 1; Korean 2; and Korean history) and job-related Korean (Petasen & Mesupnikorn, 2020; Thandee, 2006).

Only a limited number of research publications exist on Korean reading anxiety (Jee, 2012; Jee, 2019; Joo & Damron, 2015), making generalizations difficult, despite growing numbers of Korean learners and demand for university Korean educational programs.

To apply the phenomenon to Korean reading comprehension instruction, more research into Korean reading anxiety is needed. The present study examined Korean as a foreign language (KFL) reading anxiety of university students in FL contexts and analyzed research implications from journal articles to provide pedagogical implications for coping with related anxiety for non-native speakers of Korean.

2. Literature Review

2.1 FL Anxiety

Zeidner and Matthews (2011) present an overview of areas of FL anxiety associated with information-processing abilities such as encoding, maintaining working memory, and integrating information. As Horwitz (2001) noted, students tend to experience intense anxiety when they read languages different from their native language (L1) in terms of writing system, grammar points, and sentence structure. In the classroom, teachers should lead activities as well as offer student support with coping strategies to help students conquer unpleasant feelings. Horwitz (2001) gave further examples of instructional conditions for FL classroom anxiety.

In terms of self-efficacy, students who suspect that they are doing poorly in language class tend to have elevated anxiety levels. As for learning style, students tend to react differently to instructional activities such as group assignments.

Horwitz et al. (1986) found that according to the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), 225 university FL students expressed learning diversely. There was fear of speaking, being judged by classmates, making errors, and confusion from complex language rules. Therefore, instructors must predict and reduce FL learning anxiety.

2.2 FL Reading Anxiety

In the literature, no book-length research theoretically investigates FL reading anxiety. Instead, a study by Saito et al. (1999) of university language course students (French (114); Japanese (77); and Russian (77)) illustrates FL reading anxiety. Data was collected during the final week of each course by a self-report questionnaire on Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale (FLRAS) rating reading processes, language knowledge, motivation management, and reading strategy. Student grades were collected and compared with data from the self-report questionnaire. Hypotheses were confirmed that higher FL anxiety levels generally contributed to higher FL reading anxiety. More specifically, different language features (writing system, grammar points, sentence structure) and world knowledge (culture) directly affected FL reading anxiety. For example, Japanese language and culture appeared to be anxiety-provoking for American students. Related to this, lower first language (L1) reading ability impacted FL reading. For instance, students struggled to decode and use a required reading strategy. Saito et al. (1999) extends and explains pedagogical implications for coping with reading anxiety based on Horwitz et al.'s (1986) suggestions. To ameliorate anxiety-producing situations, teachers should support student emotional control with breathing exercises and positive inner speech. To destress the learning context, reading strategies, relevant instructional contents, and language skill practice should be taught. Appropriate reading level L2 contents must be considered for pertinent reading strategies. It is also worth designing reading reinforcement activities for student engagement in potential reading practices.

In conclusion, FL anxiety is related to student psychological reaction against anxiety-proving stimuli. The present study adapts Saito et al.'s (1999) pedagogical implications of FL reading anxiety as coding schemes for analyzing research implications for Korean reading comprehension.

2.3 Previous Studies

Some research was retrieved to discuss further phenomena of FL classroom anxiety. In Chinese classes, students expressed reading anxiety due to language differences (linguistic distances) and experiences in learning Chinese. These aspects contributed to Chinese reading anxiety. For example, they encountered challenges in processing unfamiliar aspects of language, including the alphabet, writing system, and sentence structure (Zhao et al., 2013). Similarly, in Korean classes, students had Korean reading anxiety, possibly due to unfamiliarity with Korean rather than complex learning difficulty. The more time spent on learning, the more familiarity was felt (Jee, 2014). In English classes, results showed that reading anxiety was related to reading comprehension. Students with a lower anxiety level had better working memory capacity and more willingness to take risks with different reading strategies such as guesswork and summarizing. (Song, 2018).

