

# International Journal of Linguistics (IJL)

**INVESTIGATING FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING ANXIETY: A CASE OF  
FRENCH STUDENTS IN GHANA**

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**Investigating Foreign Language Learning  
Anxiety: A Case of French Students in Ghana**

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**Article History**

**Received 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2023**

**Received in Revised Form 5<sup>th</sup> March 2023**

**Accepted 13<sup>th</sup> March 2023**



**Abstract**

**Purpose:** The purpose of this study is to investigate foreign language learning anxiety amongst French students in Ghana.

**Methodology:** The study adopted a desktop methodology. Desk research refers to secondary data or that which can be collected without fieldwork. Desk research is basically involved in collecting data from existing resources hence it is often considered a low cost technique as compared to field research, as the main cost is involved in executive's time, telephone charges and directories. Thus, the study relied on already published studies, reports and statistics. This secondary data was easily accessed through the online journals and library.

**Findings:** The findings revealed that there exists a contextual and a methodological gap relating to investigating foreign language learning anxiety among French students in Ghana. Preliminary empirical review reveals that that French-speaking students at Ghanaian educational institutions suffer from moderate anxiety. Because the French language system is distinct from their own and the English language system, this may be a source of anxiety. Pre-university exposure to the French language, particularly in elementary and secondary school, may assist to reduce anxiety to a moderate degree.

**Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy:** The Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope's Theory. The Cognitive theory and the Krashen's Affective Filter Theory may be used to anchor future studies relating to foreign language learning anxiety. The study will be beneficial to EFL teachers and other relevant stakeholders in establishing policies and strategies to create a conducive environment to allow foreign language learners have an easy time in acquisition of a foreign language.

**Keywords:** *Foreign Language (FL), Anxiety, Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), Learners, Ghana*

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## INTRODUCTION

Acquiring proficiency in a second spoken language poses a multitude of obstacles. According to Mazouzi's (2013) research, the obstacles encountered can be categorized into three discrete groups, namely learner factors, instructor factors, and language factors. Extensive research has been conducted on all aspects of these characteristics, with particular emphasis on the factors related to learners. Scholars have thoroughly investigated various facets of learners, including their mental well-being. Anxiety has been identified as a significant psychological barrier that impedes students' progress in English language learning, regardless of whether they are studying English as a second language or as a foreign language (Vadivel, 2022).

Prior scholarly investigations pertaining to second language acquisition have primarily focused on the cognitive variables that impact the acquisition of a secondary or non-native language. The aforementioned factors encompassed ability, intelligence, and learning styles. Nevertheless, contemporary studies have prioritized the examination of psychological factors that could facilitate or hinder the acquisition of a second language. Subsequently, numerous studies were carried out with a predominant emphasis on effective or personality factors, given their substantial role in the acquisition of a second language.

Saville-Troike (2016) posits that comprehending the development of second language learning and teaching necessitates the consideration of psychological factors, particularly personal factors, as they exert a direct impact on the language learning process. According to Saville-Troike, the consideration of personal factors is crucial in determining whether this assertion holds true. Numerous researchers have conducted studies on various factors, with a significant focus on anxiety and its impact on second language acquisition over the past few decades (Larsen-Freeman, 2014).

Zeidner (2014) posits that the anxiety experienced by students is primarily rooted in their worry and emotionality. The term "concern" is utilized to denote the cognitive experiences that students undergo during the process of acquiring novel knowledge. The aforementioned experiences may encompass psychological apprehensions pertaining to the learners themselves, in addition to pessimistic anticipations. The present situation of the student, along with the expected consequences, collectively contribute to the heightened state of anxiety. The term "emotionality" pertains to the physiological in nature and affective elements, as well as the negative affective states that are beyond the control of learners during episodes of anxiety. Instances of such emotions encompass sensations of strain and discomfort.

According to Alico's (2015) definition, anxiety is characterized as a subjective sensation of tension, uncertainty, nervousness, and worry, accompanied by an activation of the autonomic nervous system. The etiology of anxiety is multifactorial, rendering it challenging to identify a singular causative factor. Asif (2017) posits that anxiety may arise from diverse sources, such as personal and interpersonal anxieties, learner perspectives on language acquisition, instructor attitudes towards language teaching, instructor-learner interactions, classroom protocols, and language testing. Based on the results of specific research, it can be inferred that the experience of anxiety is a consequence of inadequate language acquisition skills among students (Yan & Horwitz, 2008).



