



**The University of the West Indies  
St. Augustine Campus  
Faculty of Humanities and Education  
Caribbean Studies Project  
HUMN 3099**

Student name: ALYSSA KANGOO

Student ID no.: 816006961

Degree Program: B.A. SPANISH, MINOR IN FRENCH

Supervisor: DR. OSCAR BAZAN

Title of Thesis:

**Foreign Language Anxiety: a comparison of the effects of foreign language anxiety on the female and male genders amongst undergraduate French and Spanish students at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus.**

**Declaration**

1. I declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree. Except where stated otherwise by reference or acknowledgment, the work presented is entirely my own.
2. I authorise The University of the West Indies to make a physical or digital copy of my thesis/research paper/project report for its preservation, for public reference, and for the purpose of inter-library loan.
3. I consent to have my attached thesis used in any publication comprising Caribbean Studies Projects by The University of the West Indies. I understand that I will receive no compensation. I hereby assign publishing rights for the contribution to The University of the West Indies, including all copyrights.

Signature of Student: Alyssa Kangoo Date: 14/04/2021

THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES

The Office of the Board for Undergraduate Studies

**INDIVIDUAL PLAGIARISM DECLARATION**

This declaration is being made in accordance with the University Regulations on Plagiarism (First Degrees, Diplomas and Certificate) and should be attached to all work submitted by a student to be assessed as part of or/the entire requirement of the course, other than work submitted in an invigilated examination.

**Statement**

1. I have read the Plagiarism Regulations as set out in the Faculty Handbook and University websites related to the submission of coursework for assessment.
2. I declare that I understand that plagiarism is the use of another's work pretending that it is one's own and that it is a serious academic offence for which the University may impose severe penalties.
3. I declare that the submitted work indicated below is my own work, except where duly acknowledged and referenced.
4. I also declare that this paper has not been previously submitted for credit either in its entirety or in part within the UWI or elsewhere.
5. I understand that I may be required to submit the work in electronic form and accept that the University may check the originality of the work using a computer-based plagiarism detection service.

TITLE OF ASSIGNMENT – Foreign Language Anxiety: a comparison of the effects of foreign language anxiety on the female and male genders amongst undergraduate French and Spanish students at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus.

COURSE CODE – HUMN 3099

COURSE TITLE - CARIBBEAN STUDIES PROJECT

STUDENT ID – 816006961

By signing this declaration, you are confirming that the work you are submitting is original and does not contain any plagiarised material.

I confirm that this assignment is my own work, and that the work of other persons has been fully acknowledged.

SIGNATURE – Alyssa Kangoo

DATE – 14/04/2021

## Acknowledgments

The researcher of this study extends her gratitude to the supervisor of this paper, Dr. Oscar Bazan along with the Caribbean Studies Project administrators for their support and guidance throughout this research process. Further, the researcher appreciates the valued contribution of the sample population since without them this study would not have been possible.

## Abstract

Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) is a condition, which plagues many language learners and often prevents them from achieving successful language acquisition. These effects sometimes have differing outcomes since it appears that they are dependent on numerous factors. Males seem to experience less effects of this condition as compared to their female counterparts. This research was developed and designed so that the effects of FLA can be analysed and assessed in the sample population of undergraduate French and Spanish students at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine campus. The occurrences of FLA were critically examined in each year group (years one, two and three), gender, language and further, the link between FLA, gender and performance was also explored. A quantitative method of data collection was used namely questionnaires along with a qualitative method, that is the interview, involving a male and female third year student answering questions regarding how FLA affects them. This primary data was in addition to the secondary data, which aided in the researcher making deductions. The findings of the study explained that FLA appears to impact females more than males due to a number of factors. However, even though females experience higher levels of FLA, it does not affect their academic performances. Whilst FLA affects females more, overall, French students experience more FLA than Spanish students do. Nevertheless, FLA naturally decreases as the language learning process continues.

**Keywords:** FLA, gender, performance, French, Spanish, year group, occurrence.

## Table of Contents

List of Figures .....	1
List of Appendices .....	2
Introduction .....	3
<i>Rationale</i> .....	4
<i>Aims</i> .....	4
<i>Objectives</i> .....	4
<i>Methodology</i> .....	5
Chapter 1 .....	7
Literature Review.....	7
<i>Comparing FLA in different year groups</i> .....	7
<i>The differing effects of FLA in French and Spanish programmes</i> .....	8
<i>The link between FLA and gender with performance levels in the language components</i> .....	9
Chapter 2 .....	11
Findings.....	12
<i>Findings of questionnaire</i> .....	12
<i>Findings of interview</i> .....	23
Chapter 3.....	26
Discussion.....	26
<i>Comparing FLA in different year groups</i> .....	26
<i>FLA in French versus Spanish</i> .....	28
<i>FLA, gender and performance levels in the language components</i> .....	30
Conclusion.....	32
Limitations.....	33
Recommendations.....	34
Works Cited .....	35
Appendix 1.....	37
Appendix 2.....	41

## List of Figures

Figure Title	Page
1. Line graph representing the occurrences of FLA within the sample population of Spanish students.	12
2. Line graph representing the occurrences of FLA in the French undergraduate population.	14
3. Line graph showing the occurrence of FLA in the Male French and Spanish undergraduate population.	15
4. Line graph showing the occurrence of FLA in the Female French and Spanish undergraduate population.	16
5. Bar graph showing the different situations where male and female French and Spanish undergraduate students may experience FLA.	17
6. Bar graph showing the comparison of 2 <sup>nd</sup> and 3 <sup>rd</sup> year male and female French and Spanish students' ability to adapt to FLA.	19
7. Bar graph showing the comparison of FLA occurrences in male and female students concerning the different language components.	20
8. Pie chart showing the language components with the highest occurrence of FLA among male French and Spanish undergraduate students.	21
9. Pie chart showing the language components with the highest occurrence of FLA amongst female French and Spanish undergraduate students.	22
Table Title	Page
1. Demographic information of the sample population.	11
2. Table showing whether participants consider themselves to be anxious or not.	12

List of Appendices

Appendix Title	Page
1. Questionnaire	37
2. Interview	41

## Introduction

Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) refers to a sense of nervousness, unease and apprehension, which arises when non-native speakers are forced to use or learn a foreign language. These language learners are burdened with anxiety, often times crippling, which directly impede upon not only fluency whilst speaking but also other language components such as listening and reading. Unsurprisingly, the prevalence of FLA amongst students is one of the leading hindrances in effective language acquisition and fluency.

FLA manifests itself within the contexts of both examination and classroom settings. Many of these language learners must confront severe anxiety that causes them to experience an array of symptoms, namely sweaty palms, increased heartrate, brain fog and nausea. These intense symptoms notably deter persons from willingly continuing the language learning process. Evidently, FLA is an extremely debilitating condition, which negatively affects a person's ability to learn and use foreign languages. There is a common misconception that FLA occurs only during examinations. However, it also presents itself within the classroom since many students are too afraid and hesitant to participate and complete tasks. FLA characteristically interferes with the academic performance and motivation of language learners hence the importance of understanding its effects.

Interestingly, FLA affects both the male and female genders but it distinctly impacts these genders differently. The symptomology differs depending on the gender, as it seems that males appear to experience the effects of FLA to a lesser extent. FLA and gender are therefore inherently linked since, as previously stated, one gender appears to be more affected.

This study has been framed to investigate the differing effects of FLA in the male and female students pursuing degrees in Spanish and French at the undergraduate level at UWI, St. Augustine.

### *Rationale*

The rationale for this study stems from the researcher's observation of the target audience within the classroom and examination settings. Students who were normally calm outside of school were noticeably experiencing symptoms of FLA whilst present in class or during examinations. After recognizing the presence of FLA amongst these undergraduate students, the researcher hypothesizes that female students experience a higher level of FLA than male students do. However, the researcher also identified that the effects of FLA appeared to vary, as it was dependent on the year group and the target language being studied. In this regard, FLA seemingly decreases as the language learning process progresses but females still show more symptoms of FLA than their male counterparts do.

In light of these observations, the researcher decided to explore the distinct intricacies of FLA and gender amongst these undergraduate students.

### *Aims*

Having considered the rationale, this study aims to determine which gender, male or female, experiences a greater level of FLA. It also seeks to investigate the effects of FLA on the genders through a thorough analysis of the year groups, the specific target language being pursued and the academic performance.

### *Objectives*

- To determine the effects of FLA on both genders in each year group.

- To identify the differing effects of FLA on undergraduate students in the French and Spanish programmes.
- To investigate the link between FLA and gender with performance levels in the various language components.

### *Methodology*

The methodology of this study was constructed to suit the topic being researched, FLA, gender, year of study and language of study. Primary data for this project was collected via anonymous questionnaires and two email interviews. The questionnaires were distributed during the week of March 1<sup>st</sup>- 6<sup>th</sup> in semester 2 of the 2020-2021 academic year. The interview questions for the two participants were sent on March 6<sup>th</sup> and responses were received on the same day. In order to navigate around the restrictions put in place due to the pandemic, questionnaires were distributed online via Google Forms and the process of conducting interviews via email was chosen rather than in person interviews.

