
Influence of Foreign Language Anxiety on the Academic Achievement of Senior Secondary School Students in French in Imo State

Obinna-Akakuru Annabel Uchechukwu^{1,*}, Maduagwu Beatrice Chinomso²,
Nelson-Okartar Ezinne³, Onyeka Gospel-Tonyj³

¹Department of Psychology, Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri, Nigeria

²Department of Vocational Education, University of Maiduguri, Maiduguri, Nigeria

³Department of Life Science Education, Imo State University, Owerri, Nigeria

Email address

anniemagma@gmail.com (Obinna-Akakuru A. U.)

*Corresponding author

Citation

Obinna-Akakuru Annabel Uchechukwu, Maduagwu Beatrice Chinomso, Nelson-Okartar Ezinne, Onyeka Gospel-Tony. Influence of Foreign Language Anxiety on the Academic Achievement of Senior Secondary School Students in French in Imo State. *Language, Literature and Culture*. Vol. 2, No. 3, 2019, pp. 123-126.

Received: May 29, 2019; **Accepted:** August 13, 2019; **Published:** November 21, 2019

Abstract: This study investigated the influence of foreign language anxiety on the academic achievement of Senior Secondary School Students in French Language. Descriptive survey was used to obtain data from respondents who gave consent to the study. The population of the study included all the Senior Secondary school students in Owerri Educational Zone 1 and 2, while the sample consisted of 300 Senior Secondary two (SS2), male and female students randomly selected from six Secondary Schools within the population. The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FCLAS), and French Language Achievement Test (FLAT) was used as the instrument for data collection. Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were used to answer the research questions. The result revealed that language anxiety influences the academic achievement of students in French language, based on the findings, recommendations were made which includes that Instructional techniques which such as role playing, simulations and games should be adopted in teaching French language in order to create an enabling learning environment, free of tension and unnecessary stress so as avoid anxiety among students.

Keywords: Anxiety, Foreign Language, Academic Achievement

1. Introduction

Language teachers have observed, on numerous occasions the apprehension and discomfort, experienced by many students, who are attempting to acquire and produce a foreign language. This nervousness or anxiety frequently seems to become particularly aggravated when students are required to speak in class, and during exams and tests [1]. Many learners express their inability and sometimes even acknowledge their failure in learning a second language. These learners may be good at learning other skills and sciences, but when it comes to learning another language, they claim to have a 'block head' against it [2]. These personal observations have been supported in the studies of many authors, who have examined anxiety in language students. MacIntyre and Gardner in [1], for example, asserted that anxiety poses several potential

problems for the student of a foreign language because it can interfere with the acquisition, retention, and production of the new language.

Anxiety is a subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with arousal of the nervous system [3, 4] describes anxiety as a psychological and physiological state characterized by physical, emotional, cognitive, and behavioural components. Anxiety means trouble; in either presence or absence of psychological stress, anxiety can create a feeling of fear, worry, uneasiness, and dread [5]. It is considered to be a normal response to stress. It may help an individual to cope with the demands of life but in excess it may be considered as anxiety [6]. Anxiety is an intrinsic part of human nature and if we learn why something happen it usually becomes less frightening [7]. Psychologists made a distinction between two basic types of coping

strategies which include problem focused strategy and emotion focused strategy. Problem focused strategy attempts to deal with those aspects of environment that are responsible for stress and anxiety expression, that is dealing directly with the stress situation, while emotion focused strategy tends to change the way a person thinks about a stressful situation. It is when anxiety is in its severe form that some students experience genuine problem in academics. Their minds go blank, they experience the shakes, their hands go numb and they suffer from a number of sudden disabilities associated with anxiety during examination [4].

[8] Sees language anxiety as the worry and negative emotional reaction aroused when learning or using a second language. Similarly, Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope in [8] conceptualized foreign language anxiety as a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning, arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process. It is that which impedes (one's) ability to perform successfully in a foreign language class [9]. Foreign Language anxiety is attributable to different causes. The primary sources of foreign language anxiety, explicated by Horwitz et al. in [8], are communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. Price in [8], concluded from his case studies that the difficulty level of foreign language classes, personal perception of language aptitude, certain personality variables (e.g., perfectionism and fear of public speaking), and stressful classroom experiences are all possible causes of anxiety. In addition, Young in [8] identified six potential sources of foreign language anxiety from three aspects: the learner, the teacher, and the instructional practice. He claimed that language anxiety is caused by (a) personal and interpersonal anxiety, (b) learner beliefs about language learning, (c) instructor beliefs about language teaching, (d) instructor-learner interactions, (e) classroom procedures, and (f) language testing. He further elucidated that these sources of foreign language anxiety are interrelated.

Academic achievement means achievement level of the students. It can be defined as what a student does or achieve at his school [9]. It is a common practise to promote students from a lower class to a higher class, on the basis of his academic achievement. Crow & Crow in [10] defined it as the extent to which a learner is profiting from instructions in a given area of learning i.e., achievement is reflected by the extent to which skill or knowledge has been imparted to him. Good in [10], sees academic achievement as knowledge attained or skills developed in the school subjects, usually designated by test scores or by marks assigned by teachers, or by both. In fact it has become an index of future in today's highly competitive environment.

French Language appears to be one of the difficult subjects taught in Secondary Schools as a result of the nature of the subject and the way it is being taught. It has been observed that French Language classes are presented in such a way that discourages open questions, inquiry and active participation which makes the study very abstract and quite uninteresting. The effect of this is that students become

anxious in class and therefore, perform poorly academically.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effect of foreign language anxiety on the academic achievement of senior secondary school students in French Language. Specifically to:

1. To identify the extent to which foreign language anxiety influences the academic achievement of senior secondary school students in French Language;
2. To identify the relationship between foreign language anxiety and academic achievement of senior secondary school students in French Language.