Results of previous studies underlined that different language features between L1 and L2, along with language proficiency levels, caused FL learning anxiety. Creating a positive learning environment through non-anxiety provoking practices (games, journal writing, group activities); minimal feedback (no immediate evaluation); and designing relevant instructional activities to reinforce reading skills helped conquer FL reading anxiety (Jee, 2014; Song, 2018). Additionally, understanding student reading proficiency levels facilitated designing related instructional contents (Zhao et al., 2013).

In sum, FL reading anxiety persists in language classrooms. Instructors must clarify the phenomenon of Korean reading anxiety to substantiate and formulate instruction.

3. Research Methodology

Qualitative research examines individual perspectives and experiences. Document analysis provides data. Narrative descriptions are reported (Johnson & Christensen, 2020). In the present study, journal articles were examined to provide qualitative data.

3.1 Sample

The sample for the present study consisted of journal articles. Fraenkel et al.'s (2012) suggestion was adapted to search for databases and search engines, since it entailed adaptable processes.
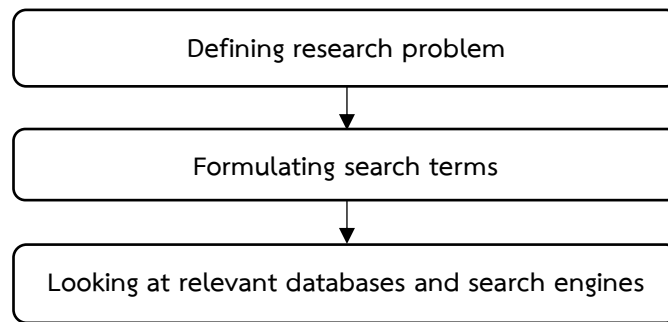
```
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│           Defining research problem          │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────┘
                      │
                      ▼
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│           Formulating search terms           │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────┘
                      │
                      ▼
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│   Looking at relevant databases and search engines   │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────┘
```

Figure 1 Processes of searching for databases and search engines

In this study, after defining the research problem (KFL university student reading anxiety), search terms were chosen. Then relevant databases and search engines were sought and databases as well as search engines accessed. Keyword combinations of "anxiety at Korean reading", "KFL student reading anxiety", and "KFL classroom anxiety" were used to search for full-text articles from online journal databases in South Korea: Korean Journal Database (KCI), Korean Studies Information Service System (KISS), and available search engines.

KCI and KISS were main sources because they provide thousands of English and Korean language full-text journal articles.
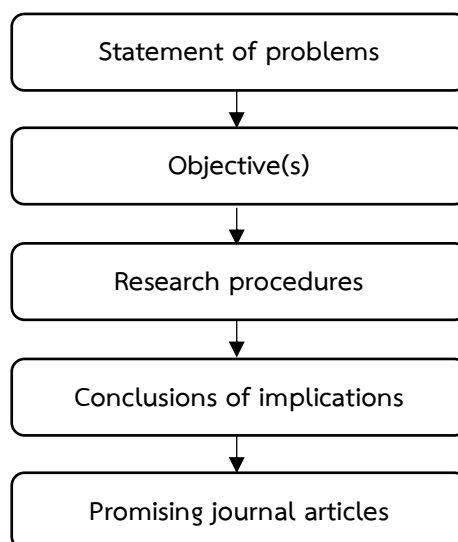
```
┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│        Statement of problems        │
└─────────────────────────────────────┘
                  │
                  ▼
┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│            Objective(s)             │
└─────────────────────────────────────┘
                  │
                  ▼
┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│         Research procedures         │
└─────────────────────────────────────┘
                  │
                  ▼
┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│      Conclusions of implications     │
└─────────────────────────────────────┘
                  │
                  ▼
┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│      Promising journal articles      │
└─────────────────────────────────────┘
```

Figure 2 Processes of selecting article

Figure 2 illustrates a four-step article selection process: first, a statement of problems provided information about Korean reading anxiety at universities; secondly, article objectives focused on Korean reading anxiety; thirdly, research procedures followed anxiety research methodology; and finally, subjects or participants were non-native speakers of Korean. Participant classification in articles relied on one of the following criteria: 1) non-native speakers of Korean; 2) non-Korean language major or Korean language major students at universities or language institutes under university supervision; 3) language proficiency at beginner, intermediate, or advanced levels; and 4) conclusions or implications offered pedagogical implications of Korean reading anxiety. However, some articles offered pedagogical implications in separate sections. These were also included as promising material.

