Je ne sais pas! Understanding French Language Anxiety in Grade 4-8 Classrooms

By

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A research paper submitted in conformity with the requirements
For the degree of Master of Teaching
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Abstract

My research explores French Language Anxiety (FL anxiety) among students in Grades 4-8, and examines the ways in which it can affect student acquisition and achievement while in FL learning environments. Specifically, the research looks at the ways in which FL anxiety can affect students academically, socially, cognitively, behaviourally, personally, as well as in their communication competence while learning French. In addition to this, the research investigates how teachers come to recognize FL anxiety in their students, and how they can support these students to help them reach their highest potentials in FL programs.

In order to collect data for this research, I consulted a variety of rich sources which offered various perspectives on the topic. I began with a literature review, focusing on qualitative research studies conducted in FL learning environments. Next, I conducted three semi-structured interviews with Grade 4-8 French teachers from the Toronto District School Board in order to gather first-hand information from experienced educators.

My research has uncovered many causes of FL Anxiety in the classroom, as well as how it can affect students, and has identified the best practices that teachers can use to support students who experience this anxiety. Research on FL anxiety has become increasingly important as it has an impact on students’ motivation to pursue FL education beyond middle school. By being aware of FL anxiety, educators can be better prepared to explore how to better recognize, accommodate and support students who experience it.

Keywords: French Language, anxiety, acquisition, learning
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following people who supported me on my journey of writing and completing this research paper.

To my research supervisor, Merlin Charles, thank you so much for your patience and guidance throughout this process. You offered me invaluable feedback and encouraged me every step of the way. I am thankful for the ways in which you challenged and inspired me to make this piece the best it could be.

To my research participants, thank you very much for your insight and expertise on the topic of FL anxiety. Your willingness to share about your teaching experiences, as well as your interactions with your students and the French Language Curriculum provided me with the insight I needed to make this project a success.

To the members of my cohort (J/I 142), you have become an integral community in my life and I want to thank you all for you encouragement and support throughout the past two years. You have been a fantastic support system, and I will miss you very much.

To my professors at OISE, your guidance and passion for learning have been a great source of encouragement over the past two years. Each and every experience has allowed me to learn more about the importance of education and the impacts which educators can have on their students and communities. Thank you.

To my friends and family, thank you for always being there for me. Through the ups and downs of completing this project, I always felt incredibly loved and supported. You have encouraged me without ceasing, and for that I am so thankful.
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Understanding French Language Anxiety in Grade 4-8 Classrooms

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the Research Study

In this paper, I explore the multi-faceted topic of Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA), with a specific focus on French Language Anxiety (FL anxiety) among students in Grade 4-8 classrooms\(^1\). FL anxiety is a recurring issue which impacts many students at the Junior/Intermediate level. Ying Zheng, from the Faculty of Education at Queen’s University, writes that “foreign language learning can sometimes be a traumatic experience for many learners” (Zheng, 2008, p. 1). Erhman (1996) states that it is an anxiety that has the potential of greatly influencing students’ academic achievements and confidence, as well as their attitude, motivation and willingness to participate. I am interested in learning about students’ experiences in Junior/Intermediate FL classrooms (specifically those in Grade 4-8), and gaining a deeper understanding of how anxiety affects students academically, socially, cognitively, behaviourally, personally, as well as in their communication competence (MacIntyre, 1998). In addition, I seek to learn how research on this topic can influence teachers’ best practices in FL learning environments.

In order to guide my research, I draw from my personal experiences as a student in the Extended French Program, as an FL tutor, and as a Teacher Candidate in FL classrooms. While enrolled in French programs at the Junior/Intermediate, Senior and University levels, I experienced FL anxiety. This anxiety prevented me from reaching my full potential academically and socially in FL learning environments. Based on this

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\(^1\) For the purposes of this research, Foreign Language Anxiety will be referred to as FLA, while French Language will be written as FL, and French Language Anxiety will be written as FL anxiety.
experience, I understand the sensitive nature of this topic and how its pervasiveness can act as a major disadvantage for students of any age. With this in mind, I conducted my research with the necessary knowledge and sensitivity required for this topic.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this phenomenological narrative study is to explore the experiences of Junior/Intermediate FL teachers and their experiences with regards to students’ FL anxiety in the classroom. In order to better understand this phenomenon, I aim to gain insight from these teachers as to how this anxiety persists and impacts students in a variety of ways, including socially, behaviourally and academically. In addition, I seek to understand how this anxiety impacts student achievement, confidence and behaviour in the classroom. My research focuses on how FL anxiety affects students on an individual basis and as a class (e.g. classroom environment and classroom culture); the impact it has on achievement, student-teacher relationships, and student-student relationships. Further, the research investigates how teachers come to recognize this anxiety in their students, as well as how teachers can support these students to help them reach their highest potentials in FL programs.

This research begins with an extensive literature review, followed by semi-structured interviews with FL teachers who teach at the Junior/Intermediate level. Much of the literature available on this topic addresses the broad concept of FLA; there is limited documentation regarding French programs and more specifically, student anxiety. Fortunately, some of the literature references qualitative research completed in FL classrooms with regards to student FL anxiety. I considered the information gathered on
FLA as well as FL anxiety for my research, as they both shed light on the language anxiety experienced by students.

The second channel through which I gather information is through interviews. During my years as a Junior/Intermediate student, I was fortunate to have been taught by many excellent FL teachers who were very aware of their students’ needs and abilities. I had the opportunity to interview three of these teachers about their interactions with students at the Junior/Intermediate levels and inquire about FL anxiety they observe in the classroom.

Research Questions

Below are my Main Research Question and Sub Questions. An explanation follows.

Main Question: What is the nature and impact of French Language Anxiety (FL anxiety) in Grade 4-8 classrooms and how can teachers support students who experience it?

Sub Questions:
1. Does FL anxiety affect students’ abilities academically, socially and personally? If so, how?
2. Does FL anxiety affect the classroom environment in any way? If so, how? (e.g. the community as a whole, the classroom culture, etc).
3. Do teachers find that there is a correlation between the motivation of students and the anxiety they experience?
4. What is the relationship between FL anxiety and academic achievement among students who experience FL anxiety?

5. What resources or support programs are available to help teachers support students who experience FL anxiety?

My research focuses on three main aspects of students’ experiences in the classroom: What alerts a teacher to a student experiencing FL anxiety, the impact of this anxiety on the student (behaviourally, academically, socially, etc.), and how the teacher can subsequently support the student in the FL classroom environment. While these topics intertwine and affect each other, they need to be viewed independently in order to gain a clear picture of the overall impact of FL anxiety. My goal, therefore, was to explore these avenues independently and observe the ways in which they connect.

In order to explore the effects this anxiety has on the various facets of students’ academic achievement, the research focuses primarily on students’ experiences in FL classrooms, and how students may be impacted by FL anxiety in a variety of ways. I strove to gain insight on anxious and non-anxious students’ academic achievement (both broadly and specifically) in reading, writing, oral and listening activities in the FL classroom. All these criteria is based on the Ontario 2013 French as a Second Language Curriculum, and focus particularly on the overall expectations for each program (Core, Extended, Immersion), in reference to the grade level in question.

As I did not request an ethics review beyond that which I was provided to interview teachers, the protocol surrounding the inquiry of students’ grades did not allow me to research such content thoroughly. Therefore, my research consisted of asking
teachers if they would be willing to share with me very general results of academic work in relation to students’ anxiety. For example, I asked teachers (if they were able) to either confirm or deny whether anxious students in their classes were achieving higher or lower grades (in general) in relation to those non-anxious students in many curriculum areas of the 2013 French as a Second Language Curriculum.

Next, my analysis shifts, focusing more on students’ overall personal experiences in the classroom. Here, I sought learn if there is a relationship between FL anxiety and student behaviour, participation, and rapport in the classroom between students and students, as well as between students and teachers. Through my interviews with teachers, I was able to gain an understanding of how the classroom environment might be affected by any students who experience FL anxiety.

Following these areas of analysis, I inquired about how teachers support students who experience FL anxiety; more specifically, the strategies, resources and/or tools the teachers employ to support students on an individual basis. Throughout my interviews, I adapted to the pace of the conversation as needed and change the order of my questions as required, so as to obtain as much information about my topic as possible.

**Background of the Researcher**

One of the main reasons I chose to focus on FL anxiety is because of my own experience as an anxious FL student, as well as the apparent declining interest in FSL classes among students at all grade levels. This is a phenomenon that I find to be very relevant to my own experiences in education today, as it has had a tremendous impact on me from middle school until my years as an undergraduate student. For years I
experienced insecurity in my abilities to communicate orally in French, which caused
tension and nervousness within me. Over the years, I have learned to cope with it and
allow it to be an encouraging force in my studies. I have also observed this type of
anxiety in many of my former classmates, as well as students that I have encountered
while tutoring and volunteering.

As a high school and university student, I had the opportunity to tutor students in
French at the Junior/Intermediate level for a number of years. Through this experience, I
came to learn about and understand the ways in which FL anxiety can affect student
learning. As with any anxiety, “language anxiety [is] intricately intertwined with
[individual] differences such as personality traits, emotion, and motivation” (Zheng,
2008, p. 3). I feel fortunate to have had the experience to tutor FL, as it taught me so
much, and gave me great insight into how FL anxiety can affect student learning.

While a student in high school, I observed that as soon as students were able to
drop French, they did so immediately. I chose to pursue the Extended French program
throughout middle and high school, and saw a decline in the student body as each year
passed. In my years as a high school student, my Extended French class decreased by
nearly 50% from Grade 9 to Grade 12. Now, having completed my undergraduate
studies, I see no change in the class size trend for FSL courses. I ponder the possibility of
FL anxiety playing a role in students’ decision to stop taking French courses, and wonder
how it may have come to affect their acquisition and distract from a wholesome learning
experience.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction to Foreign Language Anxiety

Prior to examining FL anxiety specifically, this chapter examines the broader concept of Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) and how it can impact learners. This research study also explores the socio-educational factors and the cognitive, psychological, physiological, social and emotional effects of anxiety on second language learning and performance. It also explores the impact of FLA on academic achievement, based on research of various curricula expectations. Furthermore, this chapter addresses specific characteristics of FLA and the factors which contribute to its presence and prevalence.

