



## Foreign Language Enjoyment in EFL Instruction: Instructors' Perspectives and Practices at a Korean University

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### Abstract

This qualitative study explores EFL instructors' perceptions of foreign language enjoyment (FLE) and the classroom practices they use to enhance it at a Korean university. Drawing on Fredrickson's broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions and informed by previous research on FLE, the study investigates how instructors envisage enjoyment in the language classroom and the strategies they use to increase it. Data were collected from 15 EFL instructors through online demographic surveys and semi-structured Zoom interviews. Thematic analysis revealed three main themes: varying definitions of FLE, the positive emotional and performance-related effects of FLE, and diverse instructional strategies for promoting FLE. While instructors held differing views on what constitutes FLE, they agreed that it had a positive impact on learners' attention, motivation, and language development. Common classroom strategies included using relevant content, incorporating technology, encouraging student collaboration, and showing enthusiasm while teaching. The findings underscore the complexity and significance of FLE in language learning and suggest the need for teacher training that integrates FLE-enhancing strategies. The study highlights the importance of creating positive emotional environments in EFL settings to support learner engagement and success.

## INTRODUCTION

There is a long history of researchers examining how emotions influence the learning of a foreign language. For many years, research on how emotions affect foreign language learning focused on how negative emotions such as foreign language anxiety (FLA) impacted foreign language learning. The study of emotions in foreign language learning underwent significant changes due to the positive psychology movement, particularly Fredrickson's broaden-and-build theory (2001). Positive psychologists believed that general psychology focused too much on negative emotions and not enough effort was spent looking at the impact of positive emotions (Dewaele & Alfawzan, 2018). Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) stated that the broaden-and-build theory explains how positive emotions can counteract the harmful effects of negative emotions, while also promoting exploration and play, which in turn can lead to new experiences and more efficient learning. In designing their study, Dewaele and MacIntyre identified enjoyment as the positive emotion on which they would focus. Dewaele and MacIntyre used the positive emotion of foreign language enjoyment (FLE) to create the Foreign Language Enjoyment Scale (FLES).

Numerous researchers have since investigated the role that FLE plays in the language learning process, with many of them using the FLES in their research (Dewaele & Alfawzan, 2018; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2019; Li et al., 2018; Ma & Cho, 2020; Wang & Jiang, 2022). A meta-analysis on the effects of FLE revealed that it is a positive psychological variable with the potential to enhance learning in the foreign language classroom (Botes et al., 2022). While most studies on FLE have focused on learners' emotional experiences and academic outcomes, relatively little research has explored the perspectives of instructors who play a central role in shaping the classroom environment and influencing students' emotional engagement. Understanding how instructors define and promote FLE in their teaching offers valuable insight into how enjoyment is cultivated through pedagogical choices. By focusing on EFL instructors in a Korean university context, this study contributes to the field by highlighting how teacher perceptions and practices can help foster FLE and, by extension, support L2 learning. This study also aims to bridge the gap between theoretical models of enjoyment and the everyday realities of classroom instruction. The research was guided by the following questions:

Research Question 1: What are instructors' perceptions of foreign language enjoyment at a Korean university?

Research Question 2: What practices do instructors use to increase levels of foreign language enjoyment at a Korean university?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In recent years, there has been a perceptible change in language learning research, from focusing on negative emotions, such as anxiety, to examining the effects of positive emotions in the classroom. One of the main positive emotions that has been the topic of research is FLE. Studies have shown that FLE can play an important role in students' success in language learning (Botes et al., 2022; Dewaele & Alfawzan, 2018; Gordon, 2022; Li & Wei, 2022). Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014), who introduced the construct, describe FLE as a positive emotional experience that arises from stimulating learning activities, supportive peer and teacher relationships, and a relaxed, low-anxiety classroom environment. They view it as a complex, context-sensitive emotion that is generally associated with moments of achievement, interest, and social interaction, and shaped by both individual and environmental factors.