The following research questions were posed to guide the study:

1. To what extent does foreign language anxiety influence the academic achievement of senior secondary school students in French Language?
2. What is the relationship between foreign language anxiety and academic achievement of senior secondary school students in French Language?

2. Method

Descriptive survey design was adopted in the study. The population of study comprises of all the senior secondary school students in Owerri Educational Zone (1 and 2), which are one hundred and seven thousand, six hundred and sixty three (107, 663), (SEMB, 2016). Simple random sampling technique was used to select 300 students from six secondary schools within the population. The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FCLAS) developed by [2] and researcher made French Language Achievement Test (FLAT) was used as the instrument for data collection. The scale is composed of 33 items, measured on the four point Likert scales, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, along the values of 1 – 5. The higher the score the more reflective it is of the anxiety the learners feel in the French class. The scale is composed of four subscales. Items 3, 7, 13, 15, 20, 23, 25, 31, and 33 measure fear of negative evaluation [2], items 1, 9, 14, 18, 24, 27, 29, and 32 measure communication apprehension [2], and items 2, 8, 10, 19, and 21 measure fear of tests (Horwitz et al., 1986), while item 4, 5, 6, 11, 12, 16, 17, 22, 26, 28, 30 measured anxiety of French classes [3]. The scale consisted of two sections. Section A was designed to collect data on personal variables of gender, age and religion. Section B focused on the study objectives. To ensure the cooperation of the selected respondents, clarification as regards the purpose of study was made from the onset of the study and participants were assured confidentiality of information provided while the test had two sections, A and B. Section A, elicited information on the bio-data of the students, while Section B, contained 30 multichoice question items. The test consisted of two sections. Section A was designed to collect data on personal variables of gender, age and religion while section B had 30 multi choice question items, with options A-D used to get information on the academic achievement of students.

A pilot test was conducted using test-retest method to

ascertain the reliability of the test instruments using Pearson's Product moment correlation. The instruments (FCLAS and FLAT) had reliability coefficient of 0.75 and 0.82, which were high and reliable. Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were used to answer the research questions and Pearson product moment correlation coefficient was used to ascertain the relation between anxiety and the academic achievement of students in French language.

3. Result

Table 1. Socio-Demographic data of respondents (n=300).

S/N	Biodata	(f)	(%)
1	Age:		
	10-13	204	68.0
	14-16	72	24.0
	16-18	18	6.0
2	Gender:		
	Male	130	43.3
	Female	170	56.7
3	Marital status:		
	Single	300	100.0
	Married	0	0.0
	Divorced	0	0.0

Table 3. The of correlation analysis between Language anxiety and Student's academic achievement.

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	N	Language Anxiety	Academic Achievement	Signal
Language Anxiety	8.8867	3.09825	300	1	0.734	0.00
Academic Achievement	7.5733	3.17357	300	0.734	1	0.00

The result of the analysis implies that the two set of data correlates positively as the calculated correlation value is 0.734, implying that the sets of data had the sig value 0.00, which is less than the level of significance. This means that the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, there is significant relationship between Language anxiety and Student's academic achievement.

4. Discussion

The result of the study revealed that language anxiety influences the academic achievement of students in French language. It also revealed foreign language anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, communication apprehension, anxiety of French classes and fear of tests as variables, which increases students' anxiety in French language learning. The result indicated that there was a significant relationship between anxiety and the academic achievement of secondary school students in French language. This result is in line with [11] who found that test- anxiety decreases attention span, memory and concentration, then leads to low academic performance and [12], who found out that high school students with high test-anxiety had a poor school performance.

It is also in line with [1, 13] who found that foreign language anxiety decreases attention span, memory and concentration, then leads to low academic achievement. It

S/N	Biodata	(f)	(%)
4	Separated	0	0.0
	Religion:		
	Christianity	360	100.0
	Traditional religion	0	0.0
	Islam		0.0

Table 2. Different categories of anxiety on the FLCAS.

Rank	Types	Flcas scores of each item	
		M	SD
1	Communication apprehension	3.64	0.96
2	Test anxiety	3.11	1.05
3	Fear of negative evaluation	3.09	1.05
4	Negative attitude towards the French class	2.53	0.96

The results from Table 2 indicated that the mean score for communication apprehension was 3.64, while the standard deviation was 0.96, test anxiety had 3.11 and 1.05 mean score and standard deviation respectively. For fear of negative evaluation, M=3.09, SD=1.05, while for negative attitude towards the French class, M=2.53, SD=0.96. This reveals that communication apprehension provoked the highest level of anxiety in the students, followed closely by test anxiety, fear of negative evaluation and negative attitude towards the French class.

also is in line with the findings of [12] who revealed that there was no statistical significant relationship between gender and anxiety with respect to student academic performance.

5. Conclusion

The results indicated that foreign language anxiety can really hinder the ability of learners to perform well during the process of learning French language. There is need therefore for teachers to realize that language learning, and particularly oral production is a potentially stressful situation for some students, instructional techniques which will make the students more relaxed and active should be employed to reduce anxiety and improve the academic achievement of students in French language. Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Students should be instructed to think positively in building up new ways of learning foreign language.
2. Student should be properly guided on need to handle and cope with anxiety and be made to understand that some level of anxiety is required in performing a particular task.
3. Instructional techniques which such as role playing, simulations and games should be adopted in teaching French language in order to create an enabling learning environment free of tension and unnecessary stress so

as avoid anxiety among students.

4. Assessment in French language should be well planned and the students put into consideration during such planning to avoid undue stress which triggers anxiety.

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