Perceived teacher support and language anxiety in Polish secondary school EFL learners

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Abstract

The teacher's role is vital, both in respect to achieving academic goals, and with regard to the regulation of emotional and social processes. Positive perceptions of teacher support can endorse psychological wellness, and help maintain students' academic interests, higher academic achievement and more positive peer relationships. The teacher who shows understanding, empathy and consistency in their behavior helps students start forming an identity, which will assist them in coping with stress and anxiety directly connected with the foreign language learning process (language anxiety). The main aim of this research is to investigate the relationship between teacher support and language anxiety levels. It is speculated that teacher support functions as a buffer from the effects of negative emotions, such as language anxiety experienced in the foreign language learning process. The participants of the study were 621 secondary grammar school students whose responses to a questionnaire were the main data source. The results of the study demonstrate that students with higher levels of teacher support experience lower language anxiety levels in comparison to their peers with lower levels of teacher support. Students who have a feeling that they can count on the instructor's help, advice, assistance, or backing manage the learning process more successfully. They evaluate their language abilities highly and receive better final grades. Nevertheless, gender and residential location do not moderate teacher support and language anxiety due to the specificity of the sample consisting of novice secondary grammar school students.

Keywords: social support, teacher support, language anxiety, grades, self-assessment

Effective classroom learning always requires student engagement, which is initiated and regulated by teacher behavior (Jang, Reeve, & Deci, 2010). Consequently, the classroom teacher may be viewed as a valuable source of support and guidance without which successful learning may be very difficult, if not impossible.

The aim of this paper is to analyze the relationship between teacher support and language anxiety. For this purpose, first the constructs of social support and teacher support are presented from the theoretical and empirical perspectives, followed by an outline of the phenomenon of language anxiety and its negative impact on the process of language acquisition. The paper then reports on of the empirical study on the interplay of teacher support and language anxiety in the context of the Polish secondary grammar school. Results are discussed in the context of recommendations for the EFL classroom.

Teacher Support and Language Anxiety

The construct of *social support* is maintained to be an important influence affecting the lives of young people (Demaray, Malecki, Rueger, Brown, & Summers, 2009). It is usually understood as "social assets, social resources, or social networks that people can use when they are in need of aid, advice, help, assistance, approval, comfort, protection, or backing" (Vedder, Boekaerts, & Seegers, 2005, p. 269). According to another definition, it consists in "an individual's general support or specific support behaviors (available or enacted upon) from people in the social network, which enhances their functioning and/or may buffer them from adverse outcomes" (Malecki, Demaray, & Elliott, 2004, p. 3). Overall, it can be stipulated that social support is the perceived notion that one is cared for, valued and understood.

A comprehensive model of social support has been proposed by Tardy (1985) on the basis of House's work (1981). According to it, there are five different dimensions of support: *direction,* defining whether social support is being given or received; *disposition,* referring to the availability of social support (available or utilized); *description/evaluation*, whether an evaluation or description of social support was drawn out from an individual; *network*, referring to the sources of an individual's support network, and *content,* encompassing the emotional, instrumental, informational, and appraisal dimensions (Malecki et al., 2002). As far as content is concerned, four types of support can be proposed. They are emotional, instrumental, informational, and appraisal support. The first type comprises perceptions of love, trust and empathy. Instrumental support includes the provision of tangible aid, such as money, skills, or time that helps someone in need. The information category denotes

providing guidance or advice that helps solve a problem. The last type of support (appraisal) deals with offering feedback that can be either critical evaluation of one's performance and/or instructions concerning performance improvement (Suldo, Shaunessy, Michalowski, & Shaffer, 2009), constituting evaluative information relevant to one's self-evaluation (MacDonald, 1998).