Since the development of the FLES by Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014), many studies have investigated what causes FLE, how it affects learners, and which factors influence its development. This review of the literature looks at the main causes of FLE, the emotional and performance-related effects it has on learners, and the variables that shape how it develops in different classroom environments. In this study, a distinction is made between the terms causes and variables when discussing FLE. Causes are understood to be immediate, observable factors that directly lead to feelings of enjoyment in the classroom. These can include things like teacher behavior, classroom activities, or working in a group. They are usually related to specific moments and are affected by what is happening in the classroom at the time. On the other hand, variables refer to broader, more stable background factors that shape how likely a learner is to experience FLE. These include things like personality traits, cultural background, or previous learning experiences. For example, a teacher's praise during a difficult task may directly cause enjoyment, while a learner's cultural background might influence the activities they expect to do in class. This distinction is used here to help organize the discussion, but it is recognized that the literature does not always separate these terms in the same way. The aim of this literature review is to provide a foundation for understanding

how language instructors can recognize and foster FLE in their own teaching practice.

## Causes of Foreign Language Enjoyment

An essential aspect for foreign language educators to understand FLE is discovering what causes learners to experience enjoyment in their classrooms. FLE is something that a learner feels due to a variety of learner-internal and learner-external factors (Li et al., 2018). Li et al. (2018) discovered that the causes of FLE could be divided into three factors, which were: (a) FLE-private, (b) FLE-teacher, and (c) FLE-atmosphere. The review of the literature supported the causes of FLE given by Li et al. (2018) as it showed that most causes of FLE could be attributed to private factors (Li & Xu, 2019; Su, 2022), the teacher (Dewaele & Dewaele, 2020; Dewaele et al., 2018), and the environment (Elahi Shirvan et al., 2021; Nemati et al., 2020;). The following sections look at the causes of FLE divided into private factors, teacher-related factors, and atmosphere-related factors.

### *Private Factors That Cause Foreign Language Enjoyment*

In the literature, the private factors that were the most mentioned as causes of FLE were those that were generated from language learning ability (Wang & Jiang, 2022). Academic ability and progress made in learning a language are described as sources of FLE (Li et al., 2018; Li & Xu, 2019; Özer & Altay, 2021; Su, 2022; Wang & Jiang, 2022). Students usually feel happy and enjoy it when their hard work learning a language results in a great performance or if they feel that their language skills have progressed (Su, 2022). Özer and Altay (2021) discovered that high achievement influences FLE, with high achievers experiencing more fun and enjoyment in foreign language classes. Students who attain lower levels of achievement are more likely to have a lower level of FLE due to a loss of confidence and a belief that they lack foreign language proficiency (Li & Xu, 2019).

This study distinguishes between general achievement and academic progress as they relate to FLE. Achievement is viewed as a more stable learner-internal variable that reflects a student's long-term performance or ability level across language learning experiences. In contrast, progress or performance on a specific task is considered a private cause of FLE, especially when learners recognize improvement or succeed at something they previously found difficult. For example, a student might feel enjoyment after successfully completing a speaking activity, even if their overall achievement level is average or low. These small moments of perceived progress can directly trigger enjoyment in the classroom, whereas general achievement tends to shape broader patterns of confidence or motivation over time. Other private causes of FLE mentioned in the literature include learners feeling enjoyment when they learn something new (Nemati et al., 2020), when they are understood while using new vocabulary (Wang & Jiang, 2022), or when they use the target language to communicate with peers (Li et al., 2018). These types of experiences, like moments of perceived progress, are often immediate and tied to learners' personal success in classroom interactions.

The literature showed that many private factors can cause FLE, however, it has been stated that teacher-related causes of FLE are responsible for the majority of FLE (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2019; Dewaele et al., 2018; Dewaele et al., 2019; Kun et al., 2020). Private factors such as learners' foreign language achievement or individual motivation can influence how they experience enjoyment in the classroom. However, teacher-related causes may be even more influential because of the immediate and observable impact that instructors have on the emotional climate of the classroom. Teachers make key decisions about classroom activities, communication style, feedback, and group dynamics, all of which directly shape students' emotional responses. Empirical research has shown that teacher characteristics such as enthusiasm, supportiveness, unpredictability, and use of the target language significantly predict students' levels of foreign language enjoyment (Dewaele et al., 2018; Dewaele & Dewaele, 2020). Students have been found to report higher enjoyment in classes with teachers they perceive as friendly and engaging, even when the same students report lower enjoyment with other teachers (Dewaele & Dewaele, 2020). These findings suggest that FLE is highly sensitive to teacher behavior and may fluctuate from class to class depending on how the teacher interacts with their students. The following section outlines teacher-related factors that have been found to influence students' levels of FLE.