Numerous techniques for evaluating anxiety have been devised by scholars. According to Horwitz *et al.* (1986), the creators of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), students who are acquiring English as a foreign or second language experience apprehension in the classroom for three distinct reasons. One common issue that arises in communication among students is communication apprehension, which is characterized by the fear that effective understanding and conveyance of thoughts may not be achieved due to difficulties in communication. The second factor to be taken into account is that there exist certain students who experience intense fear in response to receiving negative feedback. This fear prompts them to remain composed and refrain from participating in any type of discourse with their peers. One contributing factor is the prevalence of test-related anxiety among students of English as a Foreign Language and English as a Second Language.

The academic performance of foreign language students may be negatively impacted by anxiety, as suggested by Steinmayr (2016). Individuals with elevated levels of anxiety tend to exhibit lower academic performance, whereas those with lower levels of anxiety tend to demonstrate higher academic achievement in their university coursework. The aforementioned proposition has garnered substantiation from various investigations conducted on the topic. This suggests that students possess the capacity to enhance their academic performance through the reduction of their levels of anxiety during studying. Conducting research on anxiety among Ghanaian students is imperative to raise awareness among educators, thereby facilitating the identification of viable interventions aimed at mitigating the prevalence of anxiety among students. Despite the extensive research conducted on this topic, there is a dearth of comparable studies that examine anxiety in a broader context.

A significant number of Chinese students who pursue English as a secondary language experience anxiety in relation to their language studies. In China, the English language proficiency of students is often assessed through the administration of high-stakes examinations such as the College English Test (CET) and the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), as noted by Wagner (2016). The administration of exams imposes an additional burden of pressure and unease on students, compelling them to perform at a high level. Despite the potential limitations of traditional teaching methods, such as rote memorization, they continue to be extensively employed in English language programs throughout China. This is despite the fact that such methods may not be universally effective for all students. Individuals who encounter challenges in acquiring knowledge through this approach may encounter emotions of distress and apprehension as a consequence. The apprehension associated with acquiring a new language may also be impacted by the cultural distinctions that exist between China and English-speaking nations.

Some students may encounter difficulties with the nuances of the English language, while others may experience discomfort when communicating with individuals who are native speakers. In China, there is potential for educators and politicians to aid students in overcoming their apprehensions towards utilizing English in genuine contexts. This can be achieved through the provision of support for cultural exchange programs, the integration of student-centered learning strategies, and the augmentation of opportunities for speaking and listening practice. Educators have the ability to cultivate a mindset of growth among their students, whereby obstacles and challenges are perceived as opportunities for learning rather than as defeats.

The absence of educational resources such as textbooks, language laboratories, and multimedia materials may lead to heightened levels of anxiety and hinder the ability to acquire a new language effectively in numerous Sub-Saharan African countries. Insufficient language instruction may lead to discontentment and unease among certain students in Sub-Saharan African nations. Language learners can significantly enhance their skills and develop fluency and confidence by engaging in interactions with native speakers. Learners residing in Sub-Saharan African nations may encounter limited exposure to individuals who are fluent in the language, as well as fewer prospects to engage in conversational practice, which may contribute to heightened levels of apprehension. According to Butcher (2015)

Ghana is a nation characterized by geographic and linguistic homogeneity. According to Nkrumah and Darko (2021), the diverse ethnic and linguistic composition of Africa's populace poses a challenge in achieving consensus on matters pertaining to education and language. During the initial phases of the colonial period, English was acknowledged as a secondary language of official status, as per the findings of Cheong *et al.* (2019). In 1950, the colonial government recognized the necessity of introducing French language education in schools. The initial implementation of this policy occurred in the Central Region, specifically at Mfantshipim and Adisadel located in Cape Coast. According to Nkrumah and Darko (2021), the utilization of native languages for educational purposes was considered insufficient until the implementation of standardized educational institutions, which led to the adoption of English as the primary language of instruction.