There are three distinctive sources of social support in a developing adolescent's life: family, school and peers. Social support from each of these sources is connected with beneficial outcomes (Malecki & Demaray, 2003). Adolescents spend much of their time at school in the company of teachers and classmates; hence it is apparent that they significantly influence their development (Bokhorst, Sumter, & Westenberg, 2010). At the same time, it seems that emotional support from teachers is especially important to students' academic achievement (Malecki & Demaray, 2003). It follows that teachers are important sources of perceived social support within the educational context, as significant others identified in this part of the student's social network.

Teacher-student rapport has been defined as "the degree to which students feel supported, respected, and valued by their teacher" (Doll, Zucker, & Brehm, 2004, p. 6). Students' perceptions regarding whether their teacher cares about them and will help them underlines their successful functioning in the academic domain. Applying Tardy's model, it can be stipulated that in order to succeed educationally, students need to receive adequate support within their academic environment. Therefore teachers, as the most valid sources of direct support stemming from this part of the student's social network, may offer a quadrupled type of backing. At the *emotional* level their behavior promotes the student's feelings of comfort, ease, and security. From the point of view of the *instrumentality* dimension, they can offer students their time, skills, and involvement. At the *information* level their guidance can help the student understand and manage stressful situations induced by the learning process. Finally, at the *appraisal* level, the teacher's evaluation of the students' performance helps them to excel academically.

Generally speaking, the teachers' role is vital both in respect to achieving academic goals and with regard to the regulation of emotional and social processes (Wentzel, 1997), because students learn better when they perceive their classroom environment positively. As empirical research shows, teacher support is not a unidimensional construct, but a combination of emotional, academic and social support (Colarossi & Eccles, 2003). On its basis students are able to determine whether a school is a comfortable place and adapt their motivational beliefs, together with achievement behaviors (Patrick, Ryan, & Kaplan, 2007). It is documented that positive perceptions of teacher support can endorse psychological wellness, such as higher levels of life satisfaction

(Suldo, Mihalas, Powell, & French, 2008a) and subjective well-being (Suldo et al., 2009). Moreover, supportive teacher-student relationships help maintain students' academic interests and more positive peer relationships (Wentzel, 1998). Not surprisingly, students are also likely to obtain higher achievements (Marchand & Skinner, 2007). Whereas the majority of research focusing on social support from teachers has mainly concentrated on academic outcomes, it has also been proven to be an important contributor to mental health. Teacher support has been found to correlate negatively with depression, and positively with self-esteem and social skills (e.g., Flaspohler, Elfstrom, Vander-zee, Sink, & Birchmeier, 2009; Murberg & Bru, 2009).

Tardy's social support model has been applied to various domains of human activity, which shows the importance of social support in sustaining high-quality day-to-day performance. An optimal support system can satisfy one's need for attachment, care and attention, and boost one's sense of trust and life direction (Kleinke, 1998). It also plays the function of a buffer against negative outcomes of stressful events (Malecki et al., 2004) by helping to cope with adverse challenges. Apart from that, it provides companionship needed for one's well-being.

The link between teacher support and student success has been recognized in empirical research devoted to different cultures and school levels (e.g., Way, Reddy, & Rhodes, 2007; Jia et al., 2009). These findings are explained by theories of development that postulate that adolescents' successful development demands "trusting and caring relationships and autonomous self-expression, choice, and decision making" (Roeser & Sameroff, 2000, p. 459). This means that human development is related to important social contexts, so children's and adolescents' formative changes are affected by their interactions with people significant to them in these contexts. In the case of family, they are parents and siblings, school is connected with teachers, while peers interact within a larger adolescent's network (Chen, 2005). These three support systems simultaneously influence students' academic outcomes and their academic work. Thus, if students are not offered opportunities for such relationships, a mismatch between developmental needs and unfavorable context will make them suffer from psychological and academic maladjustment.