Furthermore, the sample population was entirely French and Spanish undergraduate students at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine campus. It was further broken down based on the year of study (first, second or third), whether the participant is pursuing French, Spanish or a combination and gender (either male or female). It should be noted that this study focused specifically on male versus female therefore more progressive terms such as non-binary were excluded. Evidently, the groups were chosen to facilitate the aims and objectives of the project.

In total, the questionnaire contained 16 closed ended questions. The questionnaire encompassed various multiple-choice questions (participants chose between pre-determined options given by the researcher) and other closed ended type questions where participants ticked the most applicable option. The researcher opted for solely close-ended questionnaires

so that it would welcome more participants as open-ended questions tend to repel possible participants. Moreover, the researcher structured the questionnaire in this way since asking participants to pick all components they experience FLA in then requesting participants to select the component that provoked the most FLA inherently produced more comprehensive data as opposed to merely asking which component causes the most FLA. A copy of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix 1 of the paper. Further, the interview consisted of 3 open ended questions answered by the two respondents, one year 3 male student and one year 3 female student. This interview provided the researcher with valuable qualitative data to further supplement the other findings. A copy of the interview questions is located in Appendix 2.

The raw data collected was tabulated, which was then presented in tables and graphs to easily visualise similarities or differences between groups. One must discern that the data used for graphs either combined answers from different questions (for example, combining “ Have you experienced FLA during your 1st year of study?” with the year 2 and 3 equivalent of that question) or the data was split along a particular line namely gender or language in order to answer the objectives of this paper.

## Chapter 1

### Literature Review

FLA is an extremely broad topic with a multitude of pre-existing literature, which investigates and analyses the intricacies of this topic. However, this review section of the paper focuses on three major themes: FLA, gender and the effects of it on different year groups, the varying effects of FLA on students depending on the language and lastly, the connection between FLA, gender and performance in the specific language components. Although, the literature contains a plethora of other themes relating to FLA, this paper emphasizes the aforementioned themes.

#### *Comparing FLA in different year groups.*

Numerous questions have arisen regarding the nature of FLA and the likelihood of an increase or decrease of the condition as the language learning process continues. The year of study inherently influences the FLA levels of students since advanced learners experience FLA to a lesser extent than beginner students do (Tran and Moni 14). FLA often diminishes after some time since students are expected to develop a higher skill level as they move up to a different year group (Bölümü et al. 87; Tran and Moni 15). Bölümü et al, explicitly discovered that FLA decreased amongst students as they progressed since familiarity with the examination formats and classroom activities facilitates a steady decline (87). Despite the findings of the aforementioned studies, existing results from extensive research illustrates that FLA irrefutably increases as the learner progresses to another level (Marcos-Llinás and Garau 101). Advanced students often face a more arduous curriculum with less assistance from their instructors, which in turn directly contributes to higher levels of FLA (Saito and Samimy 243). Contrastingly, Öztürk and Gürbüz's empirical study revealed females in pre-intermediate and intermediate foreign language programmes maintained their anxiety levels

despite progressing to a higher level as opposed to their male counterparts who experience little to no FLA in the various levels (659). This study evidently opted to conduct comparative research between male and female foreign language learners since the researchers recognized the apparent differences between the two.

Interestingly, Horwitz affirmed that FLA is subcategorized into state anxiety and trait anxiety (155). She further postulated that when a person experiences anxiety for something specific such as language learning then this is referred to as state anxiety. On the other hand, she argued that trait anxiety occurs when anxiety becomes a part of the person's personality and therefore they experience anxiety for most life situations. She found it incredibly necessary to differentiate the aforementioned terms since she wanted to observe if learning foreign languages does in fact cause anxiety or if it trait is anxiety (156). Parallel to Bölümü et al.'s study, she highlighted that sometimes state anxiety in the language learning process often decreases as the learner's proficiency increases due to these students becoming accustomed to the process (157). Paradoxically, she noted that persons with trait anxiety maintained equal amounts of anxiety throughout their learning experience. Notably, Horwitz's research was not in congruence with Öztürk and Gürbüz's investigation since she elected to abstain from assessing the differences of FLA in the genders. Öztürk and Gürbüz affirmed that FLA is a condition where certain assumptions must not be made and therefore researchers should break down their research according to gender since there are evident differences (657).

*The differing effects of FLA in French and Spanish Language programmes.*

The perceived idea that French is more challenging to learn, especially in school, than Spanish directly provokes a spike in FLA (Serrano et al. 184; Marcos-Llinás and Garau 103). According to these researchers, persons pursuing French are confronted with severe FLA in

comparison to Spanish, which they view as easier (Serrano et al. 186; Marcos-Llinás and Garau 105). The French Language has proven to be quite a feat for language learners since “the morphology is systematically represented even if it is not always overtly pronounced” (Serrano et al 184; Goswami et al. 652). They further break down the previously stated observation by affirming that students pursuing French are tasked with the difficult duty of thoroughly understanding French linguistics (184). Notably, male French students experience lower levels of FLA compared to their female classmates since many of these female students attempt to obtain perfection thus placing immense pressure on themselves to perform (Jarie et al. 689).

Serrano et al. also assessed the difficulty of Spanish language acquisition due to the linguistic elements (185). They ascertained that learning Spanish as a second language was significantly easier than learning French due to the distinct sounds (phonology) of Spanish (186). Whilst female students pursuing Spanish face more FLA than male students do, students learning other languages along with Spanish reveal that Spanish is less daunting thereby evoking less FLA during class and examinations ( Arnaiz and Guillén 12).

*The link between FLA and gender with performance levels in the language components.*

FLA is a gender specific condition which may interfere with the language learner’s ability to perform and excel in exams and the classroom setting (Park and French 465; Krashen 77). However, according to Zhang, it is seemingly obvious that FLA does not hinder the language process since in his study; although they experienced higher levels of FLA in the oral component, the female participants outperformed the male participants (37). Congruently, Öztürk and Gürbüz insisted that FLA characteristically affects female students more than it does their male classmates, during oral classes and examinations (658). Furthermore, Zhang discovered that the FLA levels were dependent on the component since

he realized that the male students were more anxious than that of their female classmates in the writing components such as reading and written expression since the male students were less proficient in the written language thus provoking intensified FLA (38). He inferred that females were naturally more motivated to achieve a perfect outcome therefore, they excelled in each component (reading, writing, listening and oral) (50). In contrary to the previously mentioned studies, Koul et al. claimed that in comparison to males, female language learners suffer from increased levels of FLA in each component since as similarly identified by Zhang, females appear to be significantly more motivated to succeed (680). The difference between Zhang and Koul et al.'s findings lies within the various components. In other words, Zhang believes that FLA in the specific genders is dependent on the components whereas Koul et al. discern that females generally experience more FLA.

### *Conclusion*

The studies mentioned in this review dealt with the effects of FLA during the language learning process. Some recognized the explicit link between FLA and gender along with the effects on each gender dependant on multiple variables throughout the learning process. This study aims to investigate the irrefutable link that gender and FLA possess through examining the effects of FLA on the genders in various year groups and languages together with the effects of FLA on their academic performances.

## Chapter 2

### Findings

This chapter of the research paper presents the findings of the primary data collection since this information permits the researcher to answer the overarching research topic of the effects of FLA on both genders in the undergraduate French and Spanish students at the University of the West Indies. This data was generally a mix of quantitative and qualitative data thus correspondingly, the data was presented both quantitatively and qualitatively. The researcher elected to present the data in the aforementioned methods since the responses in the questionnaire was better represented quantitatively whereas the responses to the interview required qualitative presentation.

#### *Findings of the questionnaire*

##### *Questions 1-3*

Table 1. Demographic information of the sample population

Language	Male			Female		
	1st Year	2nd Year	3rd Year	1st Year	2nd Year	3rd Year
Sp. Only	1	3	2	6	9	8
Fr. Only	1	1	1	2	2	0
Both	1	0	3	5	5	15

Table 1 illustrates the gender, year group and degree programmes (Sp. Only- Spanish Only, Fr. Only- French Only) of the participants. In total, there were 13 males and 52 females whereby 3 males were in year one (1 Spanish, 1 French, 1 Both). Further, there were 13 year one females (6 Spanish, 2 French, 5 Both). In year two, 4 males participated in this study (3 Spanish and 1 French) whereas there were 16 year two females who participated (9 Spanish, 2

French, 5 Both). Finally, there were 6 male participants in year 3 (2 Spanish, 1 French, 3 Both) along with 23 year three females (8 Spanish, 15 Both).

#### Question 4

Table 2. Table showing whether participants consider themselves to be anxious or not

Options	Male	Female
Anxious	2	18
Not Anxious	4	2
Situational	7	32

This table depicts that 2 males identify as anxious in contrast to 18 females.

Moreover, 4 males and 2 females consider themselves not anxious. Overwhelmingly, 7 males and 32 females agreed that their anxiety was situational.

