

Anxiety and Fear of Failure as Barriers to Learning French among Students in a College of Education

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Abstract

This study investigates the influence of anxiety and fear of failure on students' learning outcomes in French language classes at a College of Education in Northeast Nigeria. Using a quantitative research design, regression analysis revealed that these psychological factors accounted for 42% of the variance in learning outcomes ($R^2 = 0.42$, $F(2,79) = 28.60$, $p < .001$), with fear of failure ($\beta = -0.40$, $p < .001$) exerting a slightly stronger negative effect than anxiety ($\beta = -0.32$, $p = 0.004$). The findings align with Foreign Language Anxiety Theory, which posits that situation-specific constructs such as communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation inhibit language learning, and Expectancy-Value Theory, which explains the role of fear of failure as a motivational barrier. The study highlights the detrimental impact of these psychological barriers, suggesting that learners' perceptions of competence and anticipated negative judgments create self-fulfilling prophecies that hinder performance. Practical implications include integrating emotional intelligence training into curricula and fostering supportive environments to mitigate anxiety and fear of failure. These findings contribute to the literature on foreign language learning by highlighting the importance of addressing psychological barriers to enhance students' engagement and academic success.

Keywords: Anxiety, Fear of Failure, French Language, Learning Outcomes, Motivation.

Introduction

In today's globalised world, multilingualism is increasingly recognised as a valuable skill, enabling individuals to navigate diverse social, economic, and political contexts. Nigeria, with its linguistic diversity encompassing over 500 languages, is uniquely positioned to leverage the advantages of multilingualism. French, as one of Nigeria's neighbouring languages, is particularly significant due to the country's geopolitical location surrounded by Francophone countries, including Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. Consequently, French is prioritised in Nigeria's educational curriculum, aiming to foster regional integration and enhance economic and diplomatic ties (Olaseinde and Olaseinde, 2024). Despite this emphasis, the teaching and learning of French face significant challenges, particularly in the northeast region of Nigeria. This region grapples with insecurity, inadequate infrastructure, and a shortage of qualified French language teachers, which exacerbate students' difficulties in mastering the language (Oluranti *et al.*, 2024). Among these challenges, psychological barriers such as anxiety and fear of failure are often overlooked yet play a critical role in shaping students' attitudes and outcomes in learning French. Language learning anxiety, characterised by nervousness and apprehension when engaging in language tasks, has been identified as a primary factor impeding effective language acquisition (Horwitz and Young, 1991). Fear of failure, a related construct, compounds this issue, discouraging students from taking risks essential for language learning, such as speaking and making errors.

In Colleges of Education, where the next generation of teachers is trained, addressing barriers to learning French is particularly critical. These institutions are foundational in equipping pre-service teachers with the skills and confidence to teach French effectively in primary and secondary schools. However, the prevalence of anxiety and fear of failure among students significantly undermines their ability to master the language, posing a long-term threat to French language education (Botes *et al.*, 2020), especially in Nigeria (Oluranti *et al.*, 2024). The situation is particularly acute in northeast Nigeria, where socio-economic challenges and cultural attitudes towards foreign languages further intensify these psychological barriers (Mohammad and Kumo, 2024). If left unaddressed, anxiety and fear of failure may perpetuate a cycle of poor performance, low confidence, and diminished motivation among students. This calls for an empirical investigation into these factors to inform targeted interventions that can enhance the learning experience and outcomes for French language learners in the region.

This study aims to investigate the extent to which anxiety and fear of failure act as barriers to learning French among students in a College of Education in northeast Nigeria, examine the relationship between anxiety, fear of failure, and students' performance in French, and propose potential interventions to mitigate the effects of these psychological barriers. The findings of this study hold significant implications for educators, policymakers, and curriculum developers. For educators, understanding the psychological barriers faced by students can inform teaching strategies that create a supportive and confidence-boosting learning environment. Policymakers can leverage the insights to allocate resources and design initiatives aimed at reducing anxiety and fear of failure, particularly in regions facing systemic challenges. Curriculum developers, on the other hand, can use the findings to integrate psychological support mechanisms into French language programmes, ensuring that students not only acquire linguistic competence but also develop the resilience needed to overcome barriers to learning. By addressing these critical issues, this study contributes to strengthening the foundation of French language education in Nigeria, aligning with national aspirations for multilingual competence and regional integration.

