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The Influence of a Teacher's Enthusiasm on the Teaching and Learning of English in High School Students

La influencia del entusiasmo del profesor en la enseñanza y el aprendizaje del inglés en los alumnos de secundaria

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ABSTRACT

Teacher enthusiasm can shape the way students experience an English class, particularly in terms of how motivated and comfortable they feel when participating. Although this topic has received increasing attention in EFL research, less is known about how secondary school students themselves experience enthusiastic teaching. This qualitative study examined the perceptions of ten students from a public secondary school in Quevedo, Ecuador. Data were gathered through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and open-ended questionnaires and examined through thematic analysis. Four themes were identified: emotional transmission and motivation, positive energy and willingness to learn, dynamic activities as evidence of enthusiasm, and respect and inclusion as conditions for participation. The students did not merely associate enthusiasm with the energy the teacher displayed in class. They also noted the teacher's preparation, how the teacher motivated them to participate, the teacher's willingness to listen to their thoughts, how the teacher responded respectfully to mistakes, and the use of meaningful activities. These experiences were linked to greater confidence and a greater willingness to participate in class. The findings indicate that students perceived the teacher's enthusiasm through emotional support, classroom activities, and daily interaction with them.

Keywords: teacher enthusiasm, English as a foreign language, student engagement, classroom emotions, qualitative research

RESUMEN

El entusiasmo del profesor puede influir en la forma en que los alumnos viven una clase de inglés, sobre todo en lo que respecta a su motivación y a la comodidad con la que se sienten a la hora de participar. Aunque este tema ha recibido una atención cada vez mayor en la investigación sobre la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL), se sabe menos sobre cómo viven los propios alumnos de secundaria una enseñanza entusiasta. Este estudio cualitativo analizó las percepciones de diez alumnos de un instituto público de Quevedo, Ecuador. Los datos se recopilaban mediante observaciones en el aula, entrevistas semiestructuradas y cuestionarios abiertos, y se analizaron mediante un análisis temático. Se identificaron cuatro temas: transmisión emocional y motivación, energía positiva y disposición para aprender, actividades dinámicas como muestra de entusiasmo, y respeto e inclusión como condiciones para la participación. Los alumnos no se limitaron a asociar el entusiasmo con la energía que el profesor mostraba en clase. También destacaron la preparación del profesor, la forma en que les motivaba a participar, su disposición a escuchar sus opiniones, cómo respondía con respeto a los errores y el uso de actividades significativas. Estas experiencias se relacionaron con una mayor confianza y disposición a participar en clase. Los resultados indican que los alumnos percibían el entusiasmo del profesor a través del apoyo emocional, las actividades en el aula y la interacción diaria con ellos.

Palabras clave: entusiasmo docente, inglés como lengua extranjera, participación estudiantil, emociones en el aula, investigación cualitativa

INTRODUCTION

For many secondary school students, the English classroom is one of the few places where they have the opportunity to use the language. Therefore, what happens in these classes goes beyond the content being taught. The learning experience also involves the students' confidence, emotions, and willingness to participate. Positive Psychology has drawn attention to enjoyment, interest, supportive relationships, and other emotional factors that can facilitate language learning (Dewaele, Chen, et al., 2019; Richards, 2020).

Teachers play an important role in these emotional experiences. Classroom practices, friendliness, and teacher behavior have been associated with foreign language enjoyment and anxiety among adolescent learners (Dewaele et al., 2018; Dewaele, Franco Magdalena, & Saito, 2019). One relevant teacher-related factor is enthusiasm, understood as genuine interest in teaching together with its visible expression through voice, gestures, movement, encouragement, preparation, and interaction (Frenzel et al., 2009; Peng, 2021).

Enthusiastic teaching does not simply mean entertaining students. It involves communicating that the subject and students' learning matter. Perceived enthusiasm has been linked to enjoyment, engagement, interest, and favorable attitudes toward learning (Dewaele & Li, 2021; Gaspard & Lauermann, 2021; Lazarides et al., 2019). It may also reduce boredom when students perceive that activities are meaningful and that the teacher supports their participation (Cui et al., 2017; Li, 2022).

Despite these findings, much of the available evidence comes from university populations and quantitative designs. Such studies identify relationships among enthusiasm, emotions, and engagement, but they provide less detail about how secondary school students interpret enthusiastic teaching in everyday classroom situations. Qualitative evidence is therefore needed to understand which behaviors students notice and how these behaviors affect their motivation, confidence, participation, and willingness to use English.