A Situation-specific Anxiety

Language anxiety, referred to most often as Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA), is defined as “the feeling of tension and apprehension specifically associated with second language contexts, including speaking, listening, and learning” (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994, p. 284). It has the “potential for significant interference with language learning and production [and poses a] threat to an individual’s self concept” (Saito et al., 1999, p. 202). Horowitz et al. (1986) describe language anxiety as something which “impedes [one’s] ability to perform successfully in a foreign language class” (p. 125). In other words, language anxiety is a huge obstacle which, when experienced, can have significant effects on foreign language learning.
FLA has been defined as being situational in nature; that it is considered to be neither a trait anxiety (personal disposition) nor a state anxiety (transient and sporadic) (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). Foreign language learning environments have been identified as the specific context within which learners experience FLA.

**A Debilitating Anxiety**

Through various case studies and empirical research conducted by Horowitz et al. (1986) and other researchers in the field, FLA has been found to be a form of debilitating anxiety. This simply means that FLA causes too much anxiety, and therefore “may lead to avoidance of work or inefficient work performance” (Zheng, 2008, p. 2). This distinguishes it from facilitating anxiety, as the level of difficulty one experiences when completing a task in second language learning does not trigger “the proper amount of anxiety” (Zheng, 2008, p. 2). I consider this distinguishing feature of FLA to be one of the most important factors to consider. It is evident that FLA can act as a strong barrier to learning. MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) write that, “the effects of language anxiety may be both pervasive and subtle” (p. 283), and can thus manifest itself differently on a case-by-case basis. Research further shows how this anxiety not only hinders task completion and inhibits second language learning well, but it also affects their overall acquisition and achievement through many stages of the learning process.
Personality Traits

**Introversion, Extroversion and Perfectionism**

The three personality traits introversion, extroversion and perfectionism are considered most often from a curriculum perspective in the foreign language classroom. This means that they are based primarily on the oral communication expectations in the curriculum. MacIntyre and Charos, (1996) found that both introversion and extroversion “are associated with anxiety arousal” (as cited in Zheng, 2008, p. 3). Contrary to assumptions regarding the behaviours of introverted and extroverted learners, it appears as though both types of learners can experience FLA. While introverts may become anxious when asked to work in groups or communicate orally (to another individual or in front of the entire class), extroverts may experience anxiety when required to work independently (MacIntyre & Charos, 1996).

Perfectionism is a personality trait which can considerably impact the prevalence of FLA in students. Students who self-identify as perfectionists feel the constant need to improve, and have a “higher level of concern over the errors they made than non-anxious learners who tended to celebrate small victories accomplished” (Zheng, 2008, p. 3). This propensity for perfectionism applies not only to FLA, but to anxiety in general. It is important to understand how distinct characteristics of personality can contribute to individual learning styles. Research cited later in this chapter further explores the causes, effects and consequences of FLA among students with varying personality traits.
Socio-educational Factors of Anxiety in Foreign Language Learning and Performance

Environmental Matters

Research conducted by Gardner (1991) – a headliner in educational research – explains that there is a distinct correlation between learners’ comfort level in their social environment and their academic success. It is crucial that students feel they belong in a social environment. This means identifying both emotionally and socially with those around them. FLA can arise when one feels a discomfort in the learning environment because one or more of the aforementioned factors (i.e. emotional and social stability) is not present.

According to MacIntyre and Gardner (1991), there are five effects of anxiety on foreign language learning and performance. These five effects, in no specific order, are: academic, social, cognitive and personal, as well as in communication competence. One thing that is interesting to note is that although these factors link together, the academic, social and personal effects noticeably work in tandem. MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) explain that those who experience higher FLA in the classroom tend to “avoid interpersonal communication more often than less anxious learners” (as cited in Zheng, 2008, p. 5). As previously mentioned, one of the FL language curriculum requirements is oral communication. Those who refrain from participating orally may come to lack in communication experience, which can lead to feeling as though they do not belong in the classroom. This, in turn, may cause further anxiety in the future.
Linguistic Deficiency

Sparks and Ganschow (1993), two well-known authors on the topic of FLA and language acquisition, hypothesize that FLA “is a reflection of a side effect [caused] by linguistic deficiency in processing language output” (as cited in Zheng, 2008, p. 4). This hypothesis, formally known as the Linguistic Coding Deficit Hypothesis, states that anxiety can hinder language acquisition and development. Here, I consider the aforementioned five areas in which FLA can be evident: academic, social, cognitive, personal and in communication competence.

As none of the above areas can be considered independently, neither can research on the topic of FLA focus heavily on one of these areas more than another. In order to fully grasp the concept and effects of FLA, one must consider the entire spectrum of the areas listed above (ie. academic, social, cognitive, personal, and communication competence), as well as numerous other factors.

Attitude and Motivation

It has been found that an optimistic attitude and motivation can have a positive correlation with one’s learning experience. Moreover, one’s emotional state while engaged in second language learning plays a significant role in his/her success rate. Zheng (2008) discusses this when considering the causes and effects of FL anxiety, by citing the work of Chao (2003), who found “a significant relationship between FLA and emotional intelligence skills” (as cited in Zheng, 2008, p. 3-4). Zheng (2008) also makes reference to the research of Ehrman (1996), who maintains that learners find different ways to deal with self-esteem and emotional balance while learning a second language.
Gardner and Lalonde (1985) examine the role of motivation more in-depth through a socio-educational model of second language learning. This model suggests that “the learning of a second language involved both an ability and a motivational component and that the major basis of this motivation is best viewed from a social psychological perspective” (Gardner & Lalonde, 1985, p. 1). The works of these authors are important to my research because they focus specifically on FL and FL anxiety, and reference data both from samples of students’ work at the elementary and secondary level in FL programs, as well as other qualitative research.

As will be discussed later on in this chapter, learning a second language is an emotional, as well as a cognitive task. Gardner and Lalonde (1985) assert that in order for one to succeed in second language learning, there must be three motivational constructs in place: a desire, a motivational intensity/effort put forth, as well as an attitude toward language learning. In addition to this, the authors argue that one’s motivation is influenced by two distinct attitudinal constructs: “Integrativeness and Attitudes towards the Learning Situation” (Gardner & Lalonde, 1985, p. 4). In brief, this means that learners must feel as though they are a part of the classroom situation (i.e. have a sense of belonging in their environment), in addition to having a positive and determined attitude. This research considers these attitudinal constructs within two language learning contexts – Formal (i.e. classrooms) and Informal (i.e. other situations). For the purposes of my research, only the Formal learning contexts are taken into consideration as the data collected relates to school environments.
Self-efficacy and Anxiety in Foreign Language Learning

Recent studies have begun to consider self-efficacy as being related to FL anxiety and acquisition. Self-efficacy is defined as, “beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (Bandura, 1997, p. 3). It has been found that “self-efficacy plays a central role in the arousal of student anxiety” (Mills et al., 2006, p. 277). Drawing from the lens of social cognitive theory, Bandura (1986, 1977) explains that, “as a result of a student’s weakened sensed of efficacy, [he or she will] become anxious about the corresponding academic demands” (as cited in Mills et al., 2006, p. 277). Self-efficacy has been found to have a positive correlation with academic performance; the more confident students feel, the stronger their performance will be in a variety of curriculum areas.

Controlled tests with FL students have found that, in some cases, “anxiety serves as both a source and effect of self-efficacy beliefs” (Mills et al., 2006, p. 279). Therefore, there may be a cause-and-effect relationship in play. When students feel as though they do not have the capacity to complete a task, they may begin to experience anxiety. For some individuals, this anxiety can stimulate a student to put forth the extra effort needed to feel confident to complete a task, and will therefore do so successfully.

According to Mills et al. (2006), it is difficult to measure levels or effects of FLA without considering of self-efficacy as well, as variables of each phenomenon should not be considered in isolation. Research shows that one’s perceived competence, which is a construct similar to self-efficacy, “has been found to be negatively correlated to language anxiety” (Mills et al., 2006, p. 279). Tests conducted with regards to French reading and listening exercises found that in general, “reading anxiety [is] negatively associated with
reading self-efficacy [while] the relationship between the listening self-efficacy and listening anxiety of [the learner] remains unclear” (Mills et al., 2006, p. 286-7). These results are important to consider when researching FL anxiety, as self-efficacy is one of the many factors which can play a key role in students’ acquisition and achievement in an FL program.

The Cognitive Effects of Anxiety on Foreign Language Learning and Performance

Cognitive Barriers and Performance

It is imperative to consider issues of cognition, emotionality and linguistic deficiency together with FLA. Though these issues contribute differently to FLA, they need be considered concurrently, rather than in isolation. The other two effects of FLA, cognitive and communication competence, relate to each other as well. All of these factors have been found to have a much greater impact on one’s performance in the foreign language classroom. According to Sellers (2000), it has been proven that anxiety can act as an “affective filter that prevents certain information from entering a learner’s cognitive processing system [and therefore] can influence both speed and accuracy of learning” (as cited in Zheng, 2008, p. 5). The last factor, communication competence, also known as students’ quality of communication, is a direct result of this delayed cognitive processing. Zheng (2008) explains that “anxiety arousal can impact the quality of communication output as the retrieval of information may be interrupted by the ‘freezing-up moments’ that students encounter when they get anxious” (p. 5). These cognitive barriers (delays in cognitive processing, anxiety arousal in communication) need to be considered in this current study. Not only can they affect students’ grades, but
their prevalence could also be evident in their overall motivation, especially when it comes to learning a second language.

Eysenck (1979) attests that anxious students are aware of the interference that occurs in cognition while participating in foreign language learning, and that they may “attempt to compensate by increased effort” (as cited in MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994, p. 285). This effort, which can include, for example, increased time studying and preparing for assessments, may or may not result in higher achievement for an individual. It can cause one to be more cautious when making judgments in learning, and thus affect the overall language learning experience. Eysenck (1979) states that although anxiety can disrupt cognitive processing, “increased effort can compensate for the effects of anxiety on the quality of observed performance” (as cited in MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994, p. 300). Thus, there is no constant correlation between anxiety and performance; the relationship is contingent on individual learners and their ability to overcome the anxiety.

**Cognitive Barriers: Input, Processing and Output**

Consider the three-stage model of learning: Input, Processing and Output (Tobias, 1986) as it relates to foreign language and achievement. MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) employed this three-stage model for their research, and “observed significant correlations between language anxiety and second language performance at both the Input and Output stages” (p. 287). It was observed that during the Input stage for anxious learners, “the time required to recognize even the simplest items is somewhat affected by language anxiety” (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994, p. 297). While processing information, it was
found that, “anxious students were not able to translate a [French] passage as well as did their more relaxed counterparts” (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994, p. 298).