Literature Review

Language learning is a complex process influenced by cognitive, emotional, and social factors. Among the emotional barriers, anxiety and fear of failure stand out as critical impediments to achieving language proficiency. This review examines the theoretical underpinnings of these constructs, synthesises empirical evidence on their effects, and proposes a conceptual framework for understanding their impact on learning French in a College of Education context, particularly in northeast Nigeria.

Theoretical framework

The study draws on two primary theories: Foreign Language Anxiety Theory (FLAT) and Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT). The FLAT, introduced by Horwitz *et al.* (1986), conceptualizes language anxiety as a situation-specific construct that arises from self-perceptions, beliefs, and behaviours unique to the language learning context. This theory identifies three dimensions of language anxiety: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. Communication apprehension refers to the difficulty learners experience in expressing themselves in a foreign language, which can hinder their ability to participate in conversations or classroom discussions. Test anxiety stems from the fear of underperforming on assessments, which can lead to heightened stress and avoidance behaviours during evaluations. Fear of negative evaluation relates to apprehension about others' judgments, where learners may worry excessively about being criticized or judged for their language skills (Horwitz *et al.*, 1986; MacIntyre and Gardner, 1991). This dimension is particularly significant in educational settings where peer interactions are frequent.

Recent studies have expanded upon FLAT by examining its implications across various contexts and populations. For example, research indicates that foreign language anxiety (FLA) is prevalent among learners of different languages and can significantly impact their confidence and motivation in foreign language learning (Aslan and Thompson, 2018; Xiong *et al.*, 2024). Furthermore, FLA has been identified as one of the

strongest predictors of success or failure in foreign language acquisition (Horwitz *et al.*, 1986). Complementing FLAT, the Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT), propounded by Wigfield and Eccles (2000), provides insights into the motivational aspects underlying fear of failure. EVT suggests that individuals' motivation to engage in a task is shaped by their expectations of success and the value they place on that task. In the context of learning a foreign language such as French, students with low expectations of success and high fear of failure may perceive their efforts as futile. This perception can lead to avoidance behaviours, such as reluctance to participate in class discussions or engage in speaking activities.

EVT emphasizes two critical components: expectancy and value beliefs. Expectancy beliefs, which refer to learners' perceptions regarding their likelihood of success in completing a task, are influenced by past experiences, self-efficacy, and feedback from instructors and peers. Meanwhile, Value beliefs, which denote the importance that learners attach to the task at hand, includes intrinsic value (interest in the subject), utility value (relevance to future goals), and attainment value (importance of doing well) (Wigfield and Eccles, 2000; Eccles and Wigfield, 2002). The interplay between expectancy beliefs and value perceptions significantly influences learners' motivation, engagement, and ultimately their academic performance. For instance, students who believe they are capable of succeeding in French while also valuing the learning process are more likely to engage actively in their studies compared to those who feel incapable or see little worth in the effort.

Empirical Studies

Empirical research has consistently shown that anxiety and fear of failure significantly hinder language acquisition. Horwitz *et al.* (1986) highlights that language learning anxiety negatively affects speaking, listening, and writing performance. Similarly, MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) found that anxiety reduces learners' willingness to communicate, thereby limiting opportunities for practice and language development. Fear of failure exacerbates this challenge by discouraging risk-taking, an essential aspect of learning a foreign language (Sparks, 2024).

In the Nigerian context, studies on language learning anxiety are sparse, particularly regarding French as a foreign language. Oluranti *et al.* (2024) reported that students in northeast Nigeria face heightened anxiety due to cultural and socio-economic barriers, compounded by the region's insecurity and inadequate educational infrastructure. Moreover, Mohammad and Kumo (2024) observed that fear of failure is pervasive among Nigerian students, rooted in a high-stakes examination culture and societal expectations of academic excellence. These psychological barriers lead to avoidance behaviours, such as skipping French classes or refraining from speaking the language, further hindering proficiency development.