Achieving mutual comprehension on a worldwide level necessitates the acquisition of a secondary language. The prevalence of wars around the world can be attributed to the inability to effectively communicate and comprehend different cultural perspectives. A lack of cross-cultural understanding may result in the development of animosity and perplexity. Distrust and skepticism may arise in situations where one party is incapable of communicating in the language of the other. The proficiency in communicating in diverse languages is a significant determinant in the pace of globalization's advancement. It is imperative for individuals to possess proficiency in a second language, particularly one with a substantial number of native speakers, such as French, to facilitate effective communication and collaboration. An intermediary who possesses fluency in the respective language can facilitate communication between the two groups. Ghanaian students have the opportunity to expand their language skills beyond English and French. Russian, Spanish, Swahili, and Arabic are among the languages that are taught in educational institutions.

According to Nkrumah and Darko (2021), the proliferation of urban centers in Ghana has underscored the significance of college-bound students obtaining proficiency in the French language. The increasing presence of international corporations in Ghana highlights the need for proficient French interpreters and translators. The initiation of foreign language instruction and acquisition at the University of Ghana commenced in August of 2009. In 2013, Ghana inaugurated its inaugural Confucius Institute with the aim of promoting the learning of French and enhancing the availability of language education.

### **Statement of the Problem**

There has been a steady increase in the number of Ghanaian students pursuing French as a second language. Therefore, it is essential to investigate potential barriers to student achievement.

Students' anxiety can get in the way of their efforts to learn and use the language in their second or foreign language classes. "The finest learning takes place in an atmosphere of low anxiety," Krashen argues. There has not been extensive research on the prevalence of anxiety among EFL students in Ghanaian universities. More research is needed on anxiety and its potential therapies (Bezzina, 2017). This cannot be achieved in one study, so this study sets out to investigate foreign language learning anxiety among French learners in Ghana.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Theoretical Review**

#### **Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope's Theory of Foreign Language Anxiety**

Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) in their popular research define foreign language anxiety as "a distinct complex construct of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of language learning process". They contend that the anxiety associated with learning a new language is unique to that context and cannot be reduced to a more generalized kind of worry that is transferred to the work at hand. They collect data to support their theory by interviewing 30 language students and seeing classroom teachers in action. According to this theory, learning a foreign language is unique in causing anxiety since few other academic fields need as much attention to one's own identity and the creation of one's own voice. Anxiety was a problem for everyone, including those who had done well in the past. This concept has been adopted by a huge body of research, which provides support for it according to research by Dewaele (2012).

Chen and Chang (2004) posit that individuals who experience apprehension when communicating in a foreign language are likely to be experiencing situational anxiety. The authors' conclusion posits that foreign language anxiety is a unique construct that is separate from both test anxiety and academic anxiety, as evidenced by the absence of any significant correlation between the two constructs. The findings of this study support the notion that the particular difficulties associated with acquiring a second language are a contributing factor to a distinct type of anxiety, as posited by Naser *et al.* (2019).

The inclusion of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) is a noteworthy contribution to this concept, as it enables the measurement of the degree to which students experience apprehension and evasion in acquiring a foreign language due to their individual biases, discriminatory attitudes, and preexisting notions. The Foreign Language Anxiety Scale for Students (FLCAS) is a self-administered survey comprising 33 items that aims to evaluate the extent of foreign language anxiety experienced by a learner and to determine whether language anxiety is a distinct phenomenon in the context of language acquisition. The FLCAS employs a 5-point Likert scale to score its items, which ranges from complete agreement to profound disagreement and is represented by values between 1 and 5.

#### **Krashen's Affective Filter Theory**

When considering the topic of acquiring a second language, it is imperative to address Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, which was proposed in 1982. The aforementioned approach underscores the significance of emotional factors in the acquisition of a second language. Krashen

(1982) posited that affective factors encompass emotional attributes such as an individual's motivation, self-assurance, and apprehension. These variables possess the capability to impede the transmission of information to the brain's language development mechanism, thereby potentially impacting the educational process. The theory in question expounds upon the correlation between affective factors and the attainment or deficiency thereof in the acquisition of a second language, as posited by Naser *et al.* (2019).