This study addressed two questions: (1) How does teacher enthusiasm influence students' emotions and learning experiences in English classes? and (2) What teacher behaviors and classroom practices lead students to perceive an English teacher as enthusiastic or unenthusiastic?

Literature Review

Teacher enthusiasm in educational settings

Teacher enthusiasm has been described as an affective and behavioral characteristic reflected in teachers' enjoyment of teaching and the ways this positive attitude is communicated during classroom instruction. Frenzel et al. (2009) explain that enthusiasm becomes visible through verbal and nonverbal behaviors such as tone of voice, facial expressions, gestures, movement, and interaction with students. Peng (2021) further argues that enthusiasm is also expressed through teachers' instructional practices, encouragement, and commitment to students'

learning. In addition, Dewaele and Li (2021) showed that students' perceptions of teacher enthusiasm are positively associated with enjoyment and engagement and negatively associated with boredom, highlighting the importance of enthusiasm as a meaningful aspect of the language learning experience.

Because enthusiasm is perceived by students, its expression may vary across lessons and contexts. Gaspard and Lauermann (2021) found lesson- and classroom-specific variation in teacher enthusiasm and student engagement. Lazarides et al. (2019) also associated enthusiasm with the development of student interest and perceived teacher support. These findings suggest that enthusiasm is not only a fixed personality trait; it is also reflected in the teacher's choices and interactions during particular lessons.

Emotions, enjoyment, and boredom in EFL learning

Positive Psychology has broadened language-learning research by examining how enjoyment, confidence, curiosity, and supportive relationships interact with unpleasant emotions such as anxiety and boredom (Dewaele, Chen, et al., 2019). Among secondary school learners, both teacher and learner variables influence emotional experiences, showing that classroom emotions are not determined solely by individual personality or proficiency (Dewaele et al., 2018).

Foreign language enjoyment may arise when learners experience progress, meaningful challenge, successful communication, or supportive interaction. Boredom, in contrast, may emerge when activities are repetitive, unclear, overly difficult, too easy, or disconnected from students' interests. Li (2022) found that enjoyment and boredom were related to both learner and teacher variables, while Cui et al. (2017) showed that enthusiasm may reduce boredom through autonomy support and task value.

Song (2022) argued that enthusiasm is more likely to reduce boredom when it is accompanied by organized explanations, understandable instructions, and appropriate examples. An energetic presentation alone may not create a positive learning experience if students do not understand the task or its purpose.

Enthusiasm and student engagement

Engagement includes behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and social participation. In language classrooms, it may be observed through attention, effort, persistence, interaction, and willingness to communicate. Dewaele and Li (2021) found that perceived teacher enthusiasm was positively related to enjoyment and engagement and negatively related to boredom. Enjoyment and boredom partly explained the relationship between enthusiasm and social-behavioral engagement.

Zhao and Yang (2022) reported a similar pattern among high school EFL students: perceived teacher support was connected with academic engagement through enjoyment and

boredom. These quantitative findings are relevant to the present study, but they do not fully explain how adolescents recognize enthusiasm or why particular teacher behaviors matter to them.

Students’ perceptions and research gap

Students may interpret enthusiasm differently. Some may notice expressive voice and movement, while others may value patience, encouragement, respectful correction, creativity, or careful explanations. Tran and Le (2022) found that university EFL students associated enthusiastic teaching with positive attitudes and participation. Richards (2020) further emphasized that respectful teacher-student interaction can influence learners’ confidence and willingness to communicate.

Existing research therefore supports links among enthusiasm, enjoyment, boredom, support, and engagement (Peng, 2021), but fewer studies have examined how secondary school students describe these connections in their own words. This study addressed that gap through interviews, open-ended questionnaires, and non-participant observation, allowing students’ accounts to be compared with visible classroom practices.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research approach and design

A qualitative descriptive-interpretive design was used to understand students’ perceptions, emotions, and classroom experiences rather than to measure causal relationships. This approach was appropriate because the phenomenon depended on personal meaning, social interaction, and interpretation within a specific educational context (Levitt, 2021).

Context and participants

The study took place in one English class at a public secondary school in Quevedo, Ecuador. Ten students from the same class participated: nine females and one male, aged 14 to 17. Participants were selected purposively because they had attended the lessons observed during the study and could describe their own experiences with the teacher and classroom activities. Following Palinkas et al. (2015), purposive sampling was considered appropriate for selecting participants with direct experience of the phenomenon under study. The purpose of this small sample was to obtain detailed accounts of one classroom context rather than to represent a larger student population.