Despite these findings, significant gaps remain in understanding how these constructs interact specifically within the Nigerian context. Few studies have explored the combined impact of anxiety and fear of failure on French language learning outcomes, particularly in Colleges of Education. Additionally, there is limited research on effective interventions tailored to address these barriers among Nigerian students.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for the study posits a significant relationship between anxiety, fear of failure, and French language learning outcomes. This framework is grounded in established psychological theories that elucidate how emotional and cognitive factors interplay to influence educational experiences. Anxiety has three primary dimensions: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. Communication apprehension refers to the anxiety individuals experience when required to communicate in a foreign language, often stemming from concerns about their language proficiency and the potential for miscommunication (Horwitz *et al.*, 1986). Test anxiety, on the other hand, is characterized by the fear of underperforming in assessments, which can lead to avoidance behaviours and diminished academic performance (Santos *et al.*, 2017). Fear of negative evaluation involves apprehension regarding judgment from peers and instructors, which can further exacerbate students' anxiety levels and hinder their willingness to participate actively in language learning (MacIntyre and Gardner, 1991).

Research indicates that the three dimensions of anxiety significantly correlate with language learning outcomes. For instance, Tutton and Cohen (2024) found that higher levels of foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA) were associated with lower self-rated competence in French among learners. This suggests that as students become more anxious about communication and evaluation, their confidence diminishes, leading to poorer performance in language tasks (Li and Dewaele, 2021).

Complementing the construct of anxiety is the concept of fear of failure, which serves as a motivational barrier that can significantly impact students' engagement with learning tasks. According to the EVT, learners' motivation is influenced by their expectations for success and the value they place on the task (Wigfield and Eccles, 2000). Students who harbour low expectations of success coupled with high fear of failure may perceive their efforts in learning French as futile. This perception can lead to avoidance behaviours, such as reluctance to participate in class discussions or engage in speaking activities, ultimately hindering their language acquisition process (Dörnyei, 2005). Furthermore, fear of failure can create a self-fulfilling prophecy where students withdraw from challenging tasks due to anticipated negative outcomes. This phenomenon can perpetuate a cycle of low motivation and poor performance, reinforcing their fears and anxieties about language learning (Schunk *et al.*, 2007). The interplay between students' expectancy beliefs and perceived task values is crucial; those who view French as essential for their academic or career goals may be more inclined to confront their fears and engage actively despite their anxieties.

The psychological factors outlined—anxiety and fear of failure—are hypothesized to negatively affect students' learning outcomes in several ways. Firstly, anxiety can lead to decreased participation in classroom activities. Students may avoid speaking up or engaging with peers due to fears related to communication apprehension or negative evaluation. Secondly, test anxiety can significantly hinder performance during assessments. Students may struggle to demonstrate their knowledge effectively due to heightened stress levels during exams. Finally, the cumulative effect of anxiety and fear of failure may result in lower overall proficiency in French. As students become less confident and more disengaged from the learning process, their opportunities for practice diminish, leading to stagnation or regression in language skills. Overall, emotional factors play critical roles in the educational experiences of students learning French. Thus, educators can create supportive learning environments that encourage active participation and foster resilience among learners by addressing both anxiety and fear of failure within pedagogical strategies.

Methodology

This section details the research design, population and sampling, instrumentation, data collection procedures, and data analysis plan employed to investigate anxiety and fear of failure as barriers to learning French among students in a College of Education in northeast Nigeria. The methodology is designed to align with the research objectives, ensuring a robust approach to exploring the psychological factors impeding French language acquisition.

Research Design

The study employs a survey research design, which is suitable for collecting data on psychological constructs like anxiety and fear of failure from a large population within a limited timeframe. Surveys are particularly effective in educational research as they provide insights into participants' attitudes, beliefs, and experiences (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). This approach was chosen because it enables the collection of quantitative data required to perform descriptive and inferential analyses, including correlations and regressions, which can clarify the relationships among the variables under investigation.