The activation of the emotional filter can lead to various adverse consequences such as anxiety, tension, and a decrease in self-assurance. However, the absence of stringent filters does not elicit concern, thereby facilitating the comprehension of auditory input for individuals acquiring a new language. The concept of facilitating input and creating a low-anxiety classroom environment is crucial in pedagogy, particularly for language teachers who aim to make the language accessible to their students. Language instructors can facilitate a more conducive learning environment by prioritizing the significance of the message over the structure and deferring initial output until the learners are adequately prepared. The implementation of this approach is expected to enhance the English language proficiency of students. This is attributed to the increased exposure to language input, reduced cognitive barriers, and heightened confidence in engaging in classroom interactions.

### **Empirical Review**

Rafieyan (2016) set out to investigate the causes and remedies for nervousness when communicating in a foreign language. This qualitative study utilized interviews and introspective diaries as its primary research methods. The findings suggest that assessing the speaking proficiency of language learners is the most anxiety-inducing facet of the educational experience, while creating a pleasant learning atmosphere is the most commonly employed strategy for mitigating stress. The findings hold significant ramifications for pedagogy, suggesting that educators wield considerable influence over their pupils' foreign language speaking anxiety.

Marzec (2014) conducted research to find out if students with an advanced level of English experience speaking anxiety, how their self-assessment of speaking skills relates to apprehension, which aspects of speaking skills cause the most stress for students, and how commonplace aspects of classroom learning contribute to students' speaking anxiety. A correlation analysis was conducted to examine the potential impact of foreign language acquisition on an individual's mental health in high-pressure situations. The study revealed that a significant proportion of the participants exhibited apprehension towards engaging in conversations with individuals who were native speakers of the target language. Conversely, only a minority of the participants expressed a sense of assurance in their proficiency to communicate fluently in the language of interest. The most frequently reported sources of stress in the classroom were identified as peer pressure, the prospect of committing errors, and the need to speak extemporaneously. The experience of stress presents itself in various forms for students, resulting in challenges with verbal communication and other emotional concerns. Moreover, stress is evident in an individual's verbal and nonverbal communication.

Zhiping (2013) also studied the fear that overseas students in a Malaysian institution have of using English in the classroom. This study aimed to investigate the underlying reasons behind the

occurrence of anxiety among international students, along with the coping mechanisms employed by them while communicating in English during classroom sessions. The data collection process involved interviews and observations, and was carried out with the participation of eight postgraduate students from various countries studying at a university in Malaysia. The findings indicate that a majority of individuals in Nigeria do not experience anxiety or apprehension when speaking in public. The prevalence of anxiety related to concerns about negative evaluation and conflict avoidance is notably elevated in Iran and Algeria. Ultimately, it is evident that the pedagogical methods employed by educators and the responses elicited from their pupils are minimally influenced by the cultural backgrounds of the students and predominantly determined by the affective barriers and cognitive aptitudes that are universally shared among individuals.

Po- Chi (2013) looked into the ways in which Taiwanese college students deal with stress to find out if such coping mechanisms might be used to predict how anxious they would become about studying English. A group of scholars from a Taiwanese academic institution conducted a survey on a sample of 120 undergraduate students to investigate their apprehension towards speaking a non-native language in a classroom setting. The coping strategy most commonly utilized by individuals who encountered anxiety in relation to acquiring a foreign language was positive thinking regarding their advancement. The utilization of positive thinking as a coping strategy was found to be the most significant predictor of a reduction in anxiety levels associated with acquiring a new language. The results of the study indicate that discontinuing the pursuit of acquiring a foreign language is linked to elevated levels of anxiety in comparison to alternative coping mechanisms.

Mahmoodzadeh (2012) studied Iranian EFL students' interlanguage system to better understand the effects of anxiety on students' ability to speak the target language. The main objective of this research is to investigate whether Iranian students who are learning English as a foreign language attribute their anxiety towards speaking in public in the target language to certain features of their interlanguage system. Additionally, the study aims to determine the degree of such attribution and to identify any potential differences in this regard based on gender or level of proficiency. The researcher endeavored to create a self-report questionnaire utilizing a five-point Likert scale, drawing primarily from the FLCAS model developed by Horwitz et al. The aim was to explore the three primary researchable components of the overarching concept of interlanguage system, namely interlanguage phonology, interlanguage grammar, and interlanguage meaning system, as outlined in Horwitz et al.'s work from 1986. The findings indicate that the fear of public speaking in foreign languages (FL) among participants was primarily attributed to their interlanguage meaning systems, as opposed to their interlanguage pragmatics or interlanguage pragmatics systems, within the classroom setting. The findings suggest that, in the framework of their interlanguage system, female participants exhibited a greater tendency to encounter foreign language speaking anxiety.