For the purposes of this chapter, it is important to consider this model in the context of a Junior/Intermediate FL classroom setting, in order to explore more in-depth how each stage may come to fruition. The Input stage is one where students may experience anxiety if they do not have a clear understanding of the initial information. As MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) explain, “difficulties may arise if the language is spoken too quickly, or if written material appears in the form of complex sentences” (p. 286). The Processing stage (i.e. comprehension and understanding) may also be a stage where the student experiences anxiety. This anxiety can impair “cognitive processing on tasks that are more difficult, more heavily reliant on memory, and more poorly organized” (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994, p. 286). Lastly, anxiety can interfere with material Output (i.e. tests, presentations, evaluations, etc.), as some students may forget key information or have a mental block when asked to demonstrate their learning. MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) also found that language anxiety “interferes with a student’s ability to retrieve appropriate second language items from memory” (p. 298), and that it can also slow down the speed at which one can recall specific knowledge during an evaluation.

Any one or more of these stages (Input, Processing and Output) can cause varying levels of anxiety for a foreign language learner and can have an impact on his/her grades and overall achievement. In a broad sense, it is also important to bear in mind that students learn in a variety of ways, and that these three stages may look different on a case-by-case basis.
Emotional Effects of Anxiety on Foreign Language Learning and Performance

Emotional Insecurity in Foreign Language Learning

Zheng (2008) explains the importance of emotional equilibrium in the successful acquisition of a second language. Zheng (2008) cites the work of another researcher in the field, stating that:

Ehrman (1996) maintained that one protects one’s emotional equilibrium and self-esteem in a variety of ways, one of which is through what he called ‘defense mechanism’. Anxious manifestations, such as reluctance to participate, avoidance of work, and negative attitude, are all possible defense mechanisms that anxious learners employ to balance their emotional equilibrium (as cited in Zheng, 2008, p. 4).

This ‘defense mechanism’ connects strongly to those theories regarding the social factor of FLA, which relates to the discussion in the following section concerning cognitive, psychological and social barriers. MacIntyre (1995) argues that FLA “constitutes part of social anxiety, which stems primarily from the social and communicative aspects of language learning” (as cited in Zheng, 2008, p. 4). In this way, MacIntyre (1995) makes an important prediction regarding “the potential role that emotion may play in cognition” (as cited in Zheng, 2008, p. 5). It is important to recognize the impact that FLA can have on learners not just socially, but also emotionally (in terms of self-esteem, self-efficacy). Students can experience a debilitating anxiety which interferes with their cognitive processes, therefore inhibiting their learning of a new language as well as their self-efficacy.
Psychological and Physiological Effects of Anxiety on Foreign Language Learning and Performance

Just as MacIntyre (1995) argues that FLA is an entity of social anxiety, other researchers also tie in such theories with more specific ideas concerning one’s social and communicative actions while in the foreign language classroom. Horowitz et al. (1986) explain that the primary sources of FLA include communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety. Overall, there is an overarching fear of failing to understand and explain one’s thinking in the language being learned. Moreover, students who experience FLA are apprehensive when speaking in front of others. For anxious learners, this can be a highly stressful experience, which can result in making them feel inadequate or lacking in skill.

Horowitz et al. (1986) further note that in addition to experiencing “apprehension, worry [and] even dread” (p. 126), students who experience FLA may also demonstrate their anxiety and fear physiologically; they have difficulty concentrating, may become forgetful, sweat and have palpitations. It is important to remember, however, that these manifestations may vary depending on the individual, and in some cases, may not be present at all. Furthermore, these psychological and physiological effects need to be considered alongside students’ academic achievement and performance in various areas of the curriculum.
The Impact of FLA on Academic Achievement

An Overview

FL anxiety can greatly affect students’ academic success in the classroom. MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) discuss that, “language anxiety is one of the best predictors of language proficiency [...] It seems clear that high levels of language anxiety are associated with low levels of academic achievement in second/foreign language learning” (as cited in Zheng, 2008, p. 5). It has been found that, overall, anxious students “have lower fluency, lower sentence complexity, and less of a French accent” (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994, p. 300).

Eysenck (1979) further notes how anxiety can specifically affect one’s learning, stating that “anxious learners are usually more distractible, and the defense mechanism evoked by anxiety will interfere with the cognition threshold in learning” (as cited in Zheng, 2008, p. 6). This idea compliments the work of MacIntyre and Gardner (1994), who also explore how anxiety affects students cognitively and emotionally by examining this phenomenon from a cognitive psychological perspective, stating that, “a good deal of research has suggested that [language] anxiety causes cognitive interference in performing specific tasks” (p. 285).

Horowitz et al. (1986) note the specific difficulties anxious students may have which negatively affect academic achievement, and affirm that when communicating in a foreign language, anxious students may frequently attempt “less interpretive (more concrete) messages than those [experiencing] a relaxed condition” (p. 126). Horowitz et al. (1986) conclude that, “anxiety can affect the communication strategies students employ in the language class” (p. 126). In this way, more difficult passages or messages
become those which are anxiety-provoking, and thus lead to further discomfort in the student’s foreign language learning experience. This, in turn, can lead to overall limited attempts to communicate in the language, and a decreased presence in the classroom environment.

Studies show that test-taking can also influence FLA. Students can experience apprehension, fear and nervousness (as was previously discussed with regards to the psychological and physiological effects of FLA), which can come to affect their experiences when taking tests. Horowitz et al. (1986) write that “students commonly report [that] they know a certain grammar point [or other information] but ‘forget’ it during a test or an oral exercise” (p. 126). This is part of the ‘freezing-up’ phenomenon which will be further discussed in the context of foreign language oral communication.

Further, MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) also note that overall, anxious language learners may have a smaller, less extensive vocabulary than non-anxious students. In sum, the research explains a significant negative correlation between the FLA experienced and one’s ability to learn completely and effectively. FLA can be subtle in some cases, but in others, is pervasive and debilitating to learners in various aspects of the curriculum.

**FLA and Reading**

Saito et al. (1999) discuss the effects that FLA can have on reading comprehension in a foreign language. Based on research, “students’ reading anxiety levels increased with their perceptions of the difficulty of reading in the foreign language,
and their grades decreased in conjunction with their levels of reading anxiety and general [FLA]” (Saito et al., 1999, p. 203).

This anxiety is triggered during the comprehension and processing stages of reading a text, and “is also anticipated when a reader can decipher the words of a [foreign language] text, but not its sense, because of incomplete knowledge of the cultural material underlying the text” (Saito et al., 1999, p. 203). These authors explore foreign language reading anxiety within the context of student classroom experiences, and ask the following questions:

1. Does FL reading anxiety exist as a phenomenon distinguishable from general FLA?

2. Do learner perceptions of the difficulty of their particular target language relate to their levels of FL reading anxiety? (Saito et al., 1999, p. 203).

Results of qualitative research conducted reveal that “[FL] reading anxiety is indeed distinguishable” (Saito et al., 1999, p. 204) from general FLA, but that “students with higher levels of [FLA] also tended to have higher levels of [foreign language] reading anxiety” (Saito et al., 1999, p. 211). Students often feel persistent nervousness, discomfort and become disengaged as a result of such anxiety. This, as discussed earlier, pertains to the ‘defense mechanisms’ (Erhman, 1996) employed to manage in such situations.

Research by Saito et al. (1999) has also found that many foreign language students often feel intimidated by texts they are required to read, and thus sense feelings of anxiety and uneasiness, which lead to emotional disequilibrium and disrupted

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2 These questions were selected from a greater list, as they could be readily applied to other aspects of the foreign language curriculum, such as writing, oral communication and listening.
information processing. This discomfort can be attributed to a number of factors, including, a lack of understanding of the topic being discussed, difficulty understanding grammar, and a lack of knowledge about a language’s culture. Saito et al. (1999) make specific reference to French language learning in this instance, and maintain that if students had a greater knowledge of French culture, as well as of the different symbols used in the language, the anxiety would be less significant.

**FLA and Speaking/Oral Communication**

Research shows that students who experience FLA also experience challenges when asked to contribute orally in a classroom setting. Horowitz et al. (1986) cite that in foreign language classes, although “students often report that they feel fairly comfortable [delivering] prepared speeches, [they] ‘freeze’ in a role-play situation” (p. 126). This can be a result of insecurity of fluency, fear of making mistakes, or a lack of knowledge of the content in question. This fear has been referred to as “communication apprehension” (Horowitz et al., 1986, p. 127), and has been found to have distinct correlations with overall FLA. Research shows that students who are found to have FLA “are afraid to speak in the foreign language [and] feel a deep self-consciousness when asked to risk revealing themselves by speaking the foreign language in the presence of [others]” (Horowitz et al., 1986, p. 129). Those who experience such anxiety with oral communication and refrain from participating while in class may not only fail to meet the curriculum expectations, but may experience increased anxiety in the future due to lack of knowledge and experience.
Measurement of FLA

In order to gain further understanding of learners’ feelings in the foreign language classroom, researchers have employed a measurement tool entitled The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). This scale, developed by E. K. Horowitz (1983), allows researchers the opportunity to “examine the scope and severity of foreign language anxiety” (as cited in Horowitz et al., 1986, p. 129). With regards to FLA and achievement, Horowitz (1983) declares that findings from research studies using the FLCAS produced consistent negative correlations between students’ anxiety and achievement within learning environments. The scale consists of five options from which students select the one which best describes their experiences as described in phrases. Arranged left to right, these options are: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Neither Agree nor Disagree (N), Disagree (D), Strongly Disagree (SD). This is a well-respected and widely-used tool to evaluate students’ FLA anxiety in a variety of language classroom settings.

Another tool used to explore second language learning in conjunction with aptitude is the Modern Language Aptitude Test (MLAT), developed by Carroll and Sapon (1959). This test measures French achievement alongside measurements of motivation, as both these factors are “involved in the acquisition of a second language” (Gardner & Lalonde, 1985, p. 3). The MLTA has been used as a measure in research exploring students’ attitudes and motivation while learning French, as well as their levels of achievement.
Best Practices for Teaching Students with FL Anxiety

Instructional Strategies

This section discusses literature relating to the topic of best practices for FL instruction, including instructional strategies, methods and practices used by teachers in Core, Extended and Immersion French programs. Although these do not include specific teaching strategies for instructing students who have FL anxiety, they speak to how teachers can best support student learning in general in FL programs through curriculum-specific tasks.