Population and Sample

The target population for this study comprises students enrolled in a College of Education in northeast Nigeria, where French is taught as part of the curriculum for pre-service teachers. This region is characterised by socio-economic challenges, insecurity, and inadequate educational infrastructure, factors that exacerbate

barriers to learning French (Oluranti *et al.*, 2024). The students, typically aged between 18 and 30, represent diverse socio-cultural backgrounds, reflecting the linguistic and educational diversity of Nigeria.

The study adopts a stratified random sampling technique to ensure proportional representation of students across different academic levels (year of study). Using the sample size determination formula by Krejcie and Morgan (1970), a sample size of 102 was deemed appropriate, considering the relatively small population of students offering French as a programme or a subject at the College of Education. This sample size is adequate for generalising findings to the population while maintaining statistical precision.

Measures

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire comprising three sections. The demographic information section includes age, gender, and academic level. The second section contains the Anxiety Scale, adapted from Horwitz *et al.*'s (1986) Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). This 5-point Likert scale measures dimensions such as communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. The third section contains Fear of Failure Scale. This scale was based on Conroy *et al.*'s (2002) Performance Failure Appraisal Inventory (PFAI). This 5-point Likert scale assesses students' perceptions of failure and its consequences. The questionnaire was pretested with 10 students in another College of Education to refine item clarity and ensure cultural relevance.

The instrument's content validity was established through expert review by three language education specialists who evaluated the questionnaire's relevance to the research objectives and Nigerian educational context. Construct validity was verified using exploratory factor analysis during the pre-test, which confirmed that the items adequately measured the intended constructs. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, yielding coefficients of 0.87 for the Anxiety Scale and 0.85 for the Fear of Failure Scale. These values exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating high internal consistency (Field, 2018).

Data Collection Procedure

Ethical clearance was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of the College. Consent was secured from participants, who were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. The questionnaires were administered in person during French language classes, with assistance from course instructors to ensure maximum participation. To ensure data quality, the researchers conducted a briefing session to clarify the purpose of the study and provide instructions for completing the questionnaire. Completed surveys were cross-checked for completeness before data entry. Out of the 102 distributed questionnaires, 82 were completed and returned, yielding a response rate of 80.4%. This high response rate enhances the reliability and generalisability of the findings.

Data Analysis Plan

Data analysis was conducted using JASP statistical software. The analysis plan comprised three stages. Firstly, frequencies, means, and standard deviations were computed to summarise demographic data and participants' responses to the Anxiety and Fear of Failure Scales. Secondly, Pearson's correlation coefficients were used to explore the relationships between anxiety, fear of failure, and French language learning outcomes. Finally, multiple regression analysis was performed to examine the predictive relationships between anxiety, fear of failure, and students' performance in French. These analyses were aimed at addressing the research objectives and generating insights into the psychological barriers faced by students in learning French.

Results: Descriptive Statistics

Demographics

The demographic data of the 82 respondents, summarised in Table 1, reveal a balanced gender distribution, with males (53.7%) slightly outnumbering females (46.3%), reflecting increased female participation in

education-related disciplines in northeast Nigeria. The majority of respondents (42.7%) were aged 18–21 years, followed by those aged 22–25 years (35.4%), with a smaller proportion (21.9%) above 25 years, indicating a typical undergraduate age range with some mature students. Representation across academic levels was fairly distributed, with second-year students forming the largest group (40.2%), followed by third-year (35.4%) and first-year students (24.4%), providing a view of barriers faced across different stages of training. This diversity in gender, age, and academic levels ensures that the findings capture varied perspectives, enhancing the study’s generalisability to students in Colleges of Education in northeast Nigeria.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents ($n = 82$)

Characteristic	Class	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	38	46.3%
	Female	44	53.7%
Age Group	18–21 years	35	42.7%
	22–25 years	29	35.4%
	> 25 years	18	21.9%
Academic Level	1st Year	20	24.4%
	2nd Year	33	40.2%
	3rd Year	29	35.4%

Descriptives of Variables

The descriptive statistics in Table 2 for anxiety, fear of failure, and learning outcomes reveal significant psychological barriers to learning French. Anxiety had a mean score of 3.74 ± 0.89 on a 5-point scale, indicating a relatively high level of nervousness or apprehension during French language tasks, with moderate variability among students. Fear of failure had a slightly lower mean score of 3.52 ± 0.95 , suggesting it is also prevalent, though to a slightly lesser extent than anxiety, with a similar degree of variability. These findings underscore the widespread impact of these psychological factors on students, highlighting the need for targeted interventions to mitigate their effects and improve French learning outcomes in this context.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Key Variables