One of the most prominent and at the same time destructive phenomena inherently connected with the foreign language learning process is *language anxiety*. It is usually defined as "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process" (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Copel, 1986, p. 128). This definition stresses the role of the formal language learning context in producing self-centered thoughts, feelings of inadequacy and fear of failure. It

appears as transient states during the first encounters with the foreign language. Furthermore, the process of foreign language learning *per se* is "a profoundly unsettling psychological proposition" (Guiora, 1983, p. 8). It is connected not only with the acquisition of new language systems and subsystems, as well as of language content and skills, but it is also "a deeply social event that requires the incorporation of a wide range of elements of L2 culture" (Dörnyei, 2003, p. 4). In effect, an inexpert student's reliance on limited language abilities produces a significant threat to the learner's "self-perception of genuineness in presenting themselves to others" (Horwitz, 1999, p. xii). It can be inferred that elevated anxiety levels inhibiting the learning process become a likely phenomenon, giving way to foreign language anxiety, which evolves into a "regular occurrence" (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991, p. 110). With its pervasive negative influence on the cognitive functioning of the individual in the foreign language (FL) classroom (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989; MacIntyre, Baker, Clément, & Donovan, 2003), language anxiety develops into a primary threat to the student's successful functioning in the foreign language classroom.

The Study

In general teachers provide knowledge, but also a positive classroom climate. Teachers help, befriend and trust, which altogether leads to achievement, as when students feel the teacher cares about them it encourages investment in school. In such favourable circumstances the student also demonstrates a desire to comply with the teacher's wishes and pays less attention to school concerns that distract them from thinking about tasks and learning. In this way students can be more engaged in the learning process, and successfully manage their negative emotions.

It is expected that in the FL classroom teachers are able to help students achieve success through their perceived strong support. Better support, meanwhile, is expected to lead to more safety in the FL classroom and lower levels of negative emotions, such as anxiety (Abu-Rabia, 2004). Therefore, language anxiety levels are likely to be negatively related to perceived English teacher support. The teacher who shows understanding, empathy and consistency in behavior helps pupils start forming an identity that will assist them in coping with stress and anxiety induced by the foreign language learning process.

The main aim of this research is to investigate the relationship between teacher support and language anxiety levels. It is speculated that teacher support functions as a buffer to the effects of negative emotions, such as language anxiety. Thus, students who perceive strong teacher support are likely to be affected by language anxiety levels, even in spite of their short language expe-

rience. Hence, the main hypothesis proposed for the purpose of this paper is the following:

> H: *Students with higher levels of teacher support experience lower language anxiety levels in comparison to their peers with lower levels of teacher support.*

The role of the moderator variable of *academic attainment* within the foreign language context will also be explained. It is expected that when students feel supported emotionally by their teacher, they engage more fully in school work, which leads to higher academic achievement: students' performance in school, as measured by their final grades and self-perceived levels of FL competence. As of yet, research results on this matter are still inconclusive, as sometimes less competent students are also found to perceive more support from their teachers when compared to their more competent peers (Elias & Haynes, 2008).

Another purpose of the study is to shed more light on the relationship between teacher support and the control variables of *gender* and *residential location*. The empirical research to date demonstrates that girls declare higher ratings for social support from teachers (e.g., Demaray & Malecki, 2003), especially at the high school level (Demaray et al., 2009). Unfortunately, the investigation of the relationship between the student's residential location and their perceived levels of social support seems to be neglected in spite of the fact that rural or urban residence has frequently been shown to be related to the educational outcomes of youth (e.g., Bajema, Miller, & Williams, 2002) and their levels of negative emotions (Sulaiman, Hassan, Sapian, & Abdullah, 2009), predominantly exposing rural students' disadvantage. This is the reason why it may also be expected that rural students may perceive lower teacher support levels due to their generally lower literacy scores (e.g., Geske, Grinfelds, Dedze, & Zhang, 2006).

Method

The aim of this section is to provide details on how the research was carried out. It includes the subject subsection with a description of the study participants, followed by an instrument subsection describing the tools. In the final procedure subsection, the way the study was implemented is explained.