Netten and Germain (2010) write that it is crucial that teachers use “a sequence of activities that would [keep] students actively using French in authentic communicative situations” (p. 110). In addition, these researchers affirm that these activities should occur for the longest amount of time possible (ideally a number of hours per day, depending on the grade), and that they should be suited to the social, cognitive and personal developmental levels of the students. Netten and Germain (2010) also attest that the ideal curriculum (or in the context of this literature, an enriched French curriculum) would be cognitively demanding, have complex tasks and require students to use language in authentic situations. According to this research, students could use language in authentic situations through the integration of FL into various curriculum areas. This would not only motivate students, but also allow them more oral communication practice.

Netten and Germain (2005) further explain that “development of a skill requires considerable sustained use, and communication in a second language is a skill” (p. 188). These authors also make reference to research done by Calman and Daniel (1998), as well as Lightbrown and Spada (1994), which states that “short periods of French do not
give students enough time to develop oral skills” (p. 188). In order for Core, Extended and Immersion programs to best instruct students, they should include as many opportunities as possible for students to practise French. On a broader scale, research has found that French programs in schools need to provide students with 250 hours of intensive instruction on order for them to effectively participate in spontaneous communication (Netten & Germain, 2005).

When it comes to listening activities in particular, research by Goh (2008) cites the work of Flavell (1979) who explains metacognitive awareness\(^3\) as being important in language learning. Further to this, Zhang and Goh (2006) found that “there is further evidence to suggest that language learners who are aware of the benefits of some listening strategies may also use these strategies to improve their listening comprehension during communication” (as cited in Goh, 2008, p. 196). In this way, learners can have ownership over their own learning and success. Research by Zhang and Goh (2006) also suggests that if teachers reinforce students’ metacognitive awareness, students will “be more confident, more motivated and less anxious” and there will be a “positive effect on listening performance [and especially] weak listeners potentially benefit the greatest from it” (as cited in Goh, 2008, p. 196).

When it comes to best practices for reading, D’Angelo, Hipfner-Boucher and Chen (2014) explain that teachers can best support students’ vocabulary acquisition by using relevant contexts, engaging activities and lessons suited to the students’ levels. Furthermore, teachers should encourage students to read on a regular basis, as well as

\(^3\) Metacognitive awareness refers to one’s knowledge concerning one’s own cognitive processes and products or anything related to them [...] Metacognitive experience is a feeling we have about our cognition, such as the feeling we have when we do not understand something, while metacognitive knowledge consists of our beliefs and knowledge about learning (as cited in Goh, 2008, p. 196).
doing activities such as “story enactment and story mapping [will] support children’s understanding of story events and the language used to relate them” (D’Angelo, Hipfner-Boucher & Chen, 2014, p. 35). In sum, teachers should be doing all they can to support students’ interest in reading, as well as applying various strategies to assist with vocabulary acquisition and overall comprehension. Though these findings are specific to the Immersion classroom, they are flexible for use in any FL setting.

**Emotional Support for Students**

Oxford (1990) explains that “language learning is undisputedly an emotional and interpersonal process as well as a cognitive and metacognitive [process]” (as cited in Charles, 2012, p. 164). This further confirms that FL learning environments affect students emotionally, socially, behaviourally and cognitively, as well as in their abilities to communicate effectively (MacIntyre, 1998), as was previously explained in Chapter 1.

Research by Piccardo (2010) has found that it is important for teachers to consider students’ emotions as they participate in language learning, as well as to offer emotional support to motivate student learning. Interestingly, this research connects to the previously cited work of MacIntyre (1995) earlier in this chapter, who discusses the role of emotion in students’ cognition while learning, and its potential impact on self-esteem and self-efficacy.

Piccardo (2010) asserts that when teaching students, teachers’ “paying attention to the affective aspects [i.e. emotional aspects] will not only lead to more effective learning, but the act of stimulating the different emotional faculties, such as self-esteem, empathy, motivation can in fact considerably facilitate the language learning process” (p. 251).
Schrier (2008) further explains what this attention to emotion looks like in the classroom, by affirming that through an emotional bond with students, teachers can “convert the [students’] emotional engagement with the teacher into cognitive engagement with the curriculum” (as cited in Charles, 2012, p. 74). It seems, then, that teachers’ attention to their students’ emotions can contribute positively to both students’ language learning experiences and deeper engagement with the curriculum.

In a study which investigated students’ perceptions of FL learning, Charles (2012) explains that through emotional support and creating a comfortable learning environment, teachers were able to alleviate their students’ FL anxiety. Charles (2012) writes that students were “able to overcome many of their fears and anxiety associated with language learning” (p. 231) and the efforts put forth by the instructors to become well acquainted with the students “gave them [the students] a feeling of belonging and self-worth” (p. 231). In addition, this research acknowledged that overcoming this anxiety while completing classroom tasks (such as oral presentations, challenging content, etc.) contributed to students “improving their linguistic and communicative competence” (p. 201). Therefore, FL teachers’ awareness of students’ needs for emotional support can make a difference in students’ learning. This is especially true for students who experience FL anxiety. By creating a comfortable learning environment, teachers can best support students emotionally as well as cognitively.

**Summary**

Current research shows that FLA - more specifically FL anxiety - has the ability to greatly affect the acquisition and achievement of FL learners. Teachers must be aware
of the ways in which this anxiety can affect their students, as well as its impact on them not only academically, but also psychologically, physiologically, socially, emotionally and cognitively as well. It has become evident in the literature reviewed (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1997; Chao 2003; Erhman 1996; Eysenck 1979; Gardner & Lalonde, 1985; Horowitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner 1991, 1994; MacIntyre, 1995; Mills et al., 2006; Saito et al., 1999; Sellers 2000; Zheng, 2008) that when teaching and seeking to assist students who experience FL anxiety, it is important for teachers to consider the variety of causes, manifestations and effects this anxiety can have on the learner.

This literature review offers insight into what FLA and FL anxiety mean, and how they play out in various contexts. Unfortunately, there has not been a lot of research done on the topic of FL anxiety specifically, and so my literature review was limited mostly to the body of literature which discussed FLA. Some works included information pertaining to general instructional strategies for teachers to use in the FL classroom to support student acquisition, as well as additional information regarding best practices for supporting and teaching students who experience FL anxiety.

The data collected through teacher interviews will bring more perspective to the study of this topic, which aims to provide invaluable insight into some of the best practices for supporting and teaching students who experience FL anxiety. There is a significant potential in this topic as one of further study, and as I will discuss in Chapter 5, it is one in which teachers and researchers should consider investing.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

My research paper focuses on the experience of Junior/Intermediate level teachers in relation to students’ anxiety, acquisition and achievement in the FL classroom. In order to better understand these experiences, I conducted a qualitative research study. Keith Punch (2005) explains that "qualitative research concentrates on the study of social life in natural settings" (p. 194). Punch (2005) further explains that "it's richness and complexity means that there are different ways of analyzing social life" (p. 194). I have chosen to research my topic using a phenomenological narrative study. I felt as though this type of study best suited my needs in this research, as it "describes common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences [:] 'what' [and] 'how' they experienced" a phenomenon (Creswell, 2012, p. 76).

In order to better understand this phenomenon, I aimed to gain insight from my participants into how FL anxiety might persist and prevent students from reaching their highest potentials. I sought to understand how students of varying ages acquire such anxiety, and how it impacts their achievement, confidence and behaviour in the classroom. My research focused on how FL anxiety affects individual students and the classroom as a whole (e.g. classroom culture); its impact on achievement, student-teacher relationships, and student-student relationships. Further, the research investigated how teachers recognize this anxiety in students, what resources are as well as the steps which can be taken to help support students who experience FL anxiety.
Research Questions

In my research, I inquired about students’ academic achievement as well as observed FL anxiety in the classroom. Within this, I sought to learn if there is a relationship between FL anxiety and student behaviour, participation, and rapport among students and students and among students and teachers in the classroom. I formulated a list of questions and sub questions to guide my interviews. While creating these questions, I focused on tapping into the knowledge and experiences of the interviewees (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). I attempted to word my questions so that I neither imposed my “own understanding in ways that limit the interviewee’s freedom to respond” (Rubin & Rubin, 2011, p. 133), nor restricted the type of answer that the interviewees may have provide to me (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). Further, I conducted these interviews like a conversation, and was prepared to supplement where needed, other terms in this context to clarify the information being sought (Rubin & Rubin, 2011).

Brinkmann and Kvale (2009) highlight that “qualitative research interviewers [must] remain open to the dilemmas, ambivalences, and conflicts that are bound to arise throughout the research process” (p. 69). According to these authors, this also means that as the researcher, I needed to be prepared to “[pay] attention to the thematic and dynamic aspects of the questions” (p. 133) and shift the focus as needed, so as to maintain fluidity in the conversation.
Main Question

The main question guiding my inquiry is as follows:

What is the nature and impact of French Language Anxiety (FL anxiety) in Grade 4-8 classrooms and how can teachers support students who experience it?

Sub Questions

1. Does FL anxiety affect students’ abilities academically, socially and personally? If so, how?
2. Does FL anxiety affect the classroom environment in any way? If so, how? (e.g. the community as a whole, the classroom culture, etc).
3. Do teachers find that there is a correlation between the motivation of students and the anxiety they experience?
4. What is the relationship between FL anxiety and academic achievement among students who experience FL anxiety?
5. What resources or programs are available to help teachers support students who experience FL anxiety?

Research Context

The context for this research is FL programs in the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) at the Junior/Intermediate level. The teachers I chose to interview have taught a variety of grades in a variety of French programs throughout their career, and so I was able to diversify my sampling and gain a deep understanding of how the different programs may influence students’ and teachers’ experiences with FL anxiety.
Participants

For the purposes of my data collection, I recruited three participants who teach in one or more of the French programs offered by the TDSB (Core, Extended and Immersion). They teach or have experience teaching students at the Junior/Intermediate level. The individuals selected for this research study were well-aware of their students’ needs and abilities, and were proactive when offering support and resources to their students. My interviews with these individuals focused on their interactions with their students, as well as any FL anxiety they observe or have observed in the classroom.