In April 2024, the article selection procedure resulted in 15 articles chosen. The coding scheme was based on Saito et al.'s (1999) pedagogical implications of FL reading anxiety. Category I: coping with anxiety-producing situations by guiding student emotional control by breathing exercises and positive inner speech. Category II: de-stressing the learning context by teaching reading strategies and designing appropriate instructional contents and practices for reading skills.

3.2 Data Analysis

Content analysis determines qualitative data (words, themes, or concepts) and categorizes them according to coded themes (Fraenkel et al., 2012). In the present study, documents (journal articles) were analyzed to find pedagogical implications for Korean reading anxiety. Data analysis procedures follow:

First, defining terms. The analysis was of two pedagogical implications for Korean reading anxiety: a) coping with the anxiety-producing situation through emotional control; and b) de-stressing the learning context by appropriate instructional design.

Secondly, specifying the analysis unit. Sentences found in the conclusion, implications, or separated section(s) related to the defined terms were investigated and labelled.

Thirdly, formulating coding category and developing pertinent categories; data obtained was classified based on coding schemes and themes.

Fourthly, validating data. The trustworthiness of analysis was determined by peer review. The peer was asked to check the data obtained from analysis forms. Any disagreements were discussed and resolved.

4. Results and Discussion

To address research objectives, the data obtained was analyzed and tabulated:

Of 15 journal articles selected, 13 evaluated non-language major students. Seven of these addressed mixed-ability classes. Three were non-language major intermediate level students. Two were at a beginner level, while one was at an advanced level. Two articles included Korean language major students. Mixed-ability classes meant that some journal articles did not clearly define language proficiency levels. Instead, Test of Proficiency in Korean (TOPIK) scores of participants were tabulated. These articles were categorized in the mixed-ability class for the present article.

Journal articles were grouped, analyzed, and listed in alphabetical order.

Table 1 Analysis of journal articles

Author(s), Year	Research Instrument(s)	Participants	Main Implication(s)
Non-Language Major Students with Mixed-Ability Class			
1. Jee (2018)	FLCAS	KFL students	**Category I** - giving KFL students emotional support and encouragement. **Category II** - designing instructional activities to reinforce post reading.
2. Joo and Damron (2015)	- FLRAS - FLCAS - Reading Performance Test	KFL students	**Category II** - teaching reading strategies: global, problem-solving, support strategies. - integrating reading with other skills, such as examining illustrations and discussing ideas, reading captions, discussion, studying maps, charts, graphs and analyzing information. - teaching vocabulary strategies, like recording key words in selected passages, noting information about significant terms and their definitions, noted in context-rich sentences for application.

Author(s), Year	Research Instrument(s)	Participants	Main Implication(s)
3. Lee (2012)	Diary studies	Chinese KFL students	**Category II** - providing opportunities for free extensive reading activities. - adjusting textbook contents to meet KFL student interests.
4. Myat (2019)	- FLRAS - FLCAS - TOPIK	Myanmar KFL students	**Category I** - encouraging positive learning environments by promoting confidence and motivation. **Category II** - providing opportunities for free reading activity. - using different media to teach vocabulary. - teaching reading based on pre-while-post reading.
5. Su-mi and Bo-ra (2021)	- FLRAS - FLCAS	Chinese and Vietnamese KFL students	**Category II** - promoting more background knowledge such as Korean culture to help KFL students overcome language unfamiliarity with vocabulary and grammar.
6. Youngjoo (2014)	- FLRAS - Survey of Reading Strategies (SORS) - Interview	American KFL students	**Category II** - assessing target classroom to teach appropriate reading strategies for KFL students. For example, if a) previous knowledge (language, background) or b) planning awareness (setting reading purposes, finding keywords), monitoring (maintaining concentration, noticing unfamiliar words, expressions), evaluating (checking if reading purposes are achieved, checking accuracy of obtain information) was emphasized. - promoting student-centered learning so that KFL students have more opportunity to reinforce post reading.