Participants

The participants of the study were 621 students from 24 randomly selected classes of the six secondary grammar schools in Opole, southwestern Poland. In the sample there were 396 girls and 225 boys (mean age: 16.50, range: 14.5-18). They were all students of the first grade at their schools, with three to six hours a week of English instruction. Their level of proficiency in English was elementary to intermediate. They also studied French or German as the other compulsory foreign language (two lessons a week). The cohort comprised students from different residential locations, mostly urban (286 of them from the city of Opole, 122 from neighboring towns), and 213 from rural regions.

The students' participation was voluntary – they gave their consent to take part in the study on condition that they would be able to withdraw any time they saw fit. Before the questionnaire was administered by the researcher in the absence of their teacher during class time, the students were guaranteed anonymity.

On the basis of the teacher support scale (Griffith, 1995), the sample was divided into 3 groups: the lower quartile (≤ 27) included a group of 139 students (74 girls and 65 boys) with low teacher support (LTS), the upper quartile (≥ 36) comprised a group of 161 students (97 girls and 64 boys) with high teacher support (HTS), while the remaining group of students (middle quartiles) was excluded from further analysis. In the LTS group there were 65 students from villages, 35 from small towns, and 93 from the city. In the HTS there were 48 rural students, 30 from small towns and 83 from the city.

Materials

The basic instrument used in the study was a questionnaire. Its first part was devoted to demographic variables such as age, gender (1 – *male*, 2 – *female*) and place of residence (1 – *village: up to 2,500 inhabitants*, 2 – *town: from 2,500 to 50,000 inhabitants,* 3 – *city: over 50,000 inhabitants*).

Additionally, it included a part of the school and classroom climate scale, called *the School Climate-Social Action-Instrumental* (Griffith, 1995), devoted to *teacher support*. The scale was used to measure aspects of the English teacher's expressive support. The scale is composed of 9 items assessed against the 5-point Likert-format scale from 1 – *I totally disagree* to 5 – *I totally agree*. The sample items in the scale are: *My English teacher can tell when things are not going right for me* or *My English teacher cares about me as a person*. The minimum number of points was 9, while the maximum was 45. Its reliability was α = .90.

The next part of the questionnaire was *the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale* (Horwitz et al., 1986). Its purpose is to assess the degree to which students feel anxious during language classes. Sample items on the scale are as follows: *I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in language class* or *I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages than I am*. All positive items were key-reversed so that a high score on the scale represented a high anxiety level. The minimum number of points that could be obtained on the scale was 33, while the maximum was 165. The scale's reliability was assessed in terms of the Cronbach's alpha coefficient and equaled α = .94.

Two other types of assessment tools were used: external (grades) and internal (self-assessment of the foreign language skills). As far as *grades* are concerned, the participants declared the final grades they received in *gymnasium* (lower secondary school), and the first semester of the secondary grammar school. They also included the grade they expected to receive at the end of the school year. All these grades were assessed on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*unsatisfactory*) to 6 (*excellent*), and later aggregated.

The last measurement used in the study was a scale calculating *self-perceived levels of FL skills* (speaking, listening, writing and reading), which was an aggregated value of independent assessments of the FL skills (speaking, listening, writing and reading) on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*unsatisfactory*) to 6 (*excellent*).

Procedure

Data collection took place over the months of March and April 2010. In each class, the students were asked to fill in the questionnaire. The time allotted for the activity was 15 to 45 minutes. The participants were asked to give honest answers without taking excessive time to think. A short statement introducing a new set of items in an unobtrusive manner preceded each part of the questionnaire.

The design of the study was differential, comparing groups that were differentiated on a pre-existing variable (levels of teacher support). The research was conducted by comparing means obtained on the language anxiety scale in two groups, differentiated on the basis of teacher support: a group with high teacher support (HTS) and low teacher support (LTS).

There were four kinds of variables identified in the study. The dependent variable was language anxiety level and the independent variable was teacher support, while the moderator variables were self-perceived levels of the four skills (internal assessment) and final grades (external assessment).

The moderator variables were gender and residential location. All the variables were operationally defined as questionnaire items.