Data Collection

I collected my data through organized interviews with the research participants. The goal of the interviews was to have semi-formal conversations about the topic of FL anxiety. The methods I used to collect data included a questionnaire and reflective narratives, guided by carefully prepared interview questions. I also obtained further written or oral reflective responses as needed. I kept brief accounts of each interaction with my participants, and drew connections between information gathered in order to reflect and apply the information further. I met with each participant in-person for 20-40 minutes in total, with the exception of one interview which was completed over email. This allowed me to gather not only verbal information, but also to gain an understanding of the information as it is shared through body language, gestures and additional documents or resources that were on-hand (e.g. anonymous student work, Teacher Resources/Guides, classroom set-up, etc.). Each interview was recorded using a recording device (my cell phone and/or my iPad), and I took notes by hand during the interview as
needed. DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) explain that “maintaining high quality tape-recordings can prevent difficulties later in the research process” (p. 318). I ensured that my recording devices had an “adequate mic sensitive to the acoustics of the room” (Creswell, 2012, p. 164) prior to conducting the interviews, so all information attained is clear and usable. This allowed me to transcribe and code the gathered data accurately following the completion of my interviews. Following interviews, DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) advise that “recorded data should be carefully guarded and generally destroyed after transcription or once analysis is complete” (p. 318). In accordance with this, the tape recordings will be destroyed within the year.

Interviews were scheduled according to participant and researcher availability. I took into consideration the schedule for the school, as these teachers-participants had teaching and extra-curricular obligations at their school throughout the time I requested interviews.

Data Analysis

I depended on my notes and recordings from interviews to analyze my data. From that information, I highlighted gathered information from the interviews which I saw as being relevant to my understanding of the subject of FL anxiety. Following the interviews, I then carefully transcribed information from the recorded interviews. This allowed me to maintain a written record of what was said, as well as view and organize the information. I realized that the time required to transcribe the interviews depended on the quality, length and content of the recordings (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2009), as well as
the speed at which I was able to type. I allocated appropriate time to complete this step before moving onto further analysis.

There are many challenges which can arise during the process of transcribing an interview. I prepared for challenges when capturing “the spoken word in text form because of sentence structure, use of quotations, omissions and mistaking words or phrases for others” (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 318). Some participants spoke quickly, softly or in run-on sentences during sections of the interview. I consistently practised sound judgement when it came to discerning how I present the recorded information. DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) state that “when working with audio data, most experienced researchers listen to the audiotape while reading the transcripts to ensure accuracy during interpretation” (p. 318). I ensured that I listened carefully to what I had recorded multiple times to ensure accuracy.

Following the transcription process, I coded the collected data. A code, by definition, is “most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (Saldana, 2009, p. 3). As coding allows for a more in-depth understanding of the information I have gathered, I was able to visually organize the big ideas presented through my interviews, through this method. Throughout the coding process, I made note of similarities and differences in the data gathered, as well as any themes I observed. I looked for recurring patterns and themes within the transcript from each interview individually and as a whole. Saldana (2009) writes that one of a “coder’s primary goals is to find these repetitive patterns of action and consistencies” (p. 5). I was attentive to any
repeated codes, themes and patterns discussed in my interviews, and conducted my analysis accordingly.

When coding, I was careful consider both the implicit and explicit information which my participants communicated to me. When searching for patterns and themes in the gathered data, I categorized them and was aware that I should “group things together not just because they are exactly alike or very much alike, but because they might also have something in common – even if, paradoxically, that commonality consists of differences” (Saldana, 2009, p. 6). During and following the interviews, I took to heart the perspectives and varying experiences I encountered and reflected on it extensively so as to have a clear and accurate understanding of the picture this information paints for me as a whole. I then coded and analyzed my data accordingly.

**Participation Consent and Ethical Review Procedures**

Birch et al. (2002) affirm that in qualitative research, individuals are “researching private lives and placing accounts in the public arena” (p. 1). As such, it is crucial that a researcher be aware of moral issues which may arise, and thus outline the particulars of the study with the participants and address ethical procedures. It is important that the “researcher [make] reflected choices while designing [the] study and be alert to critical and sensitive issues that may turn up during the inquiry” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2009, p. 64).

Prior to commencing the interviews for my research study, all participants were required to sign a consent form (Appendix A) which outlined the purpose of the study, how the data would be gathered, and how the data would lend to my research as a whole.
In addition, the consent form clearly stated that all information collected will be kept private; viewed and used for my purposes only. DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) remind that:

The anonymity of the interviewee in relation to the information shared must be maintained. During interviewing, the interviewee may share information that could jeopardize his or her position in a system. This information must remain anonymous and protected from those whose interests conflict with those of the interviewee (p. 319).

I refrained from using my participants’ names (pseudonyms appear) and was careful not to include the names of others mentioned during any interviews. Participants understood that they may refuse to participate in any or all parts of the study on personal or ethical grounds. Participants were informed that they may receive a copy of the final research paper when available, if they so wish.

The written documentation from the interviews will be kept in a folder or binder kept in a safe location, and any typed documentation will be saved in a password-protected device. All written and typed information will be stored in a safe location for up to two years for reference and deleted thereafter. All recorded information will be deleted upon the completion of my research paper.

Limitations

Although I prepared to collect data from a wide range of participants, I knew there was the possibility that some or all of the researchers may not be able to provide an extensive amount of information regarding FL anxiety among Junior/Intermediate
students in the classroom. It may be that although my participants teach a diverse study body, anxiety is not something that has caused concerns in the classroom or school. Further, I anticipated another limitation with regards to the detail of the information I would gather. Inquiring about students’ struggles and distractions in the classroom is a very personal matter, and some teachers of these students may choose to divulge only general information about what they have encountered. Lastly, it is possible that unintentional biases and preferences would be present in the responses given throughout the interview process. While this does not cause the information to be unreliable, it would prompt me to actively isolate only the facts of the matter and analyze them, as opposed to considering the personal experiences of my participants with each element of my research.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Introduction

In this chapter, I present an analysis of the data collected through semi-structured interviews with the three participants of my study with regards FL anxiety in Grade 4-8 classrooms. The data that I collected through my interviews has been organized using the following four themes: the effects and impacts of FL anxiety on students, identifying the triggers of FL anxiety, best practices for teaching FL, and available support for students who experience FL anxiety. Each of these themes is then explored independently, and any overlap of information shared by the three participants is discussed, while making connections to relevant research found in the literature review.

The Effects and Impacts of FL Anxiety on Students

I began each of my interviews by asking the participants about some signs which might alert them to a student who is beginning to or is already experiencing FL anxiety. Many of their responses were similar in that they all explained the ways they came to recognize FL anxiety among students in their French classrooms, which were part of the Core, Extended or Immersion programs. All of the participants explained a variety of behavioural, social and emotional issues which are prevalent among students who experience FL anxiety. I will address the behavioural, social, and emotional issues independently in this section.

One consistent statement from two of the three participants, Ed and Beverley (who currently teach Extended French at the intermediate level) is that students in the
Extended French Program experience the most anxiety when it comes to oral communication and oral presentations in front of the class. Jane, who has taught Core and Immersion French throughout her career, also states that oral participation is one area where she has observed students experiencing the most anxiety as well. As cited in the literature review, students who experience FLA and FL anxiety often experience anxiety when asked to speak in French in front of others, and this can contribute to further anxiety due to lack of experience communicating orally (Horowitz et al., 1986). This phenomenon is further explored with reference to information provided by interview participants.

All the participants also indicated that reading and written communication can become an anxiety-provoking task for students in French Immersion, as the focus of this program tends to be on oral communication. This is in keeping with the research included in the literature review, which notes that when students experience difficulty deciphering words, the meaning of a text, or the cultural material within the text, they can become anxious (Saito et al., 1999). It is important to note that reading anxiety is distinguishable from oral anxiety (Saito et al., 1999), though they may present similarly among students in FL learning environments.

Finally, all participants have observed that Core French students experience anxiety with most new tasks, be they written, reading or oral, as these students have far less exposure to French from the outset. In consideration of the three FL programs mentioned, as well as the distinguishable reading, writing and oral communication anxieties, this chapter looks closely at participants’ accounts of students who have
experienced FL anxiety, and explores in detail the triggers, indicators and best supports available for these students.

**Impacts of FL Anxiety on Student Behaviour in the Classroom**

Ed noted that one of the first behavioural patterns which alerted him to a student experiencing FL anxiety was disengagement. He elaborated by explaining that some years, he has had students who, “on the first couple of days of school, come across as very outgoing and energetic and as soon as that anxiety starts coming up they shut down. They shut down; they’re not making eye contact.” When considering work habits, Ed also noted that students who experience FL anxiety seem to have difficulty when completing independent work and often require constant validation “every step of the way”. He added that these students “come in a lot after school as well, just to get support” because they know that is uninterrupted time when they can get one-on-one help with the teacher.

Research has found that, as a debilitating anxiety, FL anxiety has the potential to affect students’ self-efficacy beliefs, as well as to threaten individuals’ self-concept (Saito et al., 1999). More specifically, it has the potential to make a student feel as though he or she does not have the capacity to complete a task (Mills et al., 2006), either because of insecurity of fluency, a lack of knowledge or a fear of making errors (Horowitz, 1986). Ed’s account of students who experience FL anxiety connects to this, as he discussed their constant need for validation and assistance in order to achieve.

Further, Ed’s account also relates to research regarding the cognitive effects of anxiety on FL learning (specifically to do with cognitive barriers and performance). FL
anxiety has been found to contribute to delayed cognitive processing and within that, affect the speed and accuracy at which one learns (Zheng, 2008; Eysenck, 1979). As it pertains specifically to the anxiety experienced when engaging with oral communication tasks, the research conducted by Zheng (2008) is quite relevant here, as this author discusses the ‘freezing-up moments’ which anxious students can experience. These ‘freezing-up moments’, along with lowered self-efficacy can contribute to the presence and persistence of FL anxiety among students.

In the scenarios described above, students depend on the verbal affirmation and validation from the teacher to feel supported and encouraged in their FL classroom. In other cases, however, some behaviours (such as avoidance of work, self-harm and extreme nervousness) can be more profound, and the implications on the students’ learning are much greater. Some examples of these behaviours manifested are a student failing to complete an assignment due to avoidance of the work, or being unable to complete an oral presentation in front of the class due to extreme nervousness. As the data revealed, teachers who encounter scenarios which involve these behaviours cannot depend solely on verbal affirmation to help their students overcome FL anxiety.

Beverley described a wide variety of behaviours she has observed of anxious students in her classrooms, ranging from mild to severe. Some of the first mentioned were avoidance of work due to a fear of failure and anxiety about completing work incorrectly. She commented on this with specific reference to students in the late Extended French program, explaining that:

They are perfectionists, or high achievers, and now they’re faced with this
situation where it’s really complicated, and they have to spend so much time in a dictionary. [Usually these students] have never had to use a dictionary in their life; they’re good spellers, they’re good learners, they’re fast readers. It can be an anxiety-provoking experience when students fear that they may achieve lower grades than they have in the past, simply because the new material differs drastically from any that they have encountered in their previous French program.

