

The effect of perception of teacher characteristics on Spanish EFL Learners' Anxiety and Enjoyment

What this research was about and why it is important

Previous research has shown that students' Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) and Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) are linked to both learner-internal and learner-external variables. FLCA seems to originate more from the learner's personality but FLE seems to be linked to social environmental factors such as peers, teacher and teacher behavior. The question in the present study was thus to find out what specific characteristics of the teacher, as perceived by learners, were linked to levels of FLE and FLCA. This study used an online questionnaire that was aimed at Spanish English Foreign Language (EFL) learners. Participants reported how they felt in their EFL classes and answered a set of questions about their teacher. The study showed that teacher characteristics and teacher behavior had a much stronger effect on FLE than on FLCA. The pedagogical implication is that teachers have the power to boost FLE in their classes but can do much less to reduce FLCA. Rather than combatting FLCA, they should therefore seek to fuel learners' FLE as this typically leads to better performance.

What the researchers did

- Participants were recruited through emails to Spanish colleagues and informal contacts asking them to forward the link to colleagues and their students.
- Participants were 210 adult Spanish students of English as a foreign language, aged between 18-63 (mean age = 26). All had Spanish as an L1.
- Learners provided background information and filled out a number of Likert-scale items that allowed the calculation of FLE and FLCA in their EFL classes.

What the researchers found

- Participants who experienced high levels of FLE typically suffered less from FLCA.
- Levels of FLE were significantly higher among participants with teachers who were L1 users of English compared to participants with teachers who were foreign language users of English.
- Levels of FLE and FLCA were unrelated to teacher's gender.
- Teachers' friendliness boosted FLE but a very strong foreign accent depressed FLE.
- Participants experienced more FLCA with younger teachers, very strict teachers and teachers who did not use the FL much in class.
- The effect of teacher characteristics on FLE was more than twice as strong and the effect on FLCA.

Things to consider

- The finding that participants reported more FLE with English L1 teachers than English FL teachers should be interpreted with caution as the effect was not very strong and half of the participants did not answer the question. The cause might not be the fact that the teacher was not a L1 user of English but may have lacked confidence or willingness to use English in class which made it harder to create enjoyable classroom environments, wherein students are encouraged to use English to complete a range of meaningful, interesting and challenging tasks.
- Teachers' friendly behavior and a not too atrocious foreign accent combined with frequent use of the FL in class and avoidance of overly strict behavior might help them hit the emotional sweet spot of their learners.

Materials available on <https://iris-database.org>

How to cite this summary: Dewaele, J.-M., Franco Magdalena, A. & Saito, K. (2019). The effect of perception of teacher characteristics on Spanish EFL Learners' Anxiety and Enjoyment. *OASIS Summary* of Dewaele, Franco Magdalena, & Saito (2019) in *The Modern Language Journal*. <https://oasis-database.org>

This summary has a [CC BY-NC-SA license](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).