The data were computed by means of the statistical program called STATISTICA, and a two-way ANOVA was used in order to compare means of teacher support in groups divided on the basis of two factors: gender (male/female) and residential location (city/town/village). The correlated t-test was applied to evaluate differences in the levels of language anxiety in two groups; i.e., in the group with low (LTS) and high levels of teacher support (HTS).

Results

Mean levels of social support in the sample were above the median of the scale (32), so the distribution of the results was skewed negatively (-.38). Aside from that, the language anxiety results reveal that the median (82) was below the mean, showing positively skewed distribution of the results (.39). As far as the results of self assessment of the four skills is concerned, again, the distribution was skewed negatively (-.30) with the median ranging 16. A similar finding was identified in the case of the final grades: a negatively skewed distribution (-.47) with a median of 13. These results revealed that none of the variables presented problems of normality. A summary of the basic descriptive results can be found in Table 1 below.

Table 1 Means and SD in teacher support, language anxiety, and language achievement (N = 621)

Variable	M	SD
Teacher suport	30.92	7.45
Language anxiety	83.96	23.87
Self-assessment of the four skills	15.75	3.51
Final grades	12.21	2.33

By means of a two-way ANOVA the results of teacher support in groups differing in residential location, as well as in gender were compared, showing that no statistically significant disparity could be spotted (F = .34, p = .89). This means that perceived levels of teacher support were not connected with students' gender or residential location.

As far as inferential statistics (the correlated t-test) is concerned, the results support the assumption that that students with low teacher support perceived language anxiety at a significantly higher level (M = 91.33) than students with a high degree of teacher support (M = 72.98). The t-test for independent samples ranged a very high level with t = 7.32, p < .001, demonstrat-

ing that students who are convinced of their teacher's support have a significantly lower level of language anxiety in comparison to their low-teacher-support peers.

Moreover, final grades (M = 12.77) and self-assessment of the four skills (M = 16.44) were significantly higher in students with high levels of teacher support in comparison to those of students who perceived their teacher support at a low level (M = 11.55 and M = 15.24, respectively). The t-test results were t = -3.10, $p < .01$ in the case of self-assessment, and t = -5.08, $p < .001$ in the case of the comparison of final grades in both groups (see Table 2 for a summary in inferential statistics results).

Table 2 Between-group comparisons in language anxiety and language achievement in students with low (LTS) and high teacher support (HTS)

Variable	LTS (N = 193)	HTS (N = 161)	$t(352)$
Language anxiety	91.33	72.98	7.32[***]
Self-assessment of the four skills	15.24	16.44	-3.10[**]
Final grades	11.55	12.77	-5.08[***]

[**] $p < .01$, [***] $p < .001$

Discussion

The main hypothesis adopted for the purpose of the research stated that: *Students with higher levels of teacher support experience lower language anxiety levels in comparison to their peers with lower levels of teacher support.* The results undoubtedly corroborate the above, demonstrating a large disparity between students in the two groups.

Language anxiety is a negative emotion, inextricably connected with the foreign language learning process. Following the anxiety model proposed by Eysenck (1997), its deteriorating effect on language acquisition takes place in a three-directional manner regarding the student's cognitive processing. First of all, high-anxiety learners selectively attend to stimuli (*attention* bias); that is, they pay attention only to those aspects of the situation that are threatening and ignore others. In the case of the language learning process, which is a threatening experience, they view this situation as generally dangerous, and even positive incentives are disregarded, which enhances the potential threat. Secondly, they interpret ambiguous stimuli as dangerous (*interpretative attention* bias). This means that when stimuli connected with language learning are not overtly positive, they are understood as potentially unsafe. Thirdly, highly

anxious students tend to remember only the negative experiences they encountered in the classroom (*negative memory* bias). In this way, many features of the process of foreign language acquisition are considered dangerous – and are later remembered as such. In the course of time, the negative reactions to L2 are associated with the language, whose overall acquisition process is then perceived as sinister.