The literature reviewed further acknowledges that this propensity to perfection can greatly impact the prevalence of FL anxiety, as perfectionists generally have a tendency to be more concerned about the errors they make in comparison with their peers (Zheng, 2008). Understandably, this anxiety can become more prominent as students become further immersed in their FL program and are faced with new challenges, which may potentially impede acquisition and achievement.

Ed and Beverley also mentioned that another frequent behaviour among students who experience FL anxiety is absenteeism. This absenteeism can present itself in one of two ways – students either leave the classroom frequently to cope with their anxiety, or they miss school altogether. Both participants explained how some students practise avoidance from oral presentations or work which they perceive as being difficult, by taking long bathroom breaks or by being absent from school altogether. As cited in the literature, these are among some of the most common behaviours exhibited by anxious students, in addition to a reluctance to participate in class and a tendency to avoid work (Zheng, 2008). These behaviours have been found to occur in conjunction with those
emotional effects which FL has on students. This connection will be further analyzed in the following subsection.

Beverley elaborated on the effects of anxiety as well as behaviours which can precede or follow absenteeism; these include, but are not limited to nausea, migraines, anxiety attacks, shaking, refusing food, intense shyness and withdrawal. Ed mentioned that he is aware of some of his students having experienced anxiety attacks and engaging in self-harm when anxiety became overwhelming. Research from the literature comments on these physiological effects, stating that students who experience any type of FLA may experience extreme nervousness, have difficulty concentrating, experience forgetfulness, and may sweat and have palpitations (Horowitz et al., 1986).

Jane noted that in her classrooms, she has observed students becoming frustrated and withdrawn from any opportunities to participate orally. She sometimes finds that students who experience FL anxiety are often “reluctant to volunteer for oral skits or presentations”, and try to act “invisible” while in class. This, she explains, is how they try to “escape French speaking interaction and activities in the class”. In addition, Jane has observed that anxious students “may prefer to chat with others instead of paying attention to instruction [and] when called upon in a whole class setting, they say that they ‘do not understand’”. As a result, learners become distanced from the teaching in the FL classroom, and risk falling behind in their learning. As mentioned in Chapter 2, reluctance to participate and willingness to avoid work (Zheng, 2008) are among common behaviours exhibited by anxious learners.
As MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) note that “the effects of language anxiety may be both pervasive and subtle” (p. 283). The above accounts illustrate this well, and contribute greatly to the ongoing conversation about how teachers can identify FL anxiety.

**Social and Emotional Indicators of FL Anxiety in the Classroom**

Within the discussion about behaviour, I explained that all three participants discussed how particular behaviours and work habits in the classroom point to the possibility of a student experiencing FL anxiety. Some of these behaviours have a social component to them as well. All three participants – Beverley, Ed and Jane – noted that shyness and lack of participation are key indicators of anxiety in the French classroom. Beverley stressed that the anxiety experienced by these students is not discussed in class, and that these students are “so ashamed that they won’t discuss it”. She explained that this lack of communication within the classroom contributes to the isolation of the issue, which could be affecting many students.

Jane added that shyness can be a component of FL anxiety, depending on how it comes to affect the student. There is potential for the shyness to perpetuate throughout the year and to negatively contribute to a student’s anxiety. She explains that struggles with the oral components of the French curriculum can cause students to experience anxiety and that this “risk of failure [...] undoubtedly impacts their self-esteem and confidence to succeed”. Low self-esteem and lack of confidence, then, can discourage a student from further participation in the classroom. This can lead to more shyness, and a greater desire for “invisibility” while in the FL learning environment. The literature review highlights aspects of the emotional effects of FL anxiety, and connects to what
Ehrman (1996) refers to as a ‘defense mechanism’. This ‘defense mechanism’, as mentioned, is employed to protect a student’s emotional well-being and self-esteem and generally manifests itself behaviourally.

Ed and Beverley, who both teach at the intermediate level, indicated that the stage of adolescence may play a key role in the social interactions which stem from the anxiety experienced by students. Both participants recognize that middle school can be a very challenging time for some students, FL anxiety aside. It is a time of transition and changing perspectives, emotions and social expectations. Beverley explained how it is so common for her students to have heightened concerns about what their peers think of them, and to feel anxious doing presentations in front of classmates.

Further, Ed made a new, specific connection between gender, adolescence and social media. He mentioned that he observes female adolescents struggling most with social and anxiety issues, stating that from their perspective, “everything you say, you feel is being judged”. He added that that social media “is an extension of what you say in class as being judged by other people”. Therefore, much of the anxiety which occurs when learning French can originate from an underlying discomfort students feel at the adolescent age, and can be amplified in a new and challenging learning environment. Social media will be further discussed in conjunction with oral participation and other anxiety-provoking experiences for students.

**Identifying the Triggers of FL Anxiety**

As discussed in the previous section, there are significant effects and impacts which FL anxiety can have on students in FL programs. Some of these effects and
impacts can also be categorized as ‘triggers’, as will be further explored through the lenses of the participants. This section will also explain other factors which can play a role in triggering or contributing to FL anxiety.

Personality as a Key Contributor to FL Anxiety

The first contributor to be discussed is personality. All participants suggested that it is most often students who have an introverted personality who demonstrate the most anxiety, but that those who are extroverted can also exhibit FL anxiety as well. This is very situational and often dependent on the tasks required. As Ed mentioned, some students begin the program with high energy and as the anxiety begins, they shut down and become withdrawn. The triggers in these situations can be anything from students being asked to participate orally in whole-class activities, or when completing individual presentations. The literature echoes this discussion, stating that students with either introverted or extroverted personalities can experience anxiety. The research further revealed that introverts may experience the most anxiety when required to communicate to a large group, while extroverts may feel anxious when required to complete an independent task (MacIntyre & Charos, 1996).

Beverley and Jane both pointed out that it can sometimes be difficult to differentiate between students who are shy and those who are anxious. From the outset, shyness and anxiety may appear very similar. Jane explained that shyness can be difficult to assess, and that “it takes time to assess that there is a difference” between FL anxiety and shyness being experienced by students. Beverley noted that shyness often fades as the school year progresses if the student is not experiencing anxiety. She also went on to
explain that when students are only experiencing shyness, they “get out of it quicker”, and can excel in the class upon finding their niche and getting excited about what they are learning. She explained that non-anxious shy students become more readily comfortable with the material, and become engaged with the FL learning environment quicker as well.

**Social Media and Other Anxiety Provoking Social Situations**

Both Ed and Beverley observe that their students are heavily influenced by their peers and how they feel they are perceived by others. They noted that their students are highly aware of how others think of them, and how they are being judged by others. As previously discussed, Ed stated that he believes the intense awareness which students have in this generation “has to do with social media; everything you say is commented on. So, it's an extension of what you say in class as being judged by other people, and you feel like they're gonna talk about it when you're not around.” He added that within the adolescent years, students are sensitive to what others think of them, and negative reaction from others can contribute to very unpleasant experiences in and out of school.

Beverley explained to me that sometimes her students experience significant anxiety before presentations because they have had prior conflicts with other students in the class. She explained a scenario, which had occurred earlier in the school year. One particular student, prior to a presentation, had insulted two of her classmates, and “they were ready to jump on her [...] she was feeling vulnerable that she had actually alienated some others, and knew that they were ready for her to screw up – so they were going to call her on it and embarrass her. She had set herself up for a problem.” Adolescents, as we know, are constantly dealing with changes, socially and emotionally. The stress of
knowing that there is someone in the class who might be against them can cause that added anxiety which can greatly impact their performance and desire to thrive in their learning environment.

**Best Practices for Teaching Students with FL Anxiety**

All participants offered a variety of best practices to use when teaching FL, and outlined specific strategies they use when they become aware of students who experience FL anxiety in their classes. This section will explain the best practices for FL instruction, as well as how teachers can best create classrooms which are conducive to learning and success.

**Best Practices for Instruction to Promote Confidence among Students**

According to my participants, there are a variety of ways in which teachers can use their instruction to promote confidence among their students in FL learning environments. Beverley discussed differentiated instruction quite a bit, and explained to me some of the strategies she uses to ensure students are as confident as possible when completing tasks (specifically oral communication and oral presentations) in the FL classroom. Beverley explained that in preparation for presentations, she offers support to her students by sharing a number of strategies with them. She explained that she would offer to help students one-on-one after class, and provide them with strategies they can use at home as well.

Beverley spoke about in-class assignments as well, explaining that she gives her students the chance to practise with partners in the hallway (round-robin fashion) as
well as at their seats. This extra practice time with peers, which is aimed at increasing students’ comfort level with the oral French communication, allows her students to feel better prepared and more confident for upcoming presentations. This approach also teaches students how to collaborate and work well together, therefore forming a community where there is understanding for each others’ struggles and successes.

Within the literature, there is also a stress on authentic communication and frequent practice thereof. Research has found that frequent use and practice of oral communication, as well as communication tasks which are suited to the students’ needs and personal development skills, can strengthen students’ motivation, oral communication skills and tendencies for spontaneous communication in the FL classroom (Netten & Germain, 2005, 2010).

Ed also explained how some of his students feel more confident when given the option to present to him only, instead of having to do so in front of the entire class. When discussing one-on-one teacher assistance in the classroom, he told me that he will sometimes have students “come in a lot after school, just to get support”, and also explained: “I do remedial after school, so I’ll get some students that do that too”. This accommodation is something which he states can help struggling learners a great deal to feel more confident in their abilities. It addresses first the apprehension students feel when speaking in French, as well as the ability of students to present well in front of a group, one step at a time. He explains that he tries to accommodate students a lot, especially with presentations: “I have them come present to me […] some kids that are more dramatic or artistic, they want to present something in front of the whole class, or they want to make a video. […] And some of those kids that aren’t comfortable doing
that can kinda just write things out, come see me – just the two of us – and they can just present it to me”.

Ed and Beverley explained that they notice their students’ confidence building as they implement these teaching strategies. As students receive descriptive feedback from the teacher and their peers, they also experience reassurance and encouragement. My participants note that this can help curb anxiety and allow students to reach their full potential.

**Best Practices for Creating a Comfortable Learning Environment**

When students are learning French in any program, it is important that they feel comfortable in their learning environment. My participants shared with me a few ways in which they create this environment in their classrooms. Many of these approaches were similar, though they were implemented for different grades and stages of learning. Beverley and Ed explained that while teaching, they ensure that the learning in their class is gradual. They “read” their students, and teach at a pace which works best for them to grasp the content. As both these teachers have been teaching for over a decade, they have learned, through trial and error, how to do this effectively. As mentioned, Ed offers remedial help to his students as often as he can. Beverley does this as well by helping students prepare for presentations in addition to helping with class work.