Author(s), Year	Research Instrument(s)	Participants	Main Implication(s)
7. Yu (2021)	- FLRAS - Reading Strategy Questionnaire	Chinese, Taiwanese, Vietnamese, Japanese, Mongolian, English, Thai, American, Canadian, Russian, Brazilian, Uzbekistani, Egyptian, Norwegian, and Saudi Arabian KFL students	**Category I** - giving KFL students emotional support to encourage positive perception and motivation. **Category II** - teaching reading strategies emphasizing planning awareness (setting reading purposes, finding key words), monitoring (maintaining concentration, noticing unfamiliar words, expression), evaluating (checking if reading purposes are achieved, checking accuracy of obtained information).
Non-Language Major Students with Intermediate Level			
1. Da-seum (2020)	- FLRAS - Interview	Vietnamese KFL students	**Category I** - giving positive feedback on KFL student errors when reading aloud. **Category II** - teaching reading strategies to understand entire paragraphs by summarizing texts, providing teaching vocabulary and grammar before teaching reading. - providing opportunities to practice and organize reading strategies. - reading aloud to practice pronunciation.
2. Hyun-jin (2018)	FLRAS	Chinese, Malaysian, Norwegian, Saudi, Russian, American, Brazilian, Japanese, Kazakhstani, and Hong Kong KFL students	**Category II** - teaching reading strategies, like finding key vocabulary, inferring meaning. - explaining meaning of vocabulary and teaching grammar before reading. - providing extensive reading opportunities.

Author(s), Year	Research Instrument(s)	Participants	Main Implication(s)
3. Jee (2019)	- FLRAS - FLCAS - FLLAS (Foreign Language Listening Anxiety Scale) - SLWAI (Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory) - Short-answer questionnaire	KFL students	**Category II** - teaching reading strategies to cope with unfamiliar vocabulary, grammar, and expressions. - designing instructional activities suitable for characteristics of target KFL students.
Non-Language Major Students with Beginner Level			
1. Sun-min and Shuai (2023)	FLRAS	KFL students	**Category II** - teaching reading strategies to cope with unfamiliar vocabulary and grammar to understand entire paragraphs. - assessing language proficiency levels to design appropriate instructional contents.
2. Hyun-jin (2020)	FLRAS	American, Chinese, Malaysian, Emirati, Norwegian, Saudi Arabian, Uzbekistan, German, Mongolian, Vietnamese, Spanish, and Kazakhstani KFL students	**Category II** - teaching reading strategies to cope with unfamiliar vocabulary, grammar and to understand entire paragraphs. - assessing language proficiency to design appropriate instructional contents. **Category I** - encouraging a positive learning environment by promoting motivation and self-efficacy or self-belief.

Author(s), Year	Research Instrument(s)	Participants	Main Implication(s)
Non-Language Major Students with Advanced Level			
Hyun-jin and Jeong-eun (2017)	FLRAS	Chinese, Taiwanese, Canadian, American, Indonesian, Belgian, and Uzbekistani KFL students	**Category II** - designing instructional activities supporting vocabulary learning to strengthen reading comprehension.
Korean Language Major Students			
1. Ning (2023)	- FLCAS - Modern Korean Poetry Study Anxiety Questionnaire	KFL students	**Category I** - encouraging a positive learning environment by cooperative study (small group instruction). **Category II** - redesigning a reading evaluation more suitable for target KFL students.
2. Xiachoen (2010)	- FLRAS - Reading Strategy Questionnaire	KFL students	**Category II** - teaching reading strategies to guide KFL students to selective independent use of reading strategies: comprehension (identifying main ideas, summarizing main formation), memory (rereading, taking note), and retrieval (using prior knowledge, relating information).

In Table 1, pedagogical implications for coping with KFL university student reading anxiety were analyzed.