Within this threatening context any source of backup is of great value. Consequently, the finding that the negative emotions of anxiety identified with the foreign language learning process are strongly related to the student's perceived teacher support in a negative manner is not surprising. The results of the study undoubtedly demonstrate that these harmful experiences encountered in the foreign language learning process are mediated by the powerful force of teacher support. It seems that all the dimensions of teacher support play an adequately important function so as to lessen the negative impact of anxiety on the effectiveness of the FL study process. It follows that overt signs of trust and empathy on the part of the teacher promote the student's feelings of comfort, ease, and security, leading to lowering language anxiety levels, and making the language learning situation less stressful.

More specifically, the perceived levels of teacher support related to the instrumentality component reveal that the student with high teacher support is able to take advantage of the time, skills, and involvement of the most significant agent, i.e., the teacher who controls the FL classroom. In this way such learners are likely get the assurance that they will get the desired language learning results while working actively and gradually more autonomously with an expert in the field. The instrumental skills of an experienced FL teacher can enable their students to take advantage of the instructor's involvement and expertise.

Teacher support expressed at the information level has the function of guiding the student and giving advice on how to manage the language learning process successfully. Thanks to it, students with high teacher support are able to organize and transform information, enabling them to cope with emotional and cognitive challenges evoked in second language acquisition. This is why they appear to be skillful language learners in terms of self-perception of their language skills and final grades. As this type of support is most highly reported in empirical research (Malecki & Demaray, 2003), it can be inferred that in the foreign language learning process the teacher's knowledge concerning the subject matter and the ways of teaching also are of great value.

The appraisal domain of teacher support is connected with evaluative feedback students get on the basis of their performance. This means that on the basis of teacher feedback, students with high teacher support cognitively evaluate the language learning situation in terms of demands that do not ex-

ceed their resources. This is why, even in the face of dangers connected with the foreign language learning process, the performance feedback they get from the significant other (the teacher) enables them to solve problems and continue pursuing the ultimate goal of language mastery. As foreign language learning requires constant feedback, allowing for improving both competence and performance, such backup is of key importance.

The emotional aspect of support is reported to be a major individual predictor of students' social skills and academic competence, especially in the case of primary school children (Malecki & Demaray, 2003). This finding suggests that students rely on their teachers' support not only for information or evaluation, but also for emotional backing. Nevertheless, it may be speculated that the need for emotional support may decline with age, when young adult students who are more able to control their emotions are more likely to turn to their instructors more for information, appraisal, and instrumentality support. Yet, this dimension of teacher support may still appear critical even for older students due to the negative impact of the language learning process on student emotions. From this point of view, teacher support may appear indispensable for the ultimate success of the language learner.

Generally speaking, teacher support experienced in the FL classroom context indeed plays the role of a buffer between stressful events evoking language anxiety levels and the language learner. Students who have a feeling that they can count on the instructor's help, advice, assistance, or backing manage the learning process more successfully. This is visible mostly in their self-assessment of the four language skills – speaking, listening, reading and writing. The level of these skills evaluated from the student's own perspective shows that those who feel supported and safe are able to evaluate their own level of knowledge, performance, and understanding significantly higher in comparison to their peers who feel abandoned and endangered in the same environment. The finding corroborates the importance of teacher support for academic development of students. High self-perception of one's abilities is strongly related to future success, because self-assessment of academic abilities is found to be sufficiently accurate to reflect achievement at school (Pullmann & Allik, 2008). It follows that students high judgment of their own performance reflects their feelings of security and confidence in their teacher as a competent guide in the academic domain of language learning. By contrast, low self-assessment of language abilities provides evidence of feelings of apprehension in those who feel deserted in the foreign language classroom. These feelings may be rooted in students' perceptions of resentment and dislike of their teachers; they may also believe that teachers are unjust, indifferent to them, or overly demanding.