Moskovsky (2012) conducted an experimental research of motivated second language learners to determine the impact that teachers' motivational tactics had on their students. The present research employed a quasi-experimental design to examine the influence of motivational strategies utilized by 14 teachers on the self-reported levels of interest in learning English as a foreign language among a sample of 296 students in Saudi Arabia. During the eight-week experimental treatment,



a set of ten meticulously selected techniques were employed to motivate students, while the control group received the conventional curriculum. After accounting for variations in the backgrounds of both groups, the multivariate analyses indicated that experimental learners exhibited a significantly higher level of motivation over time compared to control learners. The results of this study provide compelling evidence that the motivational behaviors exhibited by teachers have a significant impact on the level of inspiration experienced by their students who are learning a second language.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study adopted a desktop methodology. Desk research refers to secondary data or that which can be collected without fieldwork. Desk research is basically involved in collecting data from existing resources hence it is often considered a low cost technique as compared to field research, as the main cost is involved in executive's time, telephone charges and directories. Thus, the study relied on already published studies, reports and statistics. This secondary data was easily accessed through the online journals and library.

## **FINDINGS**

A knowledge gap occurs when desired research findings provide a different perspective on the topic of discussion. For instance, Moskovsky (2014), conducted a study on the effects of teachers' motivational strategies on learners' motivation; a controlled investigation of second language acquisition. The study presented herein employed a quasi-experimental methodology to evaluate the impact of motivational tactics employed by Saudi English language learners as a foreign language. The results of the multivariate analyses indicate a noteworthy increase in learner motivation over time, particularly among the experimental group in comparison to the control group. This finding remained consistent even after accounting for any initial differences between the two groups. The findings presented in this study offer persuasive proof that the motivational conduct of teachers has a significant impact on the level of motivation experienced by individuals learning a second language. On the other hand, the focus of our current study is to investigate foreign language learning anxiety among French learners in Ghanaian schools.

Secondly, our study presents a methodological gap, for example, in 2016, Rafieyan sought to discover factors of foreign language speaking anxiety and coping strategies. The study adopted a qualitative research design based on interviews and reflective journals. The findings suggested that assessing language learners' speaking performance was the most anxiety provoking factor and creating a fun environment was the most commonly used strategy to cope with anxiety while our current study will employ a desk study literature review methodology.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study's goal is to determine the prevalence of linguistic anxiety among EFL college students in Ghana. According to a study of the relevant research, the majority of French-speaking pupils in Ghanaian classrooms experience some degree of anxiety. They may feel uneasy about learning French because the language's system is so different from their own and the language of English system. It has been suggested that learning French in both primary and secondary school can help alleviate some of the anxiety that many college freshmen feel. Many courses in Ghanaian

universities still use outdated, ineffective methods like lectures and tutorials, providing students with few opportunities to gain experience and calm their nerves. If teachers in Ghanaian universities moved their focus to the students, they could better equip them to deal with language anxiety.

Educators in Ghanaian institutions should be aware that fear of failure is a common problem among students taking foreign language courses. One of the most powerful techniques for relieving tension is Community Language Learning (CLL), developed by Curran (1976). In this approach, students work together in smaller groups (with no more than 10 people) to solve an issue by sharing ideas and working together.

The Natural Approach was developed by Stephen Krashen and Tracy Terrell in the 1970s and 1980s. The purpose of this approach to language instruction is to encourage the growth of the student's native ability to pick up the language. For this reason, correct grammar usage is less crucial than students' ability to communicate with one another. In order for pupils to be able to express their own ideas and concepts without hesitation, they must first be exposed to a vast amount of relevant information. Teachers should make student safety and mental health a top priority in the classroom.

Other ways that technology is being used to put students at the center of the learning process include computer-assisted language learning (CALL) and cooperative learning. English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students at Ghanaian universities may find classroom use of these techniques relaxing.

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