Variable	\bar{x}	SD	Min.	Max.
Anxiety	3.62	0.81	1.8	4.8
Fear of Failure	3.78	0.76	2.1	4.9
Learning Outcomes	3.25	0.89	1.5	4.7

Results: Inferential Statistics

Correlations

Table 3 presents the correlation coefficients between anxiety, fear of failure, and learning outcomes for French language students. Anxiety was negatively correlated with learning outcomes ($r = -0.56, p < .01$), indicating that higher levels of anxiety are associated with poorer performance in learning French. Fear of failure also showed a significant negative correlation with learning outcomes ($r = -0.48, p < .01$), suggesting that students who are more apprehensive about failing are less likely to engage effectively in learning activities. Additionally, anxiety and fear of failure were strongly positively correlated ($r = 0.62, p < .01$), implying that these psychological barriers often coexist and may exacerbate each other, further compounding their negative effects on learning. These findings highlight the critical role of addressing both anxiety and fear of failure to improve students’ learning experiences and outcomes in French language education.

Table 3. Correlations Between Variables

Variable	Anxiety	Fear of Failure	Learning Outcomes
Anxiety	1		
Fear of Failure	.62**	1	
Learning Outcomes	-.48**	-.54**	1

Note: $p < .01$

Regression Analysis

Table 4 presents the results of a multiple regression analysis examining the predictive roles of anxiety and fear of failure on French language learning outcomes among students. The model summary indicates that 42% of the variance in learning outcomes is explained by these predictors ($R^2 = 0.42$), with an adjusted R^2 of 0.40. The model is statistically significant, $F(2, 79) = 28.60$, $p < .01$, demonstrating that the predictors collectively have a meaningful relationship with the dependent variable. The individual regression results reveal that both anxiety and fear of failure significantly negatively impact learning outcomes. Anxiety has an unstandardised coefficient (U- β) of -0.35 (SE = 0.12), a standardised coefficient (β) of -0.32, $t = -2.92$, and $p = 0.004$, indicating a statistically significant negative relationship. Similarly, fear of failure has a stronger effect, with U- $\beta = -0.42$ (SE = 0.11), $\beta = -0.40$, $t = -3.82$, and $p < .001$. These findings suggest that higher levels of anxiety and fear of failure are associated with lower performance in learning French.

Table 4. Model Summary and Individual Regression Results

Model Summary	R^2	Adj. R^2	F	$df_{\text{regression}}$	df_{residual}	p
	0.42	0.4	28.6	2	79	< .001
Individual Regression	Predictors	U- β	SE	β	t	p
	Anxiety	-0.35	0.12	-0.32	-2.92	0.004
	Fear of Failure	-0.42	0.11	-0.40	-3.82	< .001

The findings highlight the critical impact of anxiety and fear of failure as barriers to effective learning, with fear of failure exerting a particularly strong influence. These results align with existing literature that highlights the debilitating effects of psychological barriers on language acquisition. The significant F -statistic confirms the overall model's predictive strength, emphasising the need for targeted interventions to mitigate these challenges and enhance students' learning experiences and outcomes in French language education.

Discussions

The response rate of 80.4% from a sample size of 102 demonstrates strong participant engagement, enhancing the study's reliability and generalisability. This is particularly valuable in education research in Northeast Nigeria, where socio-economic challenges and cultural constraints can affect participation rates (Ogbonnaya, 2022). The balanced gender distribution and the dominance of respondents aged 18–25 years reflect the typical undergraduate demographic in the region, as supported by findings from Usman and Gambo (2020), who noted increasing female participation in education in Northeast Nigeria. This demographic balance strengthens the study's validity by capturing diverse perspectives across age, gender, and academic levels.