#### Questions 5-7: Occurrences of FLA in various year groups

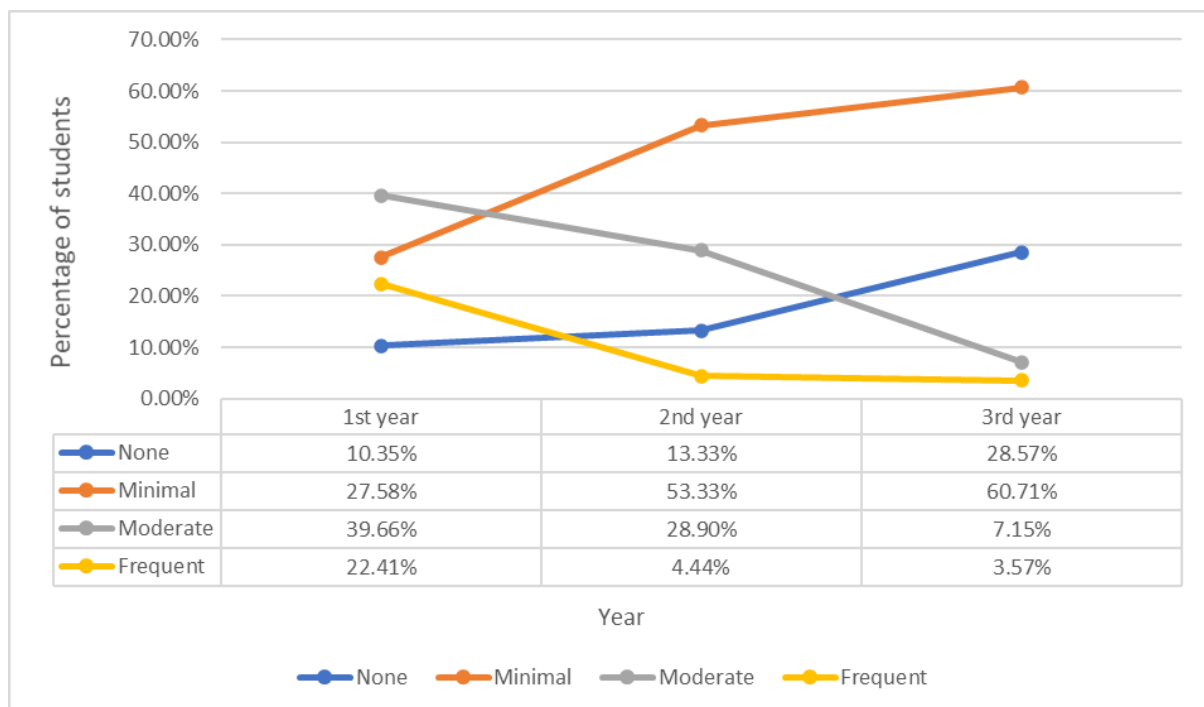


Figure 1. Line graph representing the occurrences of FLA within the sample population of Spanish students

Figure 1 illustrates that of the 58 Spanish students that responded, 28 students were in year three and therefore voted in all three years, 17 students were in year two thus voted in years one and two and 13 students were in year one and hence only voted in year one. The options were as followed: No occurrence (none), minimal occurrence (minimal), moderate occurrence (moderate) and frequent occurrence (frequent). Values were represented as a percentage of the total votes in each year.

Based on the data above, it is seen that the breakdown for year one Spanish votes were as follows: 10.35% indicated that there was no occurrence of FLA, 27.58% specified that they experienced minimal FLA, 39.66% responded that there was a moderate occurrence of FLA and 22.41% indicated that FLA occurred frequently. Contrastively, students who voted for year two mainly had minimal occurrence of FLA with 53.33%. Moreover, 28.9% of the year two votes had moderate occurrence of FLA whilst frequent and no occurrence were at 4.44% and 13.33% respectively. The majority of year three responses had minimal occurrence with 60.71% of the vote. However, 28.57% of the respondents faced no occurrence of FLA responses compared to the 7.15% and to the 3.57% who experienced moderate and frequent FLA respectively.

*Questions 8-10: Occurrences of FLA in various year groups*

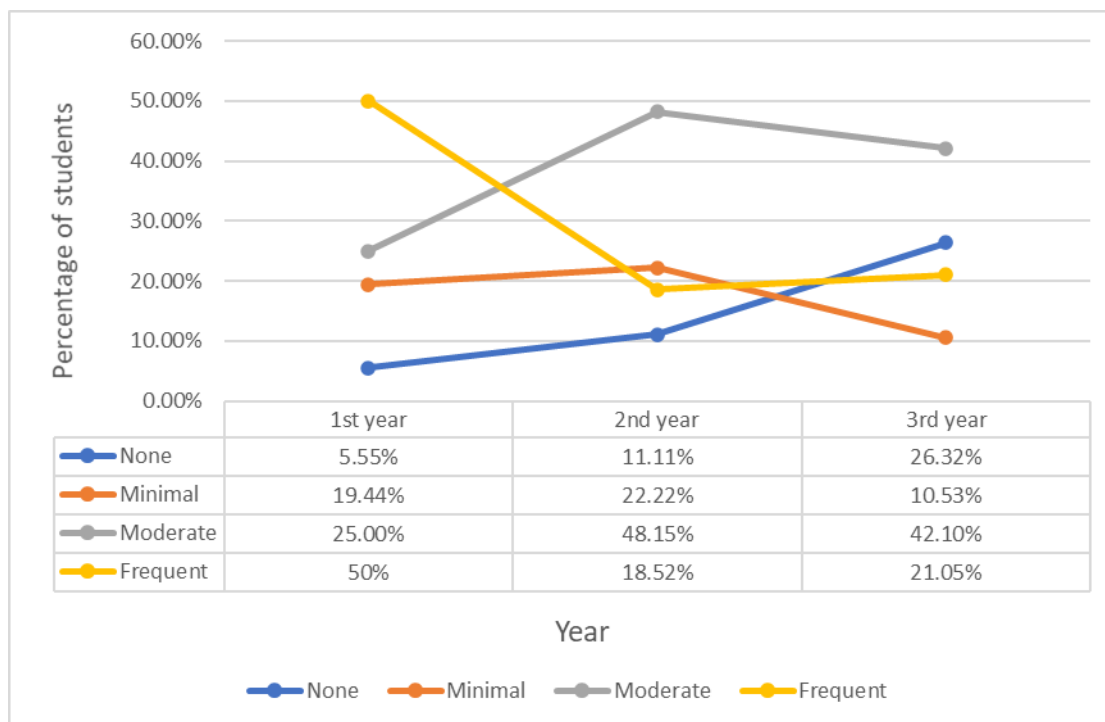


Figure 2. Line graph representing the occurrences of FLA in the French undergraduate population

Figure 2 highlights the responses of the 36 French students whereby 19 students were in year three and therefore voted for all three years, 8 students were in year two and hence voted for years one and two only and 9 students were in year one thus they only voted in year one. The options were as follows: No occurrence (none), minimal occurrence (minimal), moderate occurrence (moderate) and frequent occurrence (frequent). Values were represented as a percentage of the total votes in each year.

For the year one responses, frequent occurrence of FLA was equal to the three other options combined with 50% of the vote. Additionally, the subsequent highest option was moderate occurrence with 25% of responses, followed by minimal occurrence with 19.44% and finally no occurrence with 5.55% of the responses. The distribution of the year two responses distinctly showed that there was twice as much occurrences of moderate FLA as

any other group, with 48.15% of the responses. Further, minimal occurrence had 22.22% of responses and frequent occurrence had 18.52%% of responses whereas no occurrence was represented by 11.11% of the votes. Year three responses also revealed moderate occurrence to be the highest option with 42.10%. No occurrences of FLA was the second highest with 26.32% of responses and frequent occurrence following with a little over a fifth of responses (21.05%). Minimal occurrence was only 10.53%, the lowest of the options.