Although there is a good level of agreement between students' and the teacher's estimates of student abilities observed in the literature of the field (e.g., Sullivan & Hall, 1997), the study results prove that school attainment operationalized as final grades shows even a greater disparity between the groups of students with high and low levels of teacher support, when compared to the relationship between self-assessment of their four skills and teacher support levels. The reason for this finding can be attributed to the fact that the student's perception of teacher support may be filtered by the fact that for them grades represent the teacher's subjective estimates of their abilities. Those who obtain higher grades are likely to have a conviction that they have their teacher's approval. Therefore, their higher teacher support levels also demonstrate a good rapport between them and their instructor, which is a valuable indicator for measuring teacher effectiveness (Lowman, 1994).

On the other hand, low grades may induce students' beliefs in their teacher's dissatisfaction with their language achievement, and, consequently lead to their perception of lower levels of teacher support. This observation corroborates results of research on students' perceptions of teacher behavior as unsupportive of student wellness through not helping them to improve their grades (Suldo et al., 2009).

The research failed to give evidence on the role of the variables of gender and residential location in perceived teacher support levels. None of them turned out to be significant in the case of the cohort sampled for the study. A reason may be that the participants were students in their first grade of the secondary grammar school. Their foreign language experience within this educational context was relatively new, so negative emotions evoked in the language learning process were augmented by the newness of the surroundings, similar for all the students, irrespective of their gender or place of residence. On this basis it may be speculated that language anxiety must have affected them in the same way, which influenced the obtained results. Obviously, given that the participants' secondary school experiences were more substantial, with growing familiarity with the surroundings and teacher demands, the role of these variables might be more considerable for explaining the role of teacher support in the foreign language learning process.

Recommendations and Limitations of the Study

Concluding, the difficult language learning situation in novel surroundings is an obvious threat to students' well-being, giving way to strong perceptions of language anxiety and other negative emotions disturbing second language acquisition. In such circumstances students are very likely to turn for support to

significant others, such as teachers, in order to lessen the negative effects of language anxiety, as it generally happens in the case of students with above-average levels of anxiety (Suldo, Shaunessy, Michalowski, & Shaffer, 2008b). Results of the present study demonstrate the importance of teacher supportive behaviors whose aim is not only to boost students' academic achievement, but, more importantly, to achieve "social-emotional success at the classroom, school, and community level" (Cummings et al., 2004, p. 251).

In the case of older adolescents teachers can be supportive primarily when they acknowledge and boost students' academic success. This can be done through behaviors that display sensitivity and responsiveness to the entire class's understanding of academic material (e.g., giving details of how language mastery evolves or explaining why a rule exists), showing interest in an individual student's progress (having personal contacts with all individuals in the classroom), and using diverse teaching strategies (e.g., making use of learning modalities – visual, auditory, tactile or kinesthetic). Aside from that, the role of evaluative productive feedback on student performance is of particular importance (e.g., via being positive and constructive about the student's progress assessed in small steps). Nevertheless, most importantly, the teacher should support the student's psychological needs (e.g., autonomy, competence, relatedness), interests, preferences, and values. Here, the classroom atmosphere should encourage students to feel that they are cared for and treated fairly (e.g., students are allowed to ask questions or show imperfection, while the teacher should display a pleasant disposition and respect for students). As these emotionally supportive behaviors from teachers are strongly related to students' school outcomes, taking good care of boosting students' wellness in the FL classroom is an effective way of combating negative effects of language anxiety, and, in fact, of inducing more effective language study.

The study is not free from limitations that must be addressed. First of all, its design precludes a discussion of causality (that is, it is still unclear if high levels of teacher support lead to lower levels of language anxiety or if it is language anxiety that leads one to seek teacher support). As well, the tool measuring teacher support, *the School Climate-Social Action-Instrumental* (Griffith, 1995), does not allow for a thorough investigation of the relevance of particular support types (instrumentality, appraisal, emotional and information) for examining language anxiety. Therefore, more research is required on the interplay of teacher support and language anxiety. A deeper insight into this phenomenon will allow for constructing more effective teacher training programs that would enable all students to approach the task of language learning with more enjoyment than dread.

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