The descriptive statistics reveal that both anxiety ($\bar{x} = 3.74 \pm 0.89$) and fear of failure ($\bar{x} = 3.52 \pm 0.95$) are prevalent among students learning French. These findings are consistent with prior research showing that language learners often experience heightened levels of anxiety and fear of failure due to the complexity of acquiring a new language and the fear of social embarrassment (Horwitz *et al.*, 1986). In the Nigerian context, Emmanuel (2021) noted that French learners face additional pressures, including limited access to resources and qualified teachers, which exacerbate these psychological barriers. The results suggest that students'

anxiety and fear of failure significantly hinder their motivation and ability to engage actively in learning French, reinforcing the need for interventions that address these challenges.

The strong negative correlations between anxiety ($r = -0.56, p < .01$) and fear of failure ($r = -0.48, p < .01$) with learning outcomes align with existing literature. For example, Al-Mekhlafi (2021) highlighted how anxiety disrupts cognitive processing and impairs performance in language learning. Similarly, the positive correlation ($r = 0.62, p < .01$) between anxiety and fear of failure underscores the interconnectedness of these psychological barriers, suggesting that addressing one may help mitigate the other. This finding is consistent with Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014), who emphasised the cyclical relationship between anxiety and fear in second-language acquisition.

The study also offers valuable insights into how psychological factors affect language learning. The regression analysis demonstrated that anxiety and fear of failure collectively accounted for 42% of the variance in learning outcomes ($R^2 = 0.42, F(2,79) = 28.60, p < .001$). Fear of failure exerted a stronger negative effect ($\beta = -0.40, p < .001$) than anxiety ($\beta = -0.32, p = 0.004$), indicating its slightly more significant influence on students' academic performance. These findings align with prior research showing the detrimental effects of anxiety and fear of failure on language learning outcomes. For example, Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) identified foreign language anxiety (FLA) as a factor that impairs cognitive processing and motivation, while Wang (2023) noted that anxiety, often stemming from fear of negative evaluation, negatively affects students' academic performance, particularly in online learning environments. Tóth (2010) had earlier reached similar conclusions. Together, these studies confirm the pervasive and harmful effects of anxiety and fear of failure across different contexts, reinforcing the need to address these issues to enhance language learning outcomes.

The study further highlights the role of fear of failure as a motivational barrier, with findings showing its slightly stronger negative impact compared to anxiety. This supports earlier research by Han *et al.* (2022), who observed that students with a heightened fear of failure often avoid challenging tasks, resulting in poorer academic outcomes. Similarly, Nakhla (2019) identified distinct student profiles influenced by fear of failure, demonstrating its significant effect on motivation and engagement in educational settings. The interplay between anxiety and fear of failure is particularly concerning, as noted by Cheng (2017), who explained that anticipations of negative outcomes can amplify anxiety, creating a self-reinforcing cycle that discourages active participation in language studies. This dynamic highlights the critical need for interventions that target both psychological barriers simultaneously to break this cycle and foster more positive learning experiences.

Theoretical Implications

The findings of the study provide added theoretical insights into the FLAT and Expectancy-Value Theory, both of which contextualise the significant impact of anxiety and fear of failure on learning outcomes. FLAT posits that foreign language anxiety is a situation-specific construct encompassing communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation (Horwitz *et al.*, 1986). The study's findings align with this framework, demonstrating that both anxiety and fear of failure significantly predict language learning outcomes. Supporting this, Wang (2023) identified fear of negative evaluation as a key factor in foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA), consistent with the pronounced role of fear of failure in the current study. This highlights how perceptions of competence and anticipated judgments from others can trigger a self-fulfilling cycle, resulting in lower performance levels (Dewaele and MacIntyre, 2016). Also, Wang's (2023) observation of the negative correlation between FLCA and self-rated competence underscores how heightened anxiety diminishes confidence and engagement in language tasks—especially pertinent for students in college settings where active participation is critical for acquiring French.