*Questions 5-10: Occurrences of FLA in various year groups*

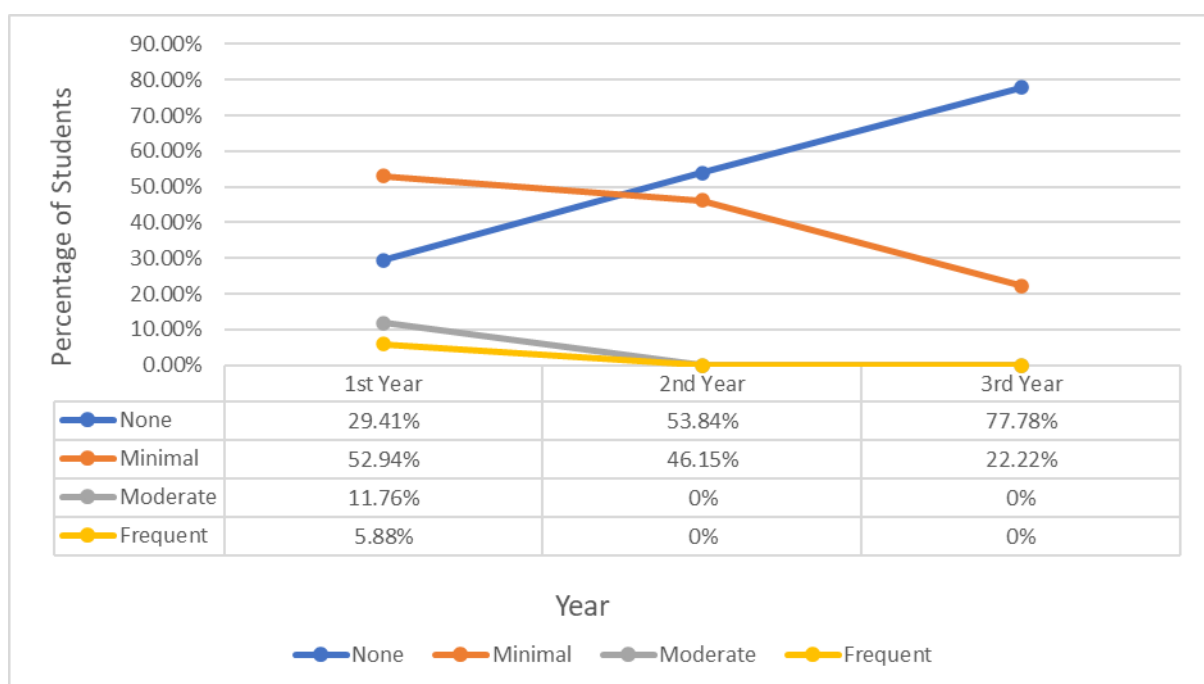


Figure 3. Line graph showing the occurrence of FLA in the Male French and Spanish undergraduate population

Based on the data above (fig.3), one must note that of the 17 male responses, 9 students were in year three and voted in all three years, 4 students were in year two and therefore voted for years one and two and 4 students were in year one thus only voting for year one. Males doing both languages responded to both French and Spanish, resulting in there being 17 overall responses. The options were as follows: No occurrence (none),

minimal occurrence (minimal), moderate occurrence (moderate) and frequent occurrence (frequent). Values were represented as a percentage of the total votes in each year.

The year one responses show that minimal and no occurrence dominate the responses with 52.94% and 29.41% respectively. Further, moderate occurrence had 11.76% of the responses as compared to frequent occurrence, which was represented by 5.88% of the responses. Responses in the second year reveal no occurrence at more than half with 53.84% and minimal occurrence with approximately 7% less at 46.15%. Both moderate and frequent occurrence had no responses. The majority of year three responses were no occurrence of FLA with 77.78%, followed by minimal occurrence with 22.22%. Moderate and frequent occurrence had no response.

*Questions 5-10: Occurrences of FLA in various year groups*

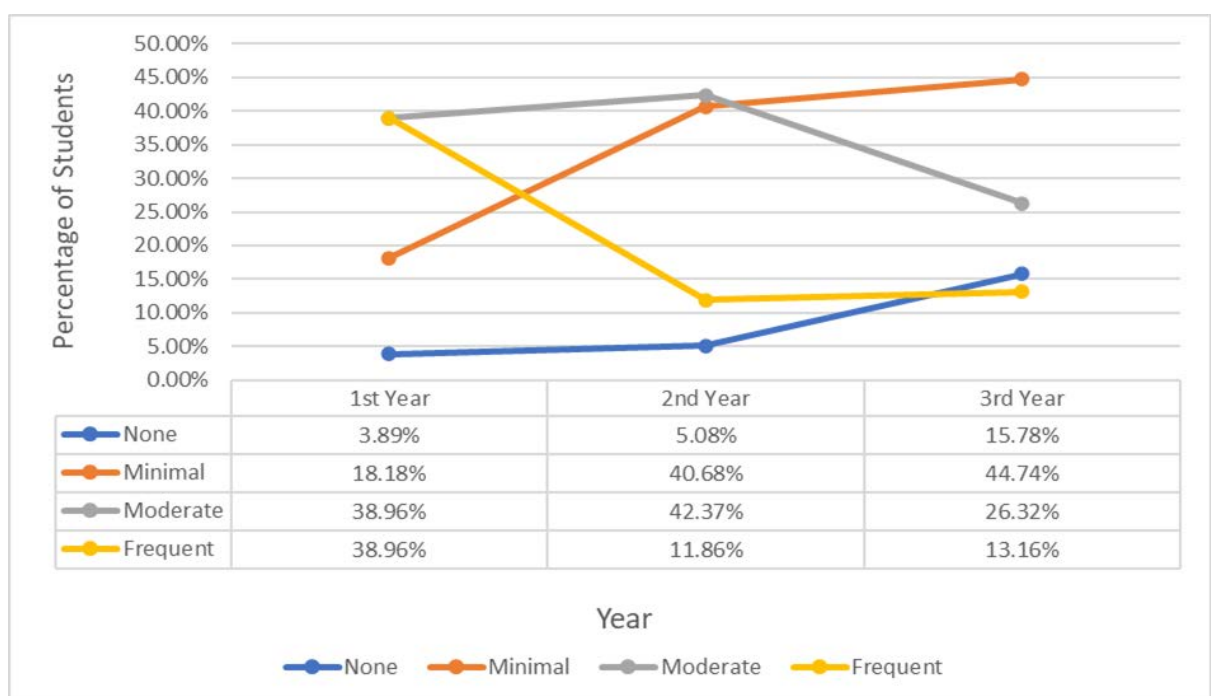


Figure 4. Line graph showing the occurrence of FLA in the Female French and Spanish undergraduate population

Figure 4 represents the data of 77 female students in French and Spanish whereby 38 students were in year three and voted in all three years, 21 students were in year two and thus voted in years one and two and 18 students were in year one and only voted in year one. Females doing both languages responded to both French and Spanish, resulting in there being 77 overall responses. The options were as followed: No occurrence (none), minimal occurrence (minimal), moderate occurrence (moderate) and frequent occurrence (frequent). Values were represented as a percentage of the total votes in each year.

The figure depicts that for the year one responses there was a tie between moderate and frequent occurrence at 38.96%. Minimal occurrence followed with 18.18% then subsequently no occurrence at 3.89%. Year two responses saw moderate occurrence receive the most responses with 42.37% followed closely by minimal occurrences with 40.68%. Frequent occurrence was represented by 11.86% compared to no occurrence, which was at 5.08%. Year three students primarily had minimal occurrence of FLA (44.74% of responses) with moderate FLA being the second most common with 26.32%. This is in contrast to frequent and no occurrence, which were 13.16% and 15.78% respectively.

#### *Question 11: Occurrences of FLA*

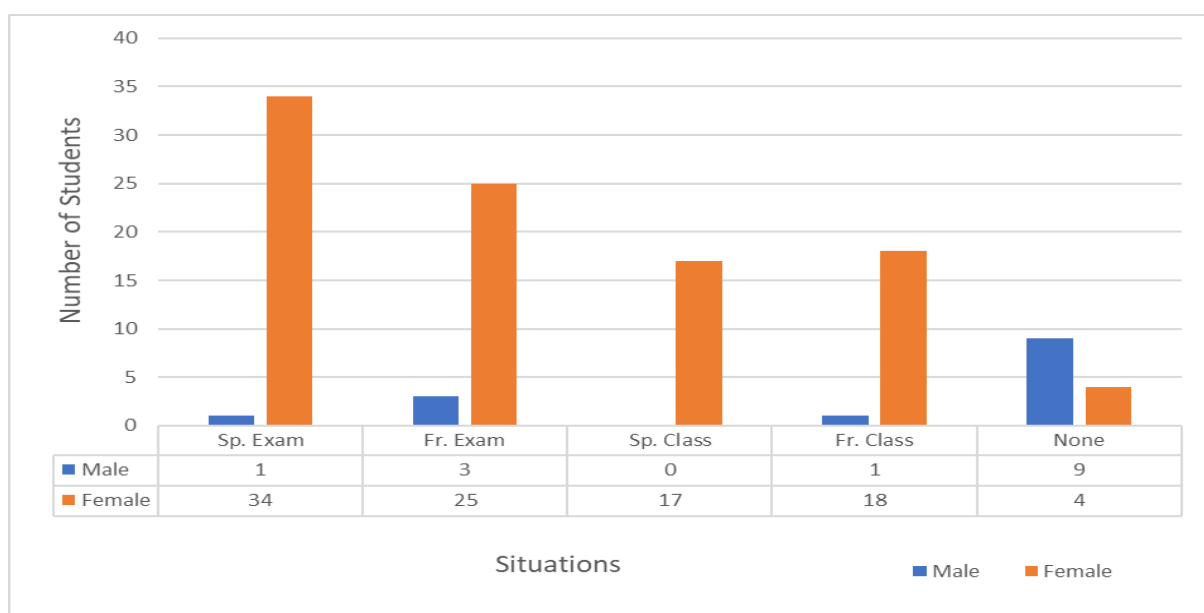


Figure 5. Bar graph showing the different situations where male and female French and Spanish undergraduate students may experience FLA

The bar graph above shows the various situations that the French and Spanish students experience FLA. The options to the questions were as follows: Spanish exams (Sp. exam), French exam (Fr. exam), Spanish class (Sp. class), French class (Fr. class), neither exam nor class (None). The results were split to compare male responses to female responses. Each option was represented simply as the number of participants who selected that option.