### *Teacher-Related Causes of Foreign Language Enjoyment*

Teacher-related causes of FLE discussed in the literature include those connected to the teacher's personality, professionalism, humor, use of praise, and classroom activities. The friendliness of educators is a personality trait that has been linked to students' levels of FLE (Dewaele et al., 2019; Pan & Zhang, 2021). Dewaele et al. (2019) explained that

teacher friendliness fostered FLE, which as they stated is a common-sense finding. Pan and Zhang's (2021) findings support this as they discovered that when teachers were more friendly the learners enjoyed their foreign language class more. Other factors related to the teacher were more about their professionalism, with teachers' organization skills influencing their students' FLE. Students reported having higher levels of enjoyment when they felt that their teachers were well-organized (Dewaele & Dewaele, 2020; Dewaele et al., 2019). In the study of foreign language learning, it might be beneficial to make trainee foreign language teachers aware of the importance of organizational skills in their teaching preparation.

An additional cause of FLE that was found in the literature is teachers using humor (Dewaele & Dewaele, 2020; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2019; Dewaele et al., 2018; Su, 2022). Dewaele et al. (2018) revealed that the participants in their study stated they felt enjoyment when teachers judiciously used humor. Teachers who used humor and sympathetic laughter to deflect embarrassing situations were also seen to raise levels of enjoyment (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2019). It is important to note that not all attempts at humor from a teacher result in increased FLE. Frymier et al. (2008) explained that students find certain kinds of humor to be inappropriate, which can be based on their individual cultural or sociological backgrounds. If a student found a teacher's attempt at humor to be unprofessional or inappropriate it would not have a positive impact on their levels of FLE. Teachers have also been shown to enhance their students' levels of FLE by giving their students praise and encouragement (Dewaele & Dewaele, 2020; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2019; Dewaele et al., 2018; Li & Xu, 2019; Nemati et al., 2020; Pan & Zhang, 2021; Su, 2022). Li et al. (2019) explained that teachers praising students for getting good test results could increase levels of enjoyment, which could then boost confidence and motivation in learning a foreign language. Dewaele and Dewaele (2020) noted that students' FLE increased when praise was given for outstanding performances, which implies that praise, when it was not fully merited, did not have a positive effect on FLE.

A cause of FLE that has been featured in numerous articles is the classroom activities that are used by the teacher (Dewaele & Dewaele, 2020; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2019; Dewaele et al., 2018; Elahi Shirvan et al., 2021; Li et al., 2018; Nemati et al., 2020; Pan & Zhang, 2021; Su, 2022; Wang & Jiang, 2022). It was found that novel or unusual teaching activities, such as watching movies or playing games enhanced FLE (Li et al., 2018; Nemati et al., 2020; Su, 2022; Wang & Jiang, 2022). Su (2022) explained that novel activities in the foreign language classroom could stimulate interest in learning, make the classroom atmosphere livelier, and increase enjoyment. Other classroom activities found to be enjoyable for learners are debates, making videos, and group presentations (Dewaele et al., 2018). It has also been acknowledged that activities work best when they are well-organized and provide an adequate amount of challenge for the students (Elahi Shirvan et al., 2021). Study findings also revealed that group and collaborative activities increased students' levels of FLE (Elahi Shirvan et al., 2021; Pan & Zhang, 2021; Wang & Jiang, 2022). Wang and Jiang (2022) noted that collaborative activities could increase FLE as students have fun when working with classmates. Collaborative activities may also have a positive impact on the atmosphere in the classroom, which is another cause of FLE.