Both Ed and Beverley believe in preparing their students for success, and communicating that to the students as they go along. Helping students understand that their teachers are on their side, and want to help them realize their strengths, can alleviate anxiety and encourage students who are struggling. Ed mentioned that helping anxious
students feel comfortable goes beyond teacher instruction. It also means paying attention to classroom dynamics and creating seating plans which work for students. With reference to anxious students, he said that he “usually [tries] to just be really gentle with them”. He then added:

I try to make sure they are in a group with at least one person that they're comfortable with [and] same thing with seating as well. Also, if it is someone who has had a history of anxiety, then the students that they're friends with will know about it as well, and they're gentler when talking with them and working with them as well.

The literature comments on creating a comfortable learning environment by responding to students’ emotional needs. As Oxford (1990) writes, “language learning is undisputedly an emotional and interpersonal process” (as cited in Charles, 2012, p. 164). Further to this, research has found that when teachers are aware of their students’ emotional needs and strive to create comfortable learning environments, it can lessen anxiety and students may feel more motivated to learn. Throughout this process, teachers are also playing a role in building students’ self-esteem and sense of worth (Charles, 2012; Piccardo, 2010; Schrier, 2008).

Therefore, creating a comfortable environment is not only about instruction, but about looking at the whole student body and creating a classroom which allows for students to feel emotionally supported in their learning environment.
Best Practices for Approaching the Issue of FL Anxiety in the Classroom

Ed noted that the behaviours of students who experience FL anxiety can potentially have an impact on the classroom environment. When it comes to accommodating students with FL anxiety, Ed ensures that the class understands that differences in behaviour while learning are natural. He explained: “I find that I do have to have a talk with the students as far as ‘everyone's different’, and people experience life in different ways.” Ed shared that he does this so as to eliminate “any tension, or negative feelings towards those students” who may behave differently as they cope with FL anxiety. “There's a lot of just intervention with the class and just talking to them about [how], people learn differently. Some people need extra support, some people don't need as much support, and I'm accommodating so that people can do the best that they can do.”

Beverley explained that she wishes students would open up about anxiety experienced in the classroom. She said that by talking about their anxieties, students would “realize that there are more of them in the class in the same boat. And then [the class] could talk publicly about the strategies [to use]. But often it’s such ‘top secret’, that they’re so ashamed, they won’t discuss it.” For her, communication about the issue could lead to a better understanding of the triggers of FL anxiety. It could also provide opportunities for students to learn more about self-regulation and how to best prepare for oral presentations in her Extended French class. This, she believes, would help eliminate most of their anxieties. One specific strategy she uses in the classroom is student-facilitated preparation for presentations. She allows the students class time to rotate among their peers and to practise what they will be saying during their presentation. In
this way, they can receive immediate feedback, and will become more comfortable as the process goes along.

Jane stated that “students achieve success when they receive support and feedback from their teacher and peers”, adding that “it is the teacher’s responsibility to determine how to best engage and provide a positive learning environment for the anxious FL learner and for the rest of the class”. In her teaching, Jane uses multiple strategies to address FL anxiety in the classroom, understanding that “it may take many approaches and instructional methods in order to provide what each child requires”. She mentioned being accommodating to students in order to help them achieve success and the importance of appealing to their interests, as their level of engagement will depend on the relevance they see in the topics. Jane explains one of these strategies/solutions as, follows: “grouping [students] in a small group with a peer that they respect as a French speaker, [as] this will sometimes help them to get involved in the oral activity”. Another of her strategies involves giving students many opportunities to face their fears through oral presentations. She asserts that “skits [and] short plays that students can rehearse and practise generally give students success and confidence”. She added that providing time for these oral practice activities, and “even singing and repeating rehearsed scripts, provide an anchor on which to frame their confidence.”

Available Support for Students who Experience FL Anxiety

As mentioned in previous sections, some of the most common forms of support for students within the school are remedial help and support from teachers during class
time. All my participants mentioned some other types of support which are available both in, and outside of schools, and how they benefit students.

Ed mentioned that there are social workers and guidance counselors who visit schools to offer support to students who experience difficulty with anxiety and other issues. He explained that “the guidance counselor is great, but she's only here part time - she has four schools that she splits her time between”, and referred to the benefits, for anxious students especially, to knowing she is there, saying it’s “somewhere where they can go - just a space that they can go.”

Beverley explained that getting parents involved can be a crucial step to dealing with students with FL anxiety. By practicing their oral language skills with a parent, or a tutor or volunteer hired by the parents, the anxious student would have more opportunity for assistance when preparing for presentations, such as receiving tips for pronunciation and delivery. In terms of support from the school board, Beverly, like Ed, noted that there is not a lot of support available for these specific needs of students. For her, integral supports beyond the guidance counselor and resource personnel could be Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) among the FL teachers in the school, as well as more interventions from outside the school. A couple of examples of these interventions are visits from student volunteers in high school to help support Grade 7 and 8 students with oral French, as well as additional support in schools from the school board or the school board French consultant.

In addition to involving parents and initiating conversations with students and parents about the experience of anxiety and useful strategies to combat it, Jane mentioned the availability of a variety of technological support which has proven to be helpful when
teaching French. She indicated that she would “often use Web 2.0 Tools [and] on-line iCloud apps to engage student learning”, adding that if a student is experiencing shyness or anxiety with an oral task or preparation for an oral presentation, “a Web 2.0 Tool such as Glogster, Voicethread, Audacity or even Garage Band can help record and capture their message”. As a final point, Jane shared that she believes that “an awareness of multimedia tools” and the promotion of those online tools mentioned would be very helpful for FL educators who have students with FL anxiety.

Unfortunately, there a limited amount of literature available pertaining to the specific topic of best practices when teaching students who experience FL, and so I was able to connect only some to the findings from the literature review to data gathered from my interviews. As such, the data gathered from my participants became the cornerstone for implications and recommendations on this subtopic. In Chapter 5, I will continue to explain how the information obtained in my interviews relates to my research questions, the data collected in my literature review, as well as what implications and recommendations it holds for teachers and researchers.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Introduction

This final chapter will discuss the implications of my research for teachers and educational communities as a whole. In addition, it will explore the possible recommendations for researchers and for future study in general. I will also use this chapter to discuss my limitations as a researcher of FL anxiety, and the ways in which I was able to gather data which will contribute to an increased awareness of FL anxiety, and better instructional practices to support students who experience it.

Implications

Implications for Teachers and Educational Communities

FL anxiety can occur in any FL learning environment, and among students of any age. For students at the Junior/Intermediate level, the impact of FL anxiety on their acquisition and achievement is especially significant. In addition to experiencing this anxiety in the classroom, they are also engaged in a time of adolescent development and social changes.

My findings suggest that FL anxiety is a phenomenon which is well recognized in schools among students of various ages and in various FL programs, and that teachers are aware of ways in which to best support students who experience FL anxiety. My findings also suggest that, teachers’ abilities to best support students who experience FL anxiety hinge on their familiarity with the factors which trigger this anxiety, as well recognizing the behavioural, social and emotional issues often present among students who
experience it. In addition, teachers are better able to support students if given adequate time to do this during the school day. It is also important that they have the resources available to do this in an effective manner for both themselves and the students.

Teachers’ abilities to support students who have FL anxiety also hinge on their awareness of the behavioural, social and emotional reactions which are prevalent among these students. This means being aware of the ways in which students are likely to react when anxious, either while completing work (i.e. avoidance, constant need for validation, absenteeism, etc.) or when engaging with others (i.e. nervousness, shyness, fear of judgement, etc.).

Awareness and familiarity are some of the greatest implications for teachers as identified in this research. Without the awareness and familiarity with the triggers and indicators of FL anxiety among students, teachers lack the strategies for engaging with anxious students, either in one-on-one or group settings. This translates to an inability to offer meaningful support or resources to ensure student success. My findings indicate that students who experience FL anxiety can be well-supported through the careful execution of strategies introduced by teachers who demonstrate awareness, care and flexibility in addressing the students’ needs.

Recommendations

Recommendations for Teachers and Educational Communities

As the literature states, FL anxiety can occur in a variety of FL learning contexts, such as speaking and listening (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994), and more specifically with reading, writing, and oral communication tasks. The data collected from my participants
also highlighted that oral communication and oral participation are also great contributors to FL anxiety. With this information in mind, I have composed the following list of practical recommendations for teachers and educational community members to use in classrooms and schools as a whole.

First of all, FL teachers should attempt to have conversations, both formal and informal, with their students about anxiety and FL anxiety specifically. As the data findings reveal, FL anxiety is rarely discussed in class because of the shame and embarrassment many anxious students feel. The teacher participants explained that this lack of dialogue contributes to the isolation of the issue, and thus, it persists without acknowledgement. Teachers should be proactive when discussing this topic, and should strive to create a safe environment where students feel comfortable sharing their concerns and feelings. Students should also be encouraged to be an active part of these conversations, and to offer solutions and strategies which may decrease anxiety and increase confidence and engagement of students who experience FL anxiety. Together, teachers and students can create a support plan that works.

Secondly, teachers should teach in a way which allows students to feel comfortable and supported in the classroom environment. While this may sound like a simple enough task, it can sometimes be very challenging for teachers to create an environment which best supports all students. In order to do this, teachers could create routines whereby they consistently allow a class period of practice time before presentations, or offer students the opportunity to work in pairs when beginning a new language task. Routines such as these, in addition to regular remedial assistance, can help prevent FL anxiety, and allow students to feel prepared and supported throughout their
learning. By fostering an environment which prioritizes preparedness and confidence, as well as care and respect for others, teachers are able to support all students well, including those who experience FL anxiety.

Thirdly, teachers should also be communicating with and supporting each other in order to best support students who experience FL anxiety. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and regular meetings to discuss best practices, ideas and strategies for supporting students who experience FL anxiety would allow teachers to form universal plans and initiatives in their classrooms. Simply having this forum and assigned topics for discussion could not only heighten the teachers’ awareness and steps taken to confront FL anxiety, but also greatly benefit the students over the short and long term.