Overall, female responses were clearly higher in each situation when compared to the male responses. Of the female responses, the highest were the exam situations where Spanish exams had 34 responses followed by French exams with 25 responses. Based on the data about the Language classes, French class (18 responses) was higher than Spanish class (17 responses). However, only 4 responses indicated that no situation induced FLA.

The majority of male responses indicated that they experienced no FLA in any of the situations (9 responses). The highest occurrence of FLA was in French exams (3 responses). This was followed by a tie between Spanish exams and French class (1 response each) in comparison with Spanish class receiving no responses.

*Question 12: Occurrence of FLA in various year groups*

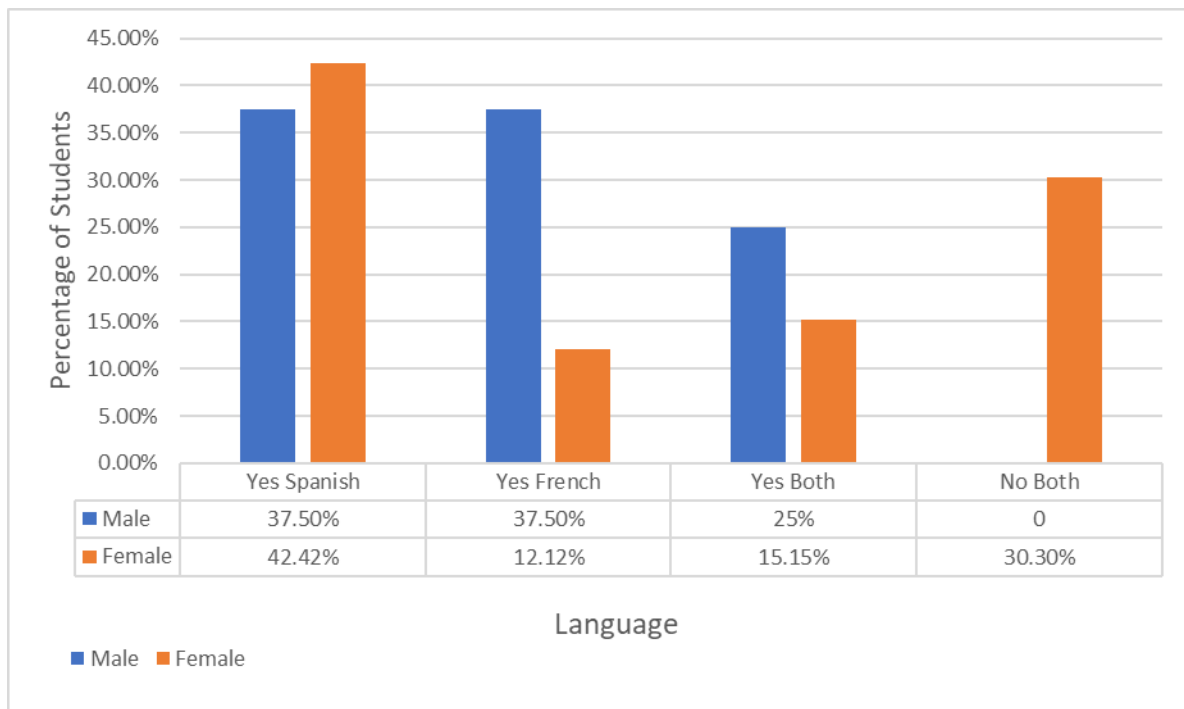


Figure 6. Bar graph showing the comparison of 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> year male and female French and Spanish students' ability to adapt to FLA.

The graph showed responses from 8 males and 35 females. The options to the question were as follows: Yes to Spanish (Yes Spanish), Yes to French (Yes French), Yes to both (Yes both), No to both (No both). Results were split to compare male responses to female responses. Each option was represented solely as the number of participants who selected that option.

Overall, the male responses showed they better adapted to FLA compared to the females in the study. There were no male responses for the inability to adapt to both (No to both) while 30.3% of females indicated that was the case. Males had higher percentages for being able to adapt to French (37.5% of responses) and to both languages (25% of responses) when compared to females (12.12% for French and 15.15% for both languages). Females

(42.42% of responses) only had a slightly higher percentage for Spanish than males (37.5% of responses).

*Question 13 and 15: FLA in different components*

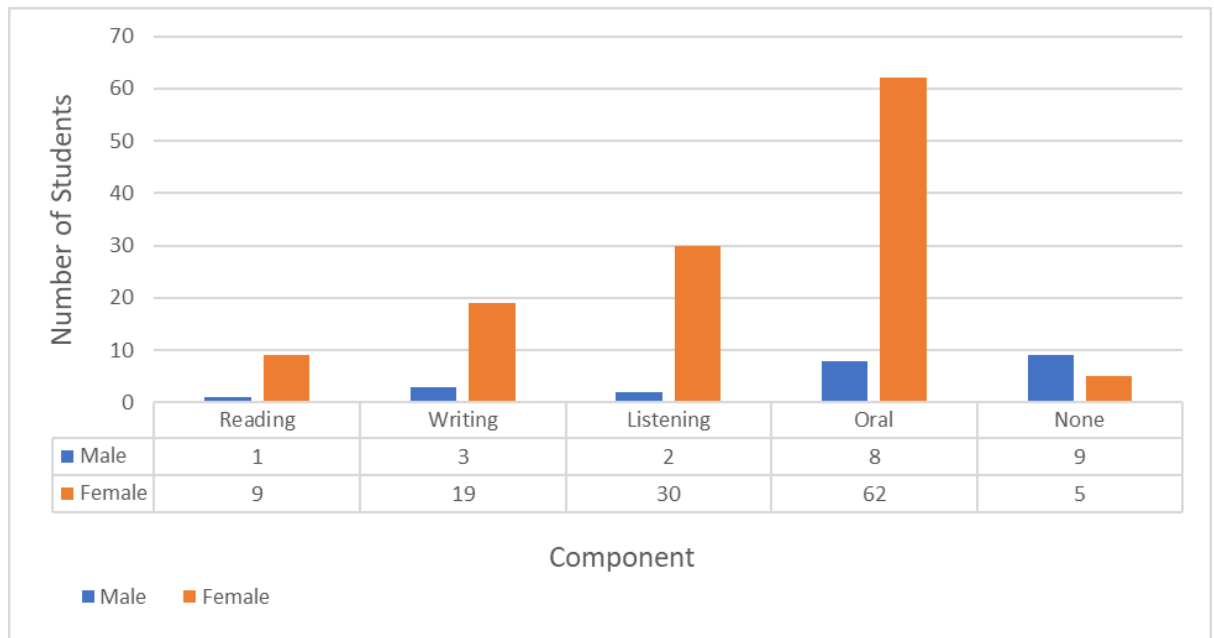


Figure 7. Bar graph showing the comparison of FLA occurrences in male and female students concerning the different language components

Figure 7 presents the data for the occurrence of FLA in the following components were: Reading, Writing, Listening, Oral, None. Results were divided to show the difference between males and females for each component. Since this graph combines French and Spanish data, students pursuing the two languages had both their French and Spanish votes counted. Each option was represented simply as the number of participants who selected that option.

Overall, females experienced FLA at a greater frequency in all components when compared to males. The oral component had the most responses in both male (8 responses) and female (62 responses). The writing component (3 responses) was second for males

followed by listening (2 responses) and reading (1 response). The female responses showed listening (30 responses) to have the second highest responses, followed by writing (19 responses) and then subsequently reading (9 responses). The data shows that more males (9 responses) experienced no FLA in the components than females (5 responses).