### *Atmosphere-Related Causes of Foreign Language Enjoyment*

Creating a positive classroom environment is essential, as it raises students' FLE and results in an increase in student learning (Li et al., 2021). There is a lot of overlap between teacher-related causes of FLE and atmosphere-related causes of FLE (Li et al., 2018). An overlap exists between teacher-related and atmosphere-related factors as teachers play such a large role in creating the atmosphere in the classroom. When teachers are friendly, humorous, give generous praise, and do novel and interesting activities, the atmosphere in the classroom is more likely to be a positive one. An important aspect of the classroom atmosphere that has not yet been discussed is the effect that peers can have. Dewaele et al. (2018) discovered from participant feedback that peers can either increase or destroy FLE. When students have peers who are friendly, funny, and supportive they are more likely to enjoy their language class than if they have peers who laugh at them, are unfriendly, or judge them harshly.

### *Effects of FLE*

Some educators may not be aware that their students having high levels of FLE can have positive effects on their learning. Educators need to understand the positive effects that FLE can have on language learning and realize that their actions help to increase FLE in their classrooms (Wang & Jiang, 2022). As the research into FLE is still in the relatively early stages, researchers are still investigating all the potential effects of FLE (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Li et al., 2020). The following section will detail the positive effects of FLE that feature the most often in the literature. Both emotional effects and performance-related effects of FLE will be discussed.

### *Emotional Responses to Foreign Language Enjoyment*

According to the broaden-and-build theory, positive emotions lessen the impact of negative emotions, give students more resilience and hardiness, and encourage learners to be creative through exploration and play (Dewaele & Alfawzan, 2018; Dewaele et al., 2018). Boudreau et al. (2018) added that applying the broaden-and-build theory suggests that positive emotions such as enjoyment broaden learners' perspectives which allows them to be more engaged with the language by exploring and playing with it in unfamiliar environments. In the literature, FLE was shown to reduce the negative emotions of FLA among students (Botes et al., 2022; Fathi & Mohammaddockht, 2021; Li & Xu, 2019). The more that students enjoy the language learning process, the less FLA they have (Fathi & Mohammaddockht, 2021). FLA has been shown to have many negative effects on language learning (Gordon, 2024b), so if FLE lessened those negative effects, it would have a positive effect on language learning.

A further emotional response to FLE that has been identified in the literature is an increase in motivation (Fathi & Mohammaddockht, 2021; Saito et al., 2018; Zeng, 2021). Zeng (2021) stated that FLE can cause learners to have higher levels of motivation, as well as higher levels of engagement. It was also discovered that students with higher levels of FLE are more likely to have a positive effect on their ideal L2 self (Fathi & Mohammaddockht, 2021; Saito et al., 2018). Saito et al. (2018) found students who had higher levels of enjoyment spent more time practicing and developing their L2 speech. FLE is said to lower levels of boredom (Elahi Shirvan et al., 2021; Li & Wei, 2022) and have a higher self-perceived achievement (Botes et al., 2022). As well as the considerable emotional effects of FLE, there are also performance-related benefits that can aid the language learning process.

### *Performance-related Effects of Foreign Language Enjoyment*

There is a need for educators to increase their students' willingness to communicate in the target language so that they spend more time practicing using the language (Kun et al., 2020). One of the positive effects of FLE that has been stated in the literature is that it can increase a learner's willingness to communicate in the target language (Bielak, 2022; Botes et al., 2022; Kun et al., 2020). Botes et al. (2022) discovered that foreign language learners who experience FLE during language learning are more likely to be willing to communicate in the language that they are learning. It has also been found that learners are more likely to use the target language when they have higher levels of FLE (Saito et al., 2018).

The effect of FLE that has been the focus of many studies is that of foreign language achievement. Many researchers have discovered that students with higher levels of FLE are more likely to have greater levels of foreign language achievement (Botes et al., 2022; Dewaele & Alfawzan, 2018; Li & Wei, 2022; Li & Xu, 2019; Özer & Altay, 2021; Su, 2022; Zeng, 2021). Özer and Altay (2021), confirmed in their study that learners with a high level of enjoyment were more likely to have high achievement in their target language. Some researchers went further and stated that high levels of FLE can have long-lasting effects on future language success and achievement (Li & Wei, 2022; Zeng, 2021). The positive effects of FLE described in the literature have been shown to have both emotional and performance-related benefits for foreign language learners. Although FLE has been shown to have a positive effect on language achievement it is not a simple relationship. Wang and Jiang (2022) did not find a significant correlation between FLE and language achievement, their study also discovered that FLE might not enhance language performance in the short term for beginners, thus showing that increased FLE does not always result in increased language achievement but depends on numerous variables.