Lastly, teachers should be ready and able to support students emotionally. When teachers ensure that students feel comfortable, welcome and valued in their learning environment, students are able to form meaningful connections with their teachers and the curriculum content. Furthermore, emotional well-being in students contributes to lower FL anxiety as well as a strong motivation to become engaged in-class. In order to provide this emotional support, teachers could take time to become familiar with their students and their needs, as well as communicate with them throughout the course with regards to any struggles or anxiety the students may be experiencing. Communication and care in the classroom environment is one way which teachers can begin to approach the emotional needs of their students.

Based on the findings of this research study, I believe that it is the responsibility of education communities to be aware of the anxieties and struggles which students can experience during their time in FL programs. With the proper tools and supports in place,
teachers and educational communities can provide students with comfortable, encouraging and positive learning environments where FL education is well recognized and well supported.

**Recommendations for Researchers**

One of the major items lacking in the literature, as well as in my own research (due to ethical restraints) is information pertaining to students’ first-hand experiences with FL anxiety, as well as best practices for teaching students who experience FL anxiety. The research I was able to locate with regards to best practices for teaching FL was very limited.

The data I was able to gather derived from FL educators who have been in the field for many years. In addition, I gathered information from current literature concerning the indicators, triggers and overviews of FLA and FL anxiety. While these resources were very helpful in gathering the information required to complete this paper, I feel as though there is still so much to learn about FL anxiety, and that so much of that knowledge and expertise on the topic needs to come from the students themselves.

I recommend that researchers interested in this topic consider engaging with students as appropriate to gather first-hand experiences with regards to FL anxiety. Not only will this be an added perspective on the topic, but it will also allow for educators to have a window through which to view and understand the phenomenon of FL anxiety more fully. I also recommend that researchers investigate more of the best practices for instructing students who experience FL anxiety so that teachers can continue to learn how to best support students using a variety of strategies and approaches.
Limitations

Throughout my research, I have encountered a number of limitations. First of all, I was unable to interview students and gather information about their first-hand experiences with FL anxiety. This would have been helpful for my research; however, the timeline for my research did not include the processing time for the ethical review needed for this permission.

A second limitation I encountered pertains to the extent of the information I was able to gather from my participants regarding anxiety among Junior/Intermediate students in the classroom. More specifically, I encountered some limitations with regards to the amount of detailed information I was able to gather. Inquiring about students’ struggles in the classroom is a very personal matter, and in some cases, my participants were not at liberty to discuss more than general information about what they have encountered. Fortunately, I was still able to gather a great deal of data on the topic, as participants were familiar with the phenomenon. This allowed them to offer me information based on the extent of their experience with it.

The last limitation I anticipated was that unintentional biases and preferences would be present in the responses given throughout the interview process. This is unavoidable, and did occur at various points during my interviews. At times I did need to isolate the facts stated from the opinions, in order to analyze my data from a neutral standpoint. Other times, however, I did take into account the preferences and prominent perspectives of the individuals (mostly when discussing best practices and personal experience in that area), as it allowed for my research to hinge on the successes and
personal experiences of educators who care about the struggles and successes of their students.

**Further study**

Further study on the topic of FL anxiety has the potential to uncover so much more about the causes, indicators and best practices for assisting students who experience FL anxiety. Some questions I wish to further explore, and feel would be lend well to future studies are:

- What are the deeper psychological reasons for why FL anxiety is experienced most when students engage with oral language tasks?

- What are the different ways in which students have become aware of FL anxiety in themselves?

- What are some initiatives students have taken in order to deal with FL anxiety, either in the classroom or while completing at-home tasks?

- In which ways can teachers lead informal discussions with their students with regards to FL anxiety, and how can they introduce the topic in a way which prompts students to share?

- What other resources or initiatives are possible to have within schools in order to help students who experience FL anxiety?

- How could teachers further improve their practice in order to a) prevent FL anxiety from occurring and/or b) address the indicators of FL anxiety among their students?
- How could teachers better support students emotionally while in an FL learning environment?

In addition to these questions, future research may gather much more information from the accounts of students enrolled in FL programs, and cite their first-hand experiences with a variety of classroom tasks. This would allow for a deeper understanding of how the anxiety can begin and persist – what it feels like, what it looks like and how it can impact one’s personal achievement when learning French.

I am confident that should I have the opportunity to investigate the questions raised in this research study, I would find an abundance of resources, strategies and information which teachers could use to recognize FL anxiety in the classroom, and best support students who experience it.

**Conclusion**

FL anxiety is a topic which is very important issue in our FL programs today. My research has found that it is a significant phenomenon which can occur within Grade 4-8 FL programs (Core, Extended and Immersion). Within these programs, students can experience FL anxiety due to a variety of factors, and exhibit the anxiety differently on a case-by-case basis. Many of the common ways in which this anxiety affects students are academically, socially, cognitively, behaviourally, personally, and in their communication competence. Within these broad categories, my research was able to uncover some of the more specific indicators and triggers of FL anxiety. Some of these indicators and triggers are much more obvious than others and, depending on the student,
can require a great deal of additional support in order for the student to succeed in the FL program.

The teacher participants readily discussed many of these triggers, which included but were not limited to shyness, personality traits and significant discomfort when learning new material. They also explained the varieties of experiences that they have had with the indicators of FL anxiety, which ranged from mild to severe. These include, but are not limited to absenteeism, avoidance of work, low self-esteem and physical illness. As revealed in my research, social media and perceived judgement from others could also be considered as dominant factors in the onset of FL anxiety.

I appreciated very much the participants’ willingness to share their strategies and best practices for supporting students who experience FL anxiety, as well as the ways in which they hope for school staff and administration to join with them. The data gathered in my research indicated that with some additional incentive from school boards and more initiative on the part of FL teachers, schools could be much better equipped to address issues of student anxiety. This, along with all the information I was able to gather on this topic, inspired me to continue my passion and search for best practices for supporting anxious students in FL learning environments. I feel very positively impacted by the research I have done, and excited for the ways in which this paper could contribute to studies pursued by myself or other researchers in the field. There is so much more to be learned, and so many students coping with FL anxiety who deserve the best support possible in their school environment.
References


Appendix A: Letter of Consent for Interview

Date: ________________
Dear ________________,

I am a graduate student at OISE, University of Toronto, and am currently enrolled as a Master of Teaching candidate. I am studying French Language Anxiety for the purposes of investigating an educational topic as a major assignment for our program. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

I am writing a report on this study as a requirement of the Master of Teaching Program. My course instructor who is providing support for the process this year is Dr. Arlo Kempf. My research supervisor is Dr. Merlin Charles. The purpose of this requirement is to allow us to become familiar with a variety of ways to do research. My data collection consists of an interview between 20-40 minutes that will be tape-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient to you. I can conduct the interview at your office or workplace, in a public place, or anywhere else that you might prefer.

The contents of this interview will be used for my assignment, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates and/or potentially at a conference or publication. I will not use your name or anything else that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information remains confidential. The only people who will have access to my assignment work will be my research supervisor and my course instructor. You are free to change your mind at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may decline to answer any specific questions. I will destroy the tape recording after the paper has been presented and/or published which may take up to five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks or benefits to you for assisting in the project, and I will share with you a copy of my notes to ensure accuracy.

Please sign the attached form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. Thank you very much for your help.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]
Leah Varro
Researcher name: Leah Varro
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Research Supervisor’s Name: Merlin Charles
Email: merlin.charles@utoronto.ca

Consent Form

I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by Leah Varro and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described.

Signature: ________________________________

Name (printed): ________________________________

Date: ___________________________
Appendix B: List of Interview Questions

**Questionnaire**

Name: ______________________________

Current Teaching Position (Grade, Program, School):
________________________________________________________________________

Total Years Teaching: _____

Briefly explain your qualifications (ex. Teacher Ed. Program, other education):
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Briefly explain why you chose to become a French Language teacher:
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Have you observed students in your class(es) who experience FL anxiety?
Yes [ ] No [ ]

Is there any other information you would like to share which pertains to this topic?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

*Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.*
Interview Questions

Background Information:

1. Could you please provide your name, along with a brief explanation of the grade and program which you teach?

2. Which French Language programs have you taught, and to which grade levels? (ex. Early/Late Immersion, Early/Late Extended, Core)

3. Could you please briefly explain your teaching qualifications for the record? (ex. teacher education, other education/experiences)

4. How many years have you been teaching French Language, and at how many schools?

Identifying FL anxiety

5. In your experience, what are some important signs that might alert a teacher to a student who is experiencing FL anxiety?
   
   Prompt: What do you see/sense? Do you notice if these students have unique social behaviour or work habits?

6. How do you distinguish between a student who is experiencing FL anxiety and a student who is simply shy by nature?
   
   Prompt: Do you find this to be a difficult task? What senses/observations guide you in either direction?

Effects of FL anxiety

7. For students who experience FL anxiety, what impact does it seem to have on their level of engagement in the classroom?

8. For students who experience FL anxiety, what impact does it seem to have on their motivation while in the classroom?

9. For students who experience FL anxiety, what impact does it seem to have on their overall academic achievement in the French Language program?

10. How is the classroom affected by those students who experience FL anxiety?
Prompt: How does this affect the teacher/students, and classroom environment as a whole? Does it impact student who don’t have this anxiety. Does it affect the classroom community?

11. Do you notice any social/emotional differences in students who experience FL anxiety versus students who are comfortable when learning French?
*Prompt: Are there differing dynamics and engagement with work (individual and group), do they interact differently with their peers and teacher?*

12. Do you notice any behavioural differences in students who experience FL anxiety versus students who are comfortable when learning French?
*Prompt: Are there differing dynamics and engagement with work (individual and group), do they behave differently around and to their peers and teacher?*

13. Which area of the curriculum do you find that students, in general, are challenged by the most (oral, written, reading), and why?

14. Which area of the curriculum (oral, reading, writing) do you notice is most challenging/anxiety provoking for students experiencing FL anxiety?
*Prompt: Why do you think this is?*

**Support for Students with FL anxiety**

15. Are you aware of any strategies and/or tools that are available to assist students who are experiencing FL anxiety?

16. When implementing strategies and tools in the classroom to minimize anxiety and maximize comfort learning French, do you notice a change in the level of engagement in your students (especially those experiencing FL anxiety?)
*Prompt: What is their response? How do you observe them reacting to this help?*

17. Are you aware of any other resources or support for students experiencing FL anxiety? *Prompt: Are there existing Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)? Are there any resources you use? Are there any that your colleagues use?*

18. How do you think your school/school board can better support you in supporting students who experience FL anxiety?
*Prompt: Are there any changes you would like to see? Do you feel there is enough support currently available?*