*Questions 14 and 16: FLA in different components*

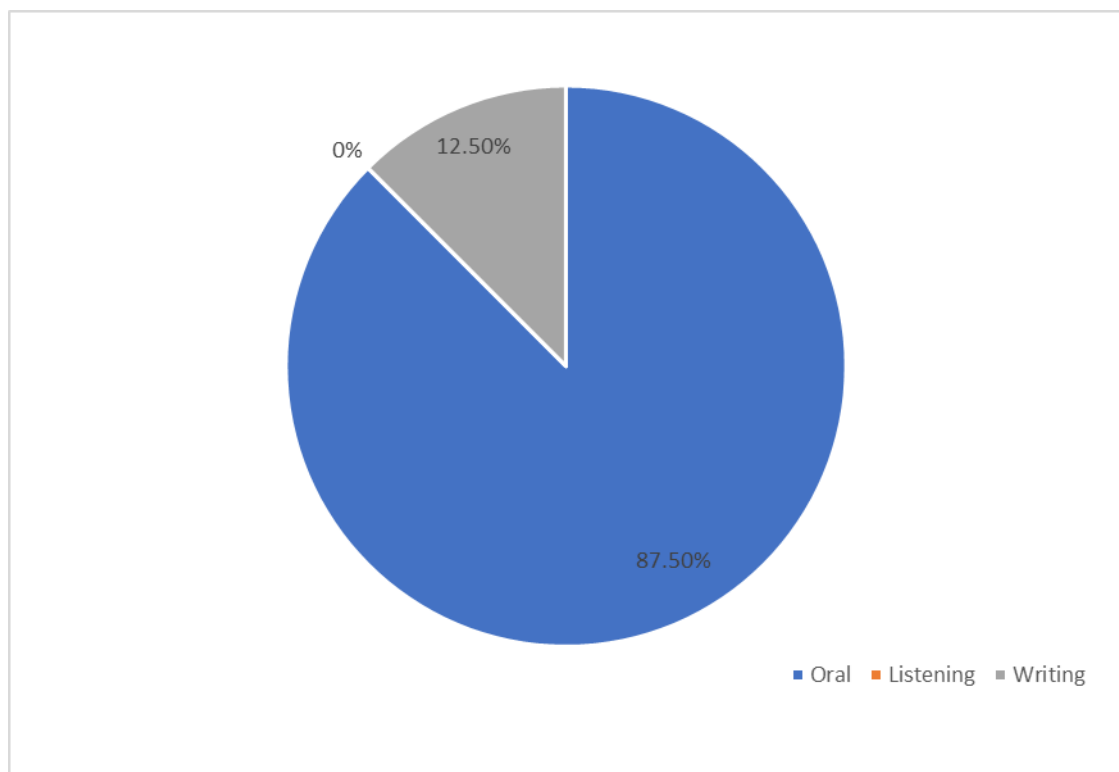


Figure 8. Pie chart showing the language components with the highest occurrence of FLA among male French and Spanish undergraduate students

In the pie chart above, the responses were represented as a percentage of the total responses. Of the 8 responses, 87.5% indicated that they experience the most FLA in the oral component. Writing was the only other component, which received votes (12.5%).

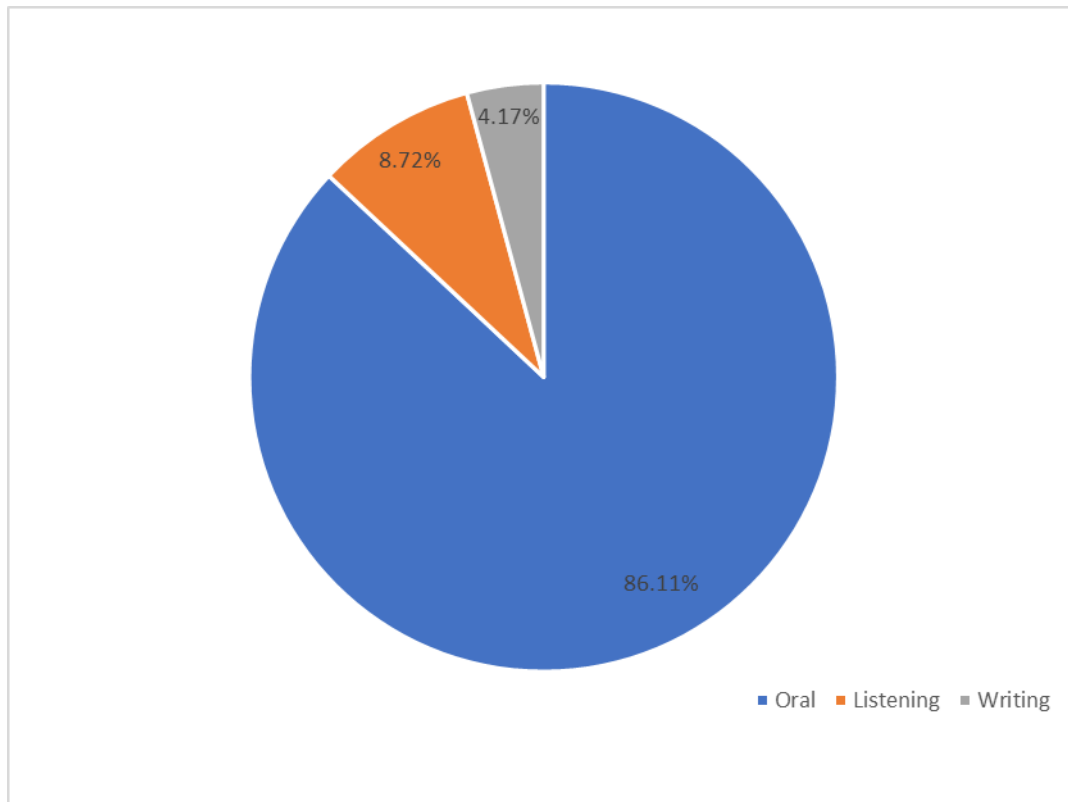
*Questions 14 and 16: FLA in different components*

Figure 9. Pie chart showing the language components with the highest occurrence of FLA amongst female French and Spanish undergraduate students

The responses were represented as a percentage of the total responses in the pie chart above. Of the 72 responses, 86.11% indicated that they experience the most FLA in the oral component. Furthermore, the other components that received responses were listening with 9.72% and writing with 4.17%.

*Findings of the interview***Question 1: Occurrence of FLA in various year groups***Male Response*

There was no added FLA for me for the time that I have been at UWI studying Foreign Languages.

*Female Response*

I am a very determined person so I always put a lot of pressure on myself to maintain a certain standard and this causes high levels of FLA. However, I would say that my FLA has been slowly but surely decreasing with time. As a level 3 student, I now willingly participate in classes much more often than years 1 and 2 where I rarely participated. This is because I have gotten a lot more practice over the years and therefore I feel more confident with my language skills, particularly my speaking skills, than I did in years 1 and 2. I am also less afraid to make mistakes in front of others as I have learnt that the only way to improve my conversation skills is through practice. Becoming more familiar and comfortable with my peers has been another contributing factor to my decreasing FLA.

**Question 2: The impact of FLA on performance***Male response:*

FLA has little to no effect on my performance levels in French nor Spanish. The reason for that is my mind set when it comes to executing exams, assignments or even presentations in the classroom. I do not really experience FLA when in front of persons speaking, or doing anything when it comes to Foreign Languages. As I said before FLA does not affect me therefore I still receive grades that are to my liking. I consider myself to be an average

student and I have maintained those grades for the last three years. For many years among my peers, I have seen how anxiety, fear and other things negatively impact their performance levels and their enjoyment of their activities, and I realised that if one is to truly get the best out of him or herself, higher levels of confidence, self-motivation and winning mind sets are required to be as successful as possible.

*Female response:*

I strongly believe that FLA affects my performance levels in the oral and listening language components. Concerning oral exams, I experience a very high level of FLA. I always experience nausea and nervousness days leading up to an oral exam and these symptoms reach their peak during the exam. This high level of anxiety has a strongly negative impact on my oral performance. My nervousness prevents me from thinking clearly and makes me stutter, mispronounce words and speak less coherently or fluently. Sometimes I lose my train of thought in the middle of speaking because of the nervousness and anxiety. I also tend to avoid speaking for long durations of time during oral exams, as I am afraid of not being able to express a point clearly and/or making too many mistakes. With respect to the listening component, I usually feel moderately anxious when listening to the audio file under exam conditions. This anxiety hinders my ability to focus on the exam, however the anxiety I experience during oral exams is significantly higher and therefore more harmful to my performance than the anxiety I experience during listening exams. Although I experience a lot of FLA, I still receive decent grades since I am a very determined individual and I try to reach a level of perfection.

**Question 3: Occurrences of FLA in French versus Spanish***Male Response:*

Neither makes me feel more or less anxious. What I can say is that I am a better Spanish speaker than I am a French speaker, and therefore I encounter more hurdles in self-expression with French than I do in Spanish. Most persons fear the negative judgment of others when it comes to possible mistakes or errors that they could make, but at the end of the day, people's opinions do not truly matter... and so I do not experience that anxiety which is linked to the fear of what others think.

*Female response:*

I would say that I definitely experience a higher level of FLA in French classes and exams than in Spanish. This is mainly because I am a stronger student in Spanish and French is very challenging. I have a much wider vocabulary in Spanish and therefore feel more confident when I speak Spanish in any setting in comparison to French. Another reason is that I feel less encouraged by our French professors to participate in classes. It feels as though mistakes are not welcomed in French, therefore I sometimes refrain from participating in class. Less participation means less practice, which leads to less confidence and harbouring feelings of anxiety towards the language (French).

The following chapter discusses the data presented in chapter 2 along with the research provided in chapter 1 of this study.