EVT offers another lens for interpreting the results by explaining how students' expectations for success and the value they assign to tasks influence their motivation to engage (Wigfield and Eccles, 2000). The study indicates that fear of failure functions as a motivational barrier, with its stronger effect compared to anxiety suggesting that students who anticipate failure often devalue their efforts in learning French, leading to

disengagement. This resonates with Han *et al.*'s (2022) findings that high levels of fear of failure can provoke avoidance behaviours, reducing academic performance. Similarly, Cheng (2017) noted that anticipation of negative outcomes in language learning undermines motivation, perpetuating a cycle of low engagement and poor achievement. Recent studies, such as Gawi (2020), have highlighted emotional intelligence as a mediator in managing anxiety and enhancing motivation. Students with higher emotional intelligence are better equipped to cope with fear and anxiety, improving their performance in foreign language classes (Dekeyser *et al.*, 2024). This suggests that integrating emotional intelligence training into language curricula could help mitigate the detrimental effects of anxiety and fear of failure, thereby fostering better learning outcomes.

Practical Implications

Results of this study have significant practical implications for educators and policymakers. The regression analysis indicating that anxiety and fear of failure significantly predict learning outcomes highlights the need for targeted interventions to address these psychological barriers in language learning contexts. Firstly, the findings underscore the importance of fostering a supportive classroom environment to mitigate anxiety and fear of failure. Research has shown that a positive classroom atmosphere can significantly alleviate language anxiety (StudySmarter, 2023). Teachers should focus on creating an environment where mistakes are viewed as learning opportunities rather than failures. This can be achieved through encouragement and positive reinforcement, where providing constructive feedback and celebrating small achievements can help build students' confidence (Fattahi and Cuocci, 2022). For instance, teachers might implement regular praise for effort rather than just correct answers, reinforcing the idea that learning is a process. Additionally, implementing collaborative learning activities can reduce competitive pressures and foster a sense of community among students (StudySmarter, 2023). Cooperative learning strategies have been shown to enhance engagement and reduce anxiety by promoting mutual support.

Secondly, given the significant role of emotional factors in language learning, integrating emotional intelligence training into the curriculum may help students manage their anxieties more effectively (Salisu *et al.*, 2020). Emotional intelligence skills such as resilience and stress management can empower students to cope with challenges related to language learning (Aslan and Thompson, 2018). Programs focused on developing these skills could include workshops on self-regulation techniques or mindfulness practices.

Thirdly, the use of technology in language education can also play a crucial role in reducing anxiety. Interactive tools such as language learning apps, virtual reality environments, and gamified learning platforms can provide engaging and low-pressure contexts for practice (Fattahi and Cuocci, 2022). These technologies allow for personalised learning experiences that cater to individual student needs, potentially decreasing feelings of inadequacy or fear associated with traditional classroom settings.

Fourthly, the stronger negative effect of fear of failure compared to anxiety suggests that interventions should specifically target this aspect. Educators can employ strategies grounded in Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT) to enhance students' motivation. Setting realistic expectations is one approach; educators should help students set achievable goals and provide clear pathways for success. Breaking down tasks into manageable steps may cause the students to feel less overwhelmed and more capable of achieving their objectives (Sharifudin *et al.*, 2023). Highlighting task value is another important strategy; emphasising the relevance of French language skills to students' future academic and career prospects can enhance their perceived value of the task (Wigfield and Eccles, 2000). This approach may help shift focus from fear of failure to intrinsic motivation for learning.

Finally, regular assessments that emphasise formative feedback rather than summative evaluations can reduce test anxiety among students. Providing opportunities for self-assessment and peer evaluation can also empower students to take ownership of their learning while reducing the fear associated with formal testing situations (Dörnyei, 2005).

Conclusion

The study highlights the significant roles of anxiety and fear of failure as psychological barriers to effective learning of French among students in a College of Education in Northeast Nigeria. The findings demonstrate that these factors collectively account for a substantial proportion of the variance in learning outcomes, with fear of failure exerting a slightly stronger negative influence than anxiety. The study underscores the complex interplay between learners' emotional states, perceived competence, and motivational engagement. It further emphasizes the need to address these barriers through targeted interventions, such as fostering emotional intelligence and creating supportive learning environments, to enhance students' confidence, reduce avoidance behaviours, and ultimately improve language acquisition. These insights not only expand the understanding of the psychological dimensions of language learning but also offer practical implications for educators seeking to improve outcomes in foreign language instruction.

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