Table 1
Characteristics of the participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	English proficiency	Data sources
Ariana	Female	14	Basic (A1)	Interview, questionnaire, observation
Camila	Female	15	Basic (A1)	Interview, questionnaire, observation
Daniela	Female	15	Basic (A1)	Interview, questionnaire, observation
Valeria	Female	16	Basic (A1)	Interview, questionnaire, observation
Natalia	Female	16	Below A1	Interview, questionnaire, observation
Mateo	Male	17	Basic (A1)	Interview, questionnaire, observation

Lucía	Female	14	Basic (A1)	Interview, questionnaire, observation
Gabriela	Female	15	Below A1	Interview, questionnaire, observation
Sara	Female	16	Basic (A1)	Interview, questionnaire, observation
Martina	Female	17	Basic (A1)	Interview, questionnaire, observation

Note. English proficiency was estimated according to students' classroom performance and the teacher's general assessment during the data collection period. Participants had not taken an official standardized English proficiency test.

Data collection

Data were collected over eight consecutive weeks through non-participant classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and open-ended questionnaires.

Observation

Classroom observations were carried out over eight consecutive weeks, with two English lessons observed each week, for a total of sixteen lessons. During this period, the researcher observed the teacher as well as the ten participating students. Notes were taken on how the teacher expressed enthusiasm through tone of voice, facial expressions, movement around the classroom, encouragement, feedback, activities, and interaction with the group. Students' responses were also observed, especially their attention, participation, willingness to answer, and involvement in the activities. This made it possible to compare what students later reported in the interviews and questionnaires with what occurred during the lessons.

Interviews

After the observation period, individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with the ten participants. Two guiding questions explored how students perceived teacher enthusiasm, how it influenced their emotions and learning, and which classroom behaviors made them perceive a teacher as enthusiastic or unenthusiastic. Follow-up questions were used to clarify or expand participants' responses when necessary.

Open-ended questionnaires

Finally, all ten participants completed an open-ended questionnaire consisting of five questions about teacher enthusiasm, classroom participation, motivation, teacher behaviors, and the importance of enthusiasm in English lessons. The written responses complemented the interviews by allowing students to reflect on their experiences individually.

Data analysis and trustworthiness

The data were examined through thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Xu & Zammit, 2020). Interview transcripts, questionnaire responses, and observation notes were read repeatedly, coded, and grouped into themes. The analysis combined an inductive process, which allowed ideas to emerge from the data, with a deductive consideration of concepts such as enthusiasm, enjoyment, boredom, confidence, and engagement.

Trustworthiness was strengthened through triangulation of the three data sources, consistent procedures, and an organized record of codes and interpretive decisions (Nowell et al.,

2017). Reflexivity was used to examine the researcher's assumptions and to avoid treating visible energy as the only form of enthusiasm. These procedures supported credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transparency (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Ethical considerations

Authorization was obtained from the educational institution before beginning the eight-week study. The students were informed of the research objective and the tasks in which they would be involved. Before their information was included in the study, consent forms were signed, and participation was voluntary throughout the entire process. Participants had the option to withdraw at any time if they wished. In the manuscript and in the transcripts, their real names were replaced with pseudonyms; the data collected were used solely for research purposes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Several recurring themes emerged from the students' experiences when comparing the information gathered through classroom observations, questionnaires, and interviews. They often commented on the atmosphere and energy they felt in class, but they also mentioned what they did and how the teacher interacted with them. Four themes were identified based on these recurring ideas: emotional transmission and motivation, positive energy and willingness to learn, dynamic activities as evidence of enthusiasm, and respect, inclusion, and confidence to participate. The researcher translated the quotes in this section from Spanish to English and used pseudonyms.

Emotional transmission and motivation

One pattern that appeared repeatedly in the three sources was the connection students made between the teacher's attitude and their own motivation. During the classroom observations, this connection could also be seen in their behavior. When the teacher spoke with energy, moved around the classroom, invited answers, and reacted positively to students' contributions, more students paid attention and became involved in the lesson. In lessons where the teacher appeared tired or interacted less with the group, participation was noticeably lower. Similar ideas later appeared in both the interviews and the open-ended questionnaires.