### *Variables That Affect Foreign Language Enjoyment*

The FLES has been used by researchers from many countries to try and discover how different variables affect levels of FLE (Dewaele & Alfawzan, 2018; Dewaele & Dewaele, 2020; Li et al., 2021; Ma & Cho, 2020). As research into FLE is still in the relatively early stages, research does not have concrete answers to how variables affect FLE. There have been studies that have examined the impact of both learner-internal (Dewaele et al., 2018; Mierzwa, 2018) and learner-external variables (Dewaele & Dewaele, 2020; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2019). In the following sections, the learner-internal variables of age, gender, nationality, and achievement will be discussed in relation to their impact on FLE. The learner-external variables connected to teachers and the classroom environment will also be looked at to find out how they affect levels of FLE.

#### *Learner-Internal Variables*

The effect that the age of a learner has on FLE has been looked at by several scholars (Botes et al., 2022; Dewaele &

MacIntyre, 2019; Dewaele et al., 2018; Mierzwa, 2018; Zeng, 2021). Some studies have found that older learners have higher levels of FLE than younger learners (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2019; Dewaele et al., 2018). In contrast, Mierzwa (2018) stated that the findings of their study did not support the idea that older learners have higher levels of FLE than younger learners. Other researchers have explained that there is not enough information to conclude how age affects FLE (Botes et al., 2022; Mierzwa, 2018).

Gender is another learner-internal variable that has been investigated in connection with FLE by many researchers, but no clear conclusions have been reached. Some researchers have discovered that females have higher levels of FLE than males (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2019; Dewaele et al., 2018; Wang & Jiang, 2022). There have also been studies that have not found any significant differences between male and female levels of FLE (Jiang & Dewaele, 2019; Mierzwa, 2018; Su, 2022). The literature review did not reveal any studies that found that male students had higher levels of FLE than female students. Not many studies have been conducted on how the nationality of the learner affects FLE. Wang and Jiang (2022) looked at how nationality impacted the FLE of learners of Chinese and found that nationality did not influence FLE. Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) stated that Asian learners had lower levels of FLE than North American learners, while Su (2022) confirmed that language learners in Asia had low levels of enjoyment when learning a foreign language. These findings are unlikely to be the result solely of nationality itself. Rather, nationality may include other underlying variables such as the educational system, classroom environment, the purpose for learning the foreign language, or whether the language is being learned in a foreign language or second language context. For example, learners in test-based educational environments may experience more anxiety and less enjoyment, while learners studying in immersive second language environments may have more opportunities for engaging and meaningful communication. Therefore, nationality in these studies should not be seen as a direct cause of FLE, but rather as a general indicator of the broader cultural and contextual factors that shape how learners experience enjoyment in the classroom.

Scholars have explored the relationship between achievement and FLE (Dewaele & Alfawzan, 2018; Li & Xu, 2019; Mierzwa, 2018; Wang & Jiang, 2022). Most of the studies that looked at how FLE is affected by achievement have found that higher levels of achievement result in higher levels of FLE and vice versa (Dewaele & Alfawzan, 2018; Li & Xu, 2019; Mierzwa, 2018). On the other hand, Wang and Jiang, (2022) did not find a significant correlation between FLE and learners' foreign language achievement. The review of the literature has revealed that more studies need to look at how learner-internal variables affect levels of FLE.

