What is this research about?
Recent studies have raised concerns about the writing achievement of minority French-speaking students (students who attend school in provinces where the majority of the population speaks a language other than French), when compared with French-speaking and English speaking students who live in majority environments (in which the majority of the population speaks the same language as the student). This study examines the causes that students attribute to their writing successes and failures in minority and majority French-speaking Canadian provinces, including Ontario.

What did the researchers do?
Data was collected from the School Achievement Indicators Program (SAIP), developed by the Council of Ministers of Education of Canada (CMEC) to assess the performance of randomly selected students (between 13 to 16 years old) in both French and English schools across the country. In particular, the study utilized raw data from question 23 on the 2002 SAIP Writing Assessment III, which asked students to indicate the level of causality for their successes and failures for 15, 4-point Likert-scale statements.

What you need to know:
Results from this study indicate that French speaking students living in environments where the majority of people are English speaking, do not perform as well as majority language speakers and tend to demonstrate a learned helplessness in relation to their perceptions of the causes of both their successes and their failures. Interventions that target the self-esteem and confidence of minority French-speaking students are recommended by the researchers. The research also suggest that schools with minority French speakers increase their outreach programs to the surrounding French-speaking community.
For example, one of the statements read, “When I get a low mark in a French language arts assignment, it is most likely because I did not study hard enough”, where students indicated a response that could range from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Overall academic achievement of the students was assessed using a sample writing task from the assessment that was scored on a 5-point scale (low to high). 16-year-old French speaking students from four minority provinces (New Brunswick, Manitoba, Ontario, and Nova Scotia) and one French majority province (Quebec) were included in the study for a total of 3874 participants (46% boys, 54% girls).

**What did the researchers find?**
Statistical analysis of the scores on the sample writing task showed a significant difference between the two groups, with the French majority student group scoring significantly higher than the minority group. Of the 15 likert-scale items, it was found that students identified 9 of the items as having a significant impact on their achievement (either positive or negative) including the quality of instruction, the amount of hard work they did, and the teacher’s grading practices.

These results indicated that students are more likely to succeed when they attribute their success to either natural talent, working hard and writing on their own time, as opposed to students who link their success to studying at home or to good luck.

In terms of student’s perceptions of the causes of their failures, students who link failure with not studying enough, hard marking, and bad luck are less likely to find success.

When broken down along minority and majority lines, French-speaking students in majority environments tended to link their successes and failures to the level of course difficulty while minority students tended to identify studying at home, working hard, lenient marking and good luck as contributing to their successes and not studying hard, hard marking, bad luck, and poor instruction as causes of failure.

The authors suggest that these results indicate that French-speaking minority students do not perceive themselves as being in control of their achievement as they tended to blame outside sources for both their success and their failure. This idea is troublesome when French
speaking minority students do work hard but do not find success, as can be the case in challenging writing activities.

How can you use this research?
There are a number of implications for teachers and administrators who work with minority French students. Teachers and administrators may wish to consider:

- Designing activities that will allow minority students to experience success and build a sense of accomplishment. This might include using various differentiated instructional activities that are tied to the interests and strengths of the students in a particular classroom;

- Developing partnerships with the surrounding French community and encouraging members of the community to become engaged in the school and in the lives of French speaking students through mentorship, tutoring and after-school programs.

Original article:
To learn more about this study, we invite you to read the original research article:


About the researchers
At the time of this study: Yamina Bouchamma and Claire Lapointe were both professors with the Department of Educational Administration and Foundations at Laval University in Quebec.

Keywords:
French-speaking students, minority, student achievement, student success
About this summary

The Ontario Education Research Exchange (OERE) is a project of the Knowledge Network for Applied Education Research, an Ontario network promoting the use of research in education. The OERE’s clear language summaries of academic research aim to support this mandate.

This summary reflects findings from this study only and is not necessarily representative of the broader body of literature on this subject. Please consult the original document for complete details about this research. In case of any disagreement, the original document should be understood as authoritative.

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