The research aimed to fill a gap in studying KFL undergraduate reading anxiety in FL contexts to facilitate Korean reading comprehension instruction. However, the limited number of journal articles available did not permit generalizations about pedagogical implications for coping with KFL student reading anxiety. To avoid overgeneralization, results were discussed broadly, based on findings.

Still, a unique issue derived from non-language major students in a mixed-ability class of intermediate level, advanced level, and language major students. These student groups sought to advance language learning to reinforce language knowledge (reading sequences: pre, while, and post-reading) and language use (extensive reading).

Drawing on obtained data, most pedagogical implications related to coping with KFL reading anxiety by de-stressing the learning context, as discussed in three aspects of Category II: First, KFL students could exploit different reading strategies. For example, reading strategies might help them to a) conquer unfamiliar vocabulary, grammar, or expressions; and b) facilitate reading comprehension through planning, monitoring, and evaluation while reading for comprehension. Secondly, KFL students could be encouraged to acquire more language sources (culture) by extensive reading. Thirdly, teachers could consider adjusting instruction by a) preparing relevant instructional activities for before, during, and after reading; b) creating adjustable lesson plans; and c) heeding different KFL student reading proficiency levels. Some pedagogical implications depended on coping with anxiety-producing situations, as discussed in Category I. This underscored emotional support for creating a positive learning environment, by boosting confidence, motivation, encouragement, and learning in small groups.

As reported, the findings revealed that de-stressing the learning context by teaching reading strategies and redesigning instructional contents to suit target KFL students was suggested oftenest, followed by emotional control. The findings did not lead to a conclusion that Category II is superior to Category I. Instead, they aim to establish pedagogical implications for classroom adaptation.

Overall, results of the present study cohered with Zhao, et al. (2013), Jee (2014), and Song (2018) insofar as FL students learning Korean as well as those learning Chinese and English claimed reading anxiety with unfamiliar languages, linguistic merging opportunities, and reading proficiency levels. Altogether, pedagogical implications from previous studies made similar claims in introducing diverse reading strategies, encouraging FL students to acquire more background knowledge and create a positive learning environment. Theoretically, FL anxiety is related to psychological reactions affecting information-processing abilities like encoding and working memory. Instructors must find suitable practices to cope with this challenge (Horwitz, 2001; Zeidner & Matthews, 2011).

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

Psychologically, FL anxiety is defined as unease, worry, and uncertainty. It may become a language barrier. Due to an inherent FL learning anxiety in language classrooms, FL reading anxiety is a main concern. This qualitative research sought to analyze research implications from journal articles to provide pedagogical implications for coping with KFL university student reading anxiety. Fifteen articles were selected and analyzed. Results were that de-stressing the learning context by teaching reading strategies and redesigning instructional contents to suit target KFL students were discussed oftenest, followed by providing emotional control.

Two pedagogical implications for coping with KFL student reading anxiety derived from the findings were discussed.

First, emotional control should help reduce anxiety. A major concern is the feedback method. Instructors should give appropriate assessment in conjunction with student responses. For example, immediate reactions should be avoided in some situations, while explicit comments should be given in others.

Second, Korean reading instructional design may be sequenced based on pre-reading, while reading, and post-reading. In pre-reading, instructors may test student KFL reading. They may also lead exercises or activities to cultivate vocabulary and background knowledge as while reading, reading strategy, and group activities are implemented. In post-reading, after in-class practice is finished, extensive reading may be assigned.

Further research should include more journal article samples. These may provide insight into comprehensively addressing KFL reading anxiety.

References

Capan, S. A., & Pektas, R. (2013). An empirical analysis of the relationship between foreign language reading anxiety and reading strategy training. *English Language Teaching, 6*(12), 181–188.

Da-seum, L. (2020). A Study on Vietnamese Korean language learners' reading anxiety through interviews. *우리말연구,* (61), 143-182.

Fraenkel, J. R., Wallen, N. E., & Hyun, H. H. (2012). *How to design and evaluate research in education* (8th ed.). Mc Graw HIll.

Gkonou, C., Daubney, M., & Dewaele, J. (2017*). New insights into language anxiety: Theory, research and educational implications*. Multilingual Matters.