## Chapter 3

### Discussion

Undoubtedly, the findings presented in this research paper directly yielded valuable data which aids in either rejecting or proving the hypothesis that FLA is gender dependent since it appears to affect one gender more than the other. This chapter of the study seeks to synthesize the primary data findings along with the findings of other relevant research conducted pertaining to FLA. The aforementioned hypothesis is further examined since the researcher included the analysis of sub themes such as the link between FLA, gender and the effects on various year groups, the differing effects of FLA on students depending on the target language and finally, FLA, gender and performance levels, since they all contribute to the overarching theme of FLA. The research objectives of determining, identifying and investigating FLA in various aspects have been answered through the analysis of the mentioned themes.

#### *Comparing FLA in different year groups*

Firstly, after analysing the findings of the primary data, it is critically imperative to underscore that FLA is seemingly gender dependent and different in the various year groups within the French and Spanish programmes at the University of the West Indies (UWI), St. Augustine campus. Based on the results in figure 3, it is quite evident that the male participants who ticked a response for the occurrence of FLA in year one, experienced minimal to no FLA (52.94% and 29.41% respectively). However, these figures are in opposition to the noticeably lower percentages of females in figure 4 who selected minimal and no FLA for year one of their programmes (18.18% and 3.89% respectively). Correspondingly, the results presented in this study support the claims put forward by Bölümü et al. (87) and Tran and Moni (15), which explain that students experience more

anxiety at the beginning of their programmes in comparison to the end since these students adapt and become familiar . For instance, the data presented in figures 3 and 4 highlights that none of the male participants who were eligible to select an option for year three experienced moderate or frequent FLA as compared to the 26.32% and 13.16% of female participants who experienced moderate and frequent FLA . Similarly, 44.74% of female participants in year 3 felt minimal FLA, which also substantiates Bölümü et al. and Tran and Moni's claims that FLA decreases as the student progresses. . Figure 6 also verifies these claims since it indicates that 0% of males and only 30.30% of females have not adapted to their feelings of FLA in contrast with the 42.42% and 12.12% of females who have adapted to FLA in Spanish and French respectively. Furthermore, as evidenced by the interview conducted, the year three female respondent explained that her FLA is "slowly but surely decreasing with time". This response from the interviewee also clearly supports Bölümü et al. and Tran and Moni's deduction that students adapt to their programmes.

On the other hand, Öztürk and Gürbüz postulated that females maintained FLA levels throughout the duration of their studies as opposed to males who experienced little to no FLA at the various levels of study (659). Evidently, their findings somewhat correlate to the results of this study since the percentages of males in year two and three who moderately or frequently faced FLA were both 0% (see fig. 3). Inversely, their claim about females is incongruent to the findings of this research since FLA levels of females were visibly different in the year groups. For example, it seems that year one females experience moderate to frequent FLA whereas year two females experience minimal (40.68 %) to moderate (42.37%) levels of FLA (see fig. 3). Thus, these findings challenge the aforementioned claim, specifically about females, that was unearthed by Öztürk and Gürbüz.

Additionally, the researcher of this study opted to investigate whether the participants of the questionnaires identified themselves as anxious. This question was a crucial element since as theorized by Horwitz; it is considered trait anxiety when a person suffers from frequent anxiety during everyday life (155). Table 2 illustrates that only two males viewed themselves as innately anxious whereas four said that they are not naturally anxious and seven responded that their anxiety was situational. The table highlighted that eighteen females said they considered themselves as anxious people rather than the two that said they are not anxious and the thirty-two who said that their anxiety was situational. Therefore, after analysing the data, it can be inferred that the eighteen women and two men who identify as inherently anxious are likely to have trait anxiety and thus are more susceptible to maintain their FLA levels in the various levels of study. The thirty two women and seven men who experience situational anxiety or state anxiety as popularised by Horwitz, are expected to progressively become less anxious throughout their programmes due to familiarity of the work, which corroborates the claims by Bölümü et al.(87) and Tran and Moni (15) and clearly rejects Öztürk and Gürbüz's (659) findings.

#### *FLA in French versus Spanish*

This study explicitly reveals that FLA is more prevalent in the French programme than in the Spanish programme. In accordance with Serrano et al. (186) and Marcos-Llinás and Garau (105), many French language learners at the UWI are plagued with FLA in comparison to Spanish learners. Figures 1 and 2 depict that 60.71% of year three Spanish students experienced minimal FLA compared to 42.10% of French students in year three who felt moderately affected by FLA. Interestingly, 22.41% of persons who selected an option for year one Spanish, unfortunately frequently endure FLA in contrast to the 50% of French students who picked the “frequent” option for year one. These trends in the primary data

confirm that Serrano et al. possibly were justified in claiming that there is a linguistic link whereby Spanish linguistic elements are not as challenging and perhaps more straightforward than those of French. Moreover, as seen in figures 1 and 2, the notion propelled by Serrano et al. is further validated. They distinctly deduced that Spanish language acquisition was much less daunting than French is. The findings show that 53.33% of Spanish participants who selected an option for year two experienced minimal anxiety as opposed to the 48.15% of French participants who chose moderate FLA for year two (see figs. 1 and 2). Evidently, these results may be verified due to the proposition by Serrano et al.

Furthermore, this study accentuates Jarie et al.'s claim that male French students face less FLA than their female classmates do since females pressure themselves to perform at a high level (689). This is exemplified via the interview, which overtly highlights that in response to question 1, the female interviewee, explains that she is extremely determined to succeed and thus puts pressure on herself, which in turn provokes high levels of FLA. The male respondent elucidates that he does not experience any FLA and he has never faced this problem whilst completing his degree. In response to question 3, he further explained that although neither language makes him anxious, he is considerably more comfortable speaking Spanish than French. Therefore, this research paper's findings endorses Jarie et al.'s proposition.

Finally, according to the findings, thirty-four females experienced FLA in Spanish exams whilst 25 females found that French exams produced FLA (see fig. 5). Proportionally, the 25 females represent 86.2% of the female sample size that studies French whereas only 70.8% is representative of the female Spanish student sample size. Additionally, only 1 male experiences FLA in Spanish exams versus 3 males in French exams. The notion that Spanish provokes less FLA is further explored in this study through the interview where the female

respondent's response to question 3 states that she experiences more FLA in French classes and exams than Spanish classes and exam since "French is more challenging". Evidently, these findings undoubtedly corroborate Arnaiz and Guillén's proposal that Spanish is essentially less arduous to learn than French is (12).

*FLA, gender and performance levels in the language components.*

It appears that FLA, gender and performance levels may be linked according to this study along with research mentioned in chapter 2. Research conducted by Zhang revealed that although females were intrinsically more anxious than their male counterparts were, they still managed to outperform them in examinations (37). Whilst responding to question 2, the female respondent expounded that she suffers from severe FLA but she still receives "decent grades". However, the male respondent's retort to the question demonstrates that he does not suffer from FLA due to his positive mind-set and therefore FLA does not affect his performance levels since he considers himself "an average student" who has maintained his grades. It can be inferred that perhaps Zhang's study correlates to the results of this study since even though FLA plagues the female interviewee, she does not allow it to hinder her performances.

Essentially, based on the findings of this study, FLA may not be linked to the various components. Figure 7 illustrates that 47.06% (8/17 male votes) of males that voted face FLA in the oral component while 80.52% (62/77 female votes) of females that voted experience FLA in the same component. This evidently corresponds to Zhang's study, which stipulated that females experienced more FLA than their male classmates in the oral component (37). Moreover, figure 7 also depicts that 17.65% (3/17 male votes) of male who voted are plagued with FLA in the writing component whereas 24.68% (19/77 female votes) of females votes experience FLA in this component. However, these results specifically reject Zhang's

hypothesis, which claims that FLA in the different genders are dependent on the language components (38). In essence, Zhang insinuated that males experience more FLA in the writing component than females do. Conversely, it must be recognized that the male sample size is visibly too small thus the researcher of this study cannot definitively reject Zhang's hypothesis. Additionally, the results shown in figure 7 may supplement the claim by Koul et al., which inherently states that females experience higher levels of FLA in each component (680). Therefore, more females specified that they experienced FLA in every component as compared to males.

To further underscore the connection between FLA, gender and performance levels in the language components, the results of figures 8 and 9 will be analysed. Both male and female participants experience high levels of FLA in the oral component. 7 out of 8 males (87.5%) who said they experienced FLA in some of the components and 62 out of 72 females (86.11%) believed that the oral component produced the most FLA. In the interview with the female interviewee, as previously stated, the oral component provokes immense FLA as opposed to the male respondent who does not experience FLA at all. These interviewees both explained that they receive decent grades in each component. Therefore, it can be inferred that FLA in the components may be dependent on gender but gender does not influence performance since both male and female interviewees obtain acceptable grades.