These observations were consistent with the students' interview responses. Ariana explained that the teacher's positive attitude directly influenced her motivation to learn.

When a teacher enters the classroom motivated, cheerful, and willing to teach, the same emotion is transmitted to me, and it completely encourages me to learn (Ariana, interview, translated by the researcher).

Lucia expressed a similar perception:

When the teacher arrives motivated and willing to work, I also feel motivated and eager to learn because I know that the teacher brings new things to teach us (Lucia, interview, translated by the researcher).

Responses from the open-ended questionnaires reinforced these experiences, as several students described enthusiasm as an attitude that encouraged participation and created a more positive learning environment. These findings are consistent with Frenzel et al. (2009), who explained that teachers' emotions can be transmitted through observable classroom behaviors. Likewise, Dewaele and Li (2021) found that students who perceived greater teacher enthusiasm reported higher levels of enjoyment and engagement. The present findings provide qualitative evidence of how these emotional experiences were interpreted by secondary school students in their everyday English classes.

Positive energy and willingness to learn

Participants also associated teacher enthusiasm with preparation, new content, and an active classroom atmosphere. In her interview, Camila focused particularly on what she expected from the lesson. When the teacher appeared motivated and prepared, she felt more interested in learning because she expected something new or different in class. In contrast, a tired or less involved attitude made her think that the lesson might be less interesting.

The comments from other students echoed what Camila said. For them, it wasn't enough for the teacher to simply show enthusiasm; it was also important to see that the teacher was interested in the lesson and had prepared something meaningful for them. This seemed to spark greater interest in what they were going to do and a greater willingness to participate. However, based on these responses, it cannot be concluded that the teacher's enthusiasm improved the students' English proficiency, since this study did not measure their linguistic performance. These responses do, however, show how students linked an enthusiastic teacher to greater participation in class. Similar relationships between enthusiastic teaching, attitudes, participation, enjoyment, and boredom have been reported by Tran and Le (2022) and Li (2022).

Dynamic activities as evidence of enthusiasm

Open-ended questionnaires showed that students recognized enthusiasm through instructional practices. Valeria associated it with completing sentences at the board, while Daniela emphasized word games in which all students had to think and participate.

One of the games that makes me feel that a teacher is motivated is the word game, where everyone thinks and participates to find the correct word in English (Daniela, open-ended questionnaire, translated by the researcher).

Observation similarly showed more participation when students moved, responded, worked with words, or contributed ideas. This supports Peng's (2021) affective-behavioral view of enthusiasm and Song's (2022) argument that enthusiasm and clarity can reduce boredom. The students did not value games only as entertainment; they valued activities that combined enjoyment with a clear learning purpose. This interpretation is consistent with Cui et al. (2017), who emphasized task value and meaningful involvement.

Respect, inclusion, and confidence to participate

Students also interpreted enthusiasm through respectful communication, organization, equal treatment, and acceptance of mistakes. Natalia associated the teacher's interest with appropriate language and an organized, participatory classroom. Mateo emphasized that equal treatment and encouragement helped him speak even when he might make errors.

By including and treating everyone as having the same potential, the teacher encourages me to participate whether I make mistakes or not, and allows me to express my ideas (Mateo, open-ended questionnaire, translated by the researcher).

This theme broadened enthusiasm beyond visible energy. In an EFL classroom, respectful responses can reduce the fear of embarrassment that limits communication (Richards, 2020). The finding also supports Zhao and Yang (2022), who connected teacher support with engagement, and Dewaele, Franco Magdalena, and Saito (2019), who related teacher characteristics to learners' emotional experiences. In the students' accounts, enthusiasm was also present when they felt respected, supported, and comfortable enough to share their ideas in class.