Horwitz, E. (2001). Language anxiety and achievement. *Annual review of applied linguistics, 21,* 112-126.

Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., & Cope, J. (1986). Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal, 70*(2), 125–132. https://doi.org/10.2307/327317

Hyun-jin, P. (2018). Correlation between anxiety factors and level of anxiety in second language reading with focus on intermediate level Korean language learners. *The Study of Korean Language and Literature, 60*, 361-393.

Hyun-Jin, P. (2020). A study on reading anxiety factors in beginner Korean language learners. *The Study of Korean Language and Literature, 66*, 337-366.

Hyun-jin, P., & Jeong-eun, K. (2017). Relationships between reading anxiety and advanced Korean learners academic performances: In the context of Korean for academic purposes. *Bilingual Research, 67*, 129-160.

Jee, M. J. (2012). Effects of language anxiety on three levels of classes of Korean as a foreign language. *Journal of Korean Language Education, 23*(2), 467-487.

Jee, M. J. (2014). Affective factors in Korean as a foreign language: Anxiety and beliefs. *Language, Culture and Curriculum, 27(*2), 182-195.

Jee, M. J. (2018). Four skill-based foreign language anxieties: Learners of Korean in Australia. *Linguistic Research, 35*, 23–45.

Jee, M. J. (2019). Foreign language anxiety and self-efficacy: Intermediate Korean as a foreign language learners. *어학연구, 55*(2), 431-456.

Joo, K. Y., & Damron, J. (2015). Foreign language reading anxiety: Korean as a foreign language in the United States. *Journal of the National Council of Less Commonly Taught Languages, 17*(1), 23-48.

Johnson, B., & Christensen, L. B. (2020). *Educational research: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed approaches* (7th ed). SAGE publications.

Lee, H. S. (2012). Using diary studies to examine reading anxiety in KFL learners. *Journal of the International Network for Korean Language and Culture, 9*(1), 221-245.

Myat. (2019). A study on the anxiety of reading and learning Korean for Myanmar learners. *Language Facts and Perspectives, 48*, 571-597.

Ning, W. (2023). Anxiety among Korean learners reading modern poetry: Survey of advanced Korean Language learners in China. *국어교육연, (51), 277-321.

Petasen, P., & Mesupnikom, N. (2020). Korean language education (KLE) and Korean studies (KS) in Thailand's universities: Current status, problems and challenges, and policy recommendations. *Thai Journal of East Asian Studies, 24*(1), 18–35.

Saito, Y., Garza, T. J., & Horwitz, E. K. (1999). Foreign language reading anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal*, *83*(2), 202-218.

Song, J. (2018). Relationships among reading anxiety, reading processing, and reading comprehension. *Foreign Languages Education*, *25*(2), 83-113.

Song, J. J. (2005). *The Korean language: Structure, use and context*. Routledge.

Sun-min, A., & Shuai, H. (2023). Analysis of Korean reading anxiety factors of beginner Korean language learners. *The Study of Korean Language and Literature, 76*, 369-400.

Su-mi, K., & Bo-ra, M. (2021). The correlation between reading anxiety and reading strategy of Korean learners for academic purposes. *Korean Language and Literature in International Context, 91*, 273-301.

Thandee, D. (2006). *Continuity of Korean studies in Thailand.* http://www3.ru.ac.th/korea/article1/article17.pdf

Xiachoen, L. (2010). Effects of reading anxiety on KFL learners' reading strategy use. *The Language and Culture, 6*(3), 107-133.

Youngjoo, K. (2014). A study on reading anxiety and reading strategy use in American college learners of Korean. *Teaching Korean as a Foreign Language, 41*, 61-88.

Yu, C. L. (2021). The structural relationship between factors determining reading comprehension of Korean language learners for academic purposes. *국어교육연구, (48), 291-332.

Zeidner, M., & Matthews, G. (2011). *Anxiety 101*. Springer Publisher Company.

Zhao, A., Guo, Y., & Dynia, J. (2013). Foreign language reading anxiety: Chinese as a foreign language in the United States. *The Modern Language Journal*, *97*(3), 764-778.