## Conclusion

This research paper aimed to compare and determine how FLA affects both the male and female genders pursuing French and Spanish at the undergraduate level at the UWI. The results of this study produced both quantitative and qualitative data, which permitted the researcher to arrive at certain conclusions. Based on the results illustrated in chapter 2, it is quite apparent that overall, female students encounter FLA more than male students do. Furthermore, both females and males appear to adapt to the requirements of their programmes thus their FLA decreases over time. In other words, these students face higher levels of FLA in year one but it steadily declines throughout the duration of their degrees. Evidently, French produces more FLA in both genders than Spanish does since students feel more at ease whilst learning Spanish. Students learning the two languages agree that the oral component provokes a great deal of FLA but female students are significantly more impacted by FLA in this component. Interestingly, females characteristically experience higher levels of FLA in each language component: reading, writing, listening, oral. Although females must confront this challenge, FLA does not necessarily affect their academic performances. The results from the interview show that even though males may not experience FLA, they still receive satisfactory grades comparable to their female classmates who face FLA. Despite the small sample size, these deductions reflect the situation at the UWI, St. Augustine campus. Hence, further research should be conducted regarding the occurrence of FLA in the other campuses as well in order to broaden the sample size.

## Limitations

The researcher encountered two major limitations whilst conducting the research. Firstly, the demographic of genders was a notable limitation for this study since the number of female language students significantly outweighs the male students. This research paper clearly focuses on both genders therefore; the disproportionate number of males to females hindered the research process. Lastly, the most difficult part of the process was the accessibility of the sample population. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, all language classes are online thus making the data collection process extremely challenging since many students ignored emails requesting their participation in this study, which evidently affected the sample size and the collection of data.

## Recommendations

In order to minimise the occurrence of FLA, the researcher of this paper highly recommends that the lecturers play a larger role in making the students more comfortable. Emphasis should be made on students in year one of their degree programmes since they experienced the most FLA. Perhaps, these lecturers should create a welcoming environment where mistakes are welcomed. Ensuring that the students feel comfortable enough to learn their target language is critically imperative for minimal occurrences of FLA. This suggestion would irrefutably benefit the French programme since French students categorically experience more FLA than Spanish students do.

Finally, future research investigating FLA in both genders must be carried out in order to solidify the conclusions mentioned in this study. However, it is highly recommended that future researchers utilize other language programmes so that the male sample size can balance the female sample size, which would directly add value to existing research about FLA. Male foreign language students encompass a significantly smaller percentage of these classes hence the necessity of expanding the population sample of males in future research so that more certain and precise conclusions can be made.

## Works Cited

- Arnaiz, Patricia, and Felix Guillen. "Foreign Language Anxiety in a Spanish University Setting: Interpersonal Differences." *Revista de Psicodidáctica*, vol. 17, no. 1, 2012, pp. 5–26.
- Bölümü, Dilbilim, et al. "Young Adolescent Students' Foreign Language Anxiety in Relation to Language Skills at Different Levels." *The Journal of International Social Research*, vol. 3, no. 11, 2010, pp. 84–89.
- Goswami, Usha, et al. "Pseudohomophone Effects and Phonological Recoding Procedures in Reading Development in English and German." *Journal of Memory and Language*, vol. 45, no. 4, Nov. 2001, pp. 648–664, 10.1006/jmla.2001.2790. Accessed 9 Nov. 2021.
- Horwitz, Elaine K. "Foreign and Second Language Anxiety." *Language Teaching*, vol. 43, no. 2, 3 Mar. 2010, pp. 154–167, 10.1017/s026144480999036x.
- Jarie, Laurane, et al. "Influence of Language Anxiety on French-Speaking Oral Proficiency among Secondary Education Students." *The European Proceedings of Social & Behavioural Sciences*, 4 Sept. 2019, pp. 687–693, [www.researchgate.net/publication/335609684\\_Influence\\_Of\\_Language\\_Anxiety\\_On\\_French-Speaking\\_Oral\\_Proficiency\\_Among\\_Secondary\\_Education\\_Students](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/335609684_Influence_Of_Language_Anxiety_On_French-Speaking_Oral_Proficiency_Among_Secondary_Education_Students), 10.15405/epsbs.2019.04.02.85. Accessed 9 Nov. 2020.
- Koul, Ravinder, et al. "Multiple Goal Orientations and Foreign Language Anxiety." *System*, vol. 37, no. 4, Dec. 2009, pp. 676–688, 10.1016/j.system.2009.09.011.
- Krashen, Stephen D. *The Input Hypothesis: Issues and Implications*. , Laredo Publishing, 1985, p. 77.
- Marcos-Llinás, Mónica, and Maria Juan Garau. "Effects of Language Anxiety on Three Proficiency-Level Courses of Spanish as a Foreign Language." *Foreign Language Annals*, vol. 42, no. 1, Mar. 2009, pp. 94–111, 10.1111/j.1944-9720.2009.01010.x.

- Öztürk, Gökhan, and Nurdan Gürbüz. "The Impact of Gender on Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety and Motivation." *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, vol. 70, no. 1, Jan. 2013, pp. 654–665, [www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1877042813001079](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1877042813001079), 10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.01.106. Accessed 10 Nov. 2020.
- Park, Gi-Pyo, and Brian F. French. "Gender Differences in the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale." *System*, vol. 41, no. 2, June 2013, pp. 462–471, 10.1016/j.system.2013.04.001.
- Saito, Yoshiko, and Keiko K. Samimy. "Foreign Language Anxiety and Language Performance: A Study of Learner Anxiety in Beginning, Intermediate, and Advanced-Level College Students of Japanese." *Foreign Language Annals*, vol. 29, no. 2, May 1996, pp. 239–249, [onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1944-9720.1996.tb02330.x](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1944-9720.1996.tb02330.x), 10.1111/j.1944-9720.1996.tb02330.x. Accessed 8 Nov. 2020.
- Serrano, Francisca, et al. "Variations in Reading and Spelling Acquisition in Portuguese, French and Spanish: A Cross-Linguistic Comparison." *Journal of Portuguese Linguistics*, vol. 10, no. 1, 30 June 2011, pp. 183–199, 10.5334/jpl.106.
- Tran, Trang Thi Thu, and Karen Moni. "Management of Foreign Language Anxiety: Insiders' Awareness and Experiences." *Cogent Education*, vol. 2, no. 1, 9 Jan. 2015, pp. 14–20, 10.1080/2331186x.2014.992593.
- Zhang, L.J. "Uncovering Chinese ESL Students' Reading Anxiety in a Study-Abroad Context." *Asia Pacific Journal of Language in Education*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2000, pp. 31–56.

## Appendix 1

## QUESTIONNAIRE

My name is Alyssa Kangoo and I am currently reading for a Bachelor's of Arts degree in Spanish with French at the UWI. I am conducting this research for the purpose of the HUMN3099 Caribbean research project, which is investigating the effects of Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) on the female and male genders. This questionnaire is completely anonymous, therefore please be fully transparent in your responses. Thank you very much for participating!

1. Please select your gender

Male

Female

2. Please select your year of study

1<sup>st</sup> year

2<sup>nd</sup> year

3<sup>rd</sup> year

3. Which language do you study?

French

Spanish

Both

4. Do you consider yourself an anxious person?

Yes

No

It depends on the situation

5. Have you experienced FLA during your 1st year of study? (SPANISH)

- No occurrence
- Minimal occurrence
- Moderate occurrence
- Frequent occurrence

6. Have you experienced FLA during your 2nd year of study? (SPANISH)

- No occurrence
- Minimal occurrence
- Moderate occurrence
- Frequent occurrence

7. Have you experienced FLA during your 3rd year of study? (SPANISH)

- No occurrence
- Minimal occurrence
- Moderate occurrence
- Frequent occurrence

8. Have you experienced FLA during your 1st year of study? (FRENCH)

- No occurrence
- Minimal occurrence
- Moderate occurrence
- Frequent occurrence

9. Have you experienced FLA during your 2nd year of study? (FRENCH)

- No occurrence
- Minimal occurrence
- Moderate occurrence
- Frequent occurrence

10. Have you experienced FLA during your 3rd year of study? (FRENCH)

- No occurrence
- Minimal occurrence
- Moderate occurrence
- Frequent occurrence

11. When do you experience FLA? Tick all the applicable boxes.

- Spanish exams
- French exams
- Spanish class
- French class
- Neither exam nor class

12. For 2nd and 3rd year students that indicated they have experienced FLA, did you adapt to FLA as you progressed to a higher year?

- Yes to Spanish only
- Yes to French only
- Yes to both languages
- No to both languages

13. In which of the following components of the SPANISH language have you experienced FLA? Tick all applicable boxes.

- Reading
- Writing
- Listening
- Oral
- None

14. If you ticked any of the components above, please indicate in which component you experienced the most FLA.

15. In which of the following components of the FRENCH language have you experienced FLA? Tick all applicable boxes.

- Reading
- Writing
- Listening
- Oral
- None

16. If you ticked any of the components above, please indicate in which component you experienced the most FLA.

## Appendix 2

## INTERVIEW

Good day, I am conducting this research for the purpose of the HUMN3099 Caribbean research project, which is investigating the effects of Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) on the female and male genders. This short email interview is entirely anonymous, therefore please be fully transparent in your responses. Thank you for your participation.

1. Why do you think your FLA has increased/decreased or remained the same throughout your degree?
2. Explain the impact of FLA on your performance levels.
3. Does French or Spanish make you more anxious? (Explain your response)