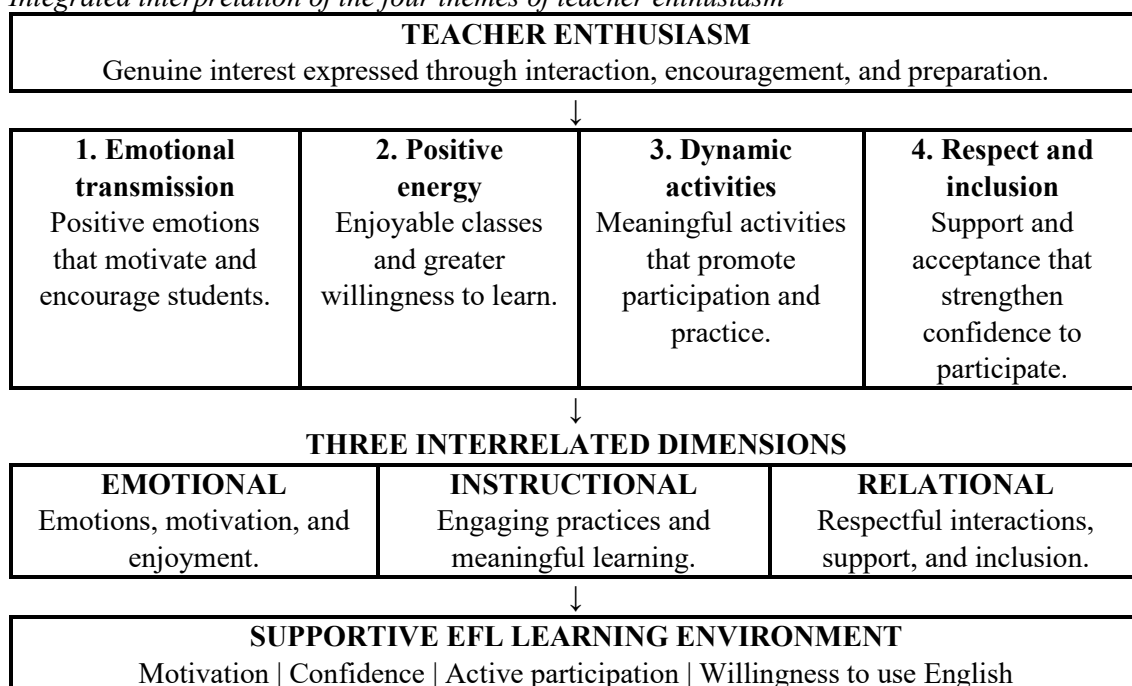
Integrated interpretation of the findings

When analyzing the three sources of information simultaneously, it became apparent that the students did not characterize enthusiasm as a single aspect of the teacher's behavior. They recognized it based on the teacher's behavior, preparation, classroom activities, motivational words, and the way the teacher addressed the students. These components were closely interrelated in their responses. Students described themselves as more interested, confident, and willing to participate when classes included relevant activities and respectful treatment. On the other hand, repetition, fatigue, and limited interaction were associated with classes that were perceived as less engaging.

Within this framework, the teacher's enthusiasm was reflected in pedagogical, emotional, and relational aspects. This interpretation is consistent with studies that have linked student engagement and enjoyment to enthusiasm (Dewaele & Li, 2021; Peng, 2021). At the same time, this research sheds light on how secondary school students learning English at an Ecuadorian public school described these relationships.

Figure 1

Integrated interpretation of the four themes of teacher enthusiasm



Note. The figure summarizes the relationships among the four themes identified through the thematic analysis of interviews, open-ended questionnaires, and classroom observations.

Source. Authors' own elaboration based on the study findings.

CONCLUSIONS

This study showed that the participating students understood teacher enthusiasm in a broader way than simply being energetic in front of the class. For them, an enthusiastic teacher was also someone who prepared meaningful activities, encouraged participation, communicated respectfully, and showed genuine interest in students' learning.

The students linked these behaviors on the part of the teacher to how they felt during English classes, based on the three sources of information. Essential to their confidence was feeling supported and knowing for certain that their mistakes would be treated with respect. They also described the interactive activities as opportunities to participate more and use English in the classroom.

This research does not allow us to conclude that enthusiasm directly improved the students' English proficiency, since linguistic performance was not assessed. However, the findings reveal how these ten students experienced enthusiasm in their daily classes and the reasons why this factor was significant for their desire to engage and commit to learning.

Limitations and Recommendations

This study was conducted with a small group of ten students from a single public secondary school; therefore, the findings represent a specific educational context and should not be generalized to other populations. In addition, the qualitative design focused on understanding

students' perceptions rather than measuring the effect of teacher enthusiasm on academic achievement.

Future research could examine this issue with students from other schools and educational settings. In addition, it would be beneficial to work with larger groups or to combine observations and interviews with quantitative measures to examine the phenomenon from a different perspective. Teachers' experiences could also be incorporated to understand how their enthusiasm varies across different classes and over time. Regarding teacher training, the results also highlight how crucial it is to consider not only instructional strategies but also how teachers communicate with their students, how they respond to students' mistakes, and how they build supportive relationships in the classroom.

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