### *Learner-External Variables*

Teachers have been shown to have a greater influence on students FLE than on their FLA (Dewaele & Dewaele, 2020; Dewaele et al., 2019). Dewaele and Dewaele (2020) investigated how the levels of FLE and FLA varied between classes with two different teachers. Dewaele and Dewaele found that the level of FLA stayed the same in each class, but the learners' FLE was much higher with the main teacher when compared with the second teacher. When students have a positive attitude towards their teacher, it has been shown to increase their levels of FLE (Dewaele & Dewaele, 2020; Dewaele et al., 2018; Jiang & Dewaele, 2019). Dewaele et al. (2019) explained that among their participants the strongest predictor of FLE was how friendly the teacher was. The friendliness of the teacher was also shown to positively affect FLE in other studies (Jiang & Dewaele, 2019; Pan & Zhang, 2021). Linked closely to teacher variables is the variable of the classroom environment.

The classroom environment was discovered to be positively connected to learners' levels of FLE (Li et al., 2021). Li et al. (2018) explained that the classroom environment had a positive effect on FLE when teachers used classroom group activities when they could socialize with their peers, and when they could use the target language with their peers. Although educators play a large role in creating a positive classroom environment, educators should not forget that FLE is also linked to the behavior of peers and classroom interactions.

While many studies have shown that teacher behavior, classroom atmosphere, and learner-internal traits can influence foreign language enjoyment, most of this research has focused on learners' emotions and learning outcomes. There has been much less attention given to how instructors themselves understand FLE or the specific things they do in class to help students enjoy learning. Although literature often includes pedagogical suggestions, these are usually general and not always based on what teachers actually do or think. This study aims to fill that gap by looking at how EFL instructors at a Korean university define FLE and the classroom practices they use to promote it. By focusing on instructors, this study adds to the discussion on emotion in language learning by showing how enjoyment is understood and supported from the teacher's point of view.

## METHOD

This study aimed to investigate how EFL instructors in Korea perceive FLE and how they implement practices related to FLE in their university classrooms. A qualitative research design was selected as the most suitable approach, given the study's objectives and guiding questions. This methodology is considered effective because it enables researchers to explore how participants interpret and make meaning of their experiences, allowing for the detailed examination of complex educational contexts (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A basic qualitative approach is appropriate for research that seeks to understand individuals' thoughts, experiences, and interpretations of past events (Percy et al., 2015). Since the research questions in this study center on EFL instructors' experiences and viewpoints concerning FLE within a specific institutional setting, this methodological approach was deemed appropriate.

The research questions were intentionally developed to explore participants' perceptions and classroom practices in an open-ended way, rather than to quantify responses or test predefined hypotheses. A qualitative design was therefore necessary to capture the depth and complexity of how instructors define FLE and the factors that shape their instructional decisions. This approach also made it possible to examine how institutional expectations, personal beliefs, and teaching strategies interact in nuanced ways, insights that would be difficult to obtain through a quantitative design.

### Participants

This study's participants comprised 15 instructors who were teaching EFL courses at a university in Korea. Before data were collected from the participants, each completed an informed consent form. The participants were instructors of different genders, nationalities, qualifications, and years of teaching experience. The demographic data of the participants can be viewed in Table 1.

**TABLE 1**  
*Demographic Data (n=15)*

Gender	Nationality	Highest Degree	Teaching Experience
Male (n = 7)	American (n = 8)	Bachelor's (n = 4)	1-5.5 years (n = 4)
Female (n = 8)	British (n = 1)	Master's (n = 9)	6-10 years (n = 5)
	Canadian (n = 2)	Specialist (n = 1)	11-15 years (n = 2)
	Korean (n = 1)	Doctorate (n = 1)	15+ years (n = 4)
	South African (n = 3)		

### Instruments

Data in this study were collected using two instruments: an online survey and a semi-structured online interview. The demographic information of the participants was gathered using the online survey. Demographic data gathered from the online survey helped to clearly define the study population. By outlining the characteristics of the participants, the study remains clear and enhances the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. Additionally, a well-defined population allows other researchers to understand the scope of the study, assess the applicability of the results to similar contexts, and replicate the research if desired.

### Data Collection

Once each participant had provided informed consent by signing a form, they were sent a link via email to complete an online demographic survey. Following the completion of this survey, participants were contacted to schedule an interview over Zoom. Each participant took part in a one-on-one Zoom interview, which lasted around 20 minutes. These sessions were recorded and automatically transcribed using Zoom's built-in features. To ensure the transcripts were accurate, the recorded interviews were reviewed, and any transcription errors were corrected. Data collected from the demographic survey was exported into an Excel file for analysis. The interview transcripts were uploaded into a qualitative analysis software, QDA Miner, where they were prepared for coding.

## Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase process for thematic analysis. Recognized as one of the most used approaches in qualitative research, thematic analysis is particularly well-suited for uncovering how a specific group understands or interprets the phenomenon being studied (Joffe, 2011). Thematic analysis helps uncover patterns in the data, allowing themes to emerge through systematic content analysis (Roberts, 2020). Their six-step process involves: (a) familiarization with the data, (b) generating initial codes, (c) searching for themes, (d) reviewing themes, (e) defining and naming themes, and (f) producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In the first phase, the interview transcripts were read thoroughly to become closely acquainted with the data. In the second phase, the coding process began. To assist in coding, each participant's transcript was uploaded into QDA Miner. Each line was examined carefully, and codes were applied to segments related to FLE. At the conclusion of the initial coding round, 16 codes relevant to FLE had been identified. Codes related to FLE included: (a) culture, (b) enjoying learning, (c) positive body language, and (d) teacher enjoys class too.

The third step focused on exploring patterns, concepts, and potential themes based on the codes. The coded data were carefully analyzed to determine how different codes could be grouped together based on shared meanings (Byrne, 2022). Through this process, 5 final codes were merged into three overarching themes. The code *meaning of FLE* became the theme *definition of FLE*. The codes *performance effects of FLE* and *physical effects of FLE*, were combined into the theme *effects of FLE*. Additionally, *instructional practices to increase FLE* and *teacher actions to increase enjoyment* came together to create the theme *instructors try to make their classes more enjoyable*.

During the fourth phase, the themes were reviewed against the coded data to ensure they accurately represented the participants' experiences and directly addressed the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). After careful evaluation, three themes were confirmed as well-suited to the research focus. The themes *definition of FLE* and *effects of FLE* were aligned with answering the research question about instructors' perceptions of FLE. The theme *instructors try to make their classes more enjoyable* addressed the research question related to classroom practices for increasing FLE.

In the fifth step, each theme was carefully defined and given a finalized name. This process involved closely examining the supporting data for each theme and selecting representative quotations that captured the central ideas (Byrne, 2022). The finalized themes were *definition of FLE*, *effects of FLE*, and *instructors trying to make their classes more enjoyable*. Finally, in the sixth step, a detailed write-up was produced, presenting the findings of the thematic analysis and illustrating how the themes addressed the study's research questions.

**TABLE 2**  
*Summary of the Thematic Analysis Process*

Research questions	Emergent codes	Final codes	Final themes	Example quote
1: What are instructors' perceptions of foreign language enjoyment at a Korean university?	Proficiency; culture; lack of anxiety; enjoying learning	Meaning of FLE	Definition of FLE	You're speaking the language you're producing the language. Yeah, just enjoy being in an atmosphere where you get to improve that foreign language skill (Instructor 13) Well, I guess you know, like being able to communicate in a language that's completely new to you, I guess (Instructor 6).
1: What are instructors' perceptions of foreign language enjoyment at a Korean university?	Participating more; increased acquisition; paying more attention.	Performance effects of FLE	Effects of FLE	But I think that if students are enjoying it, they will pay attention more, of course. So, paying attention is necessary for learning anything. The students who sort of space out, are not going to get anything from the class. So, I think it's a good idea to make the class as enjoyable as possible (Instructor 2).



Research questions	Emergent codes	Final codes	Final themes	Example quote
	Smiling or laughing; positive body language.	Physical effects of FLE		I feel like it definitely improves their wanting to learn or just their attention span in general (Instructor 15).
2: What practices do instructors use to increase levels of foreign language enjoyment at a Korean university?	Relevant; technology; grouping; games; variation.  Sharing stories; teacher enjoys class too.	Instructional practices to increase FLE  Teacher actions to increase enjoyment	Instructors try to make their classes more enjoyable	So, every week I kind of try to change the activities that we do, so that they don't get used to it and get bored with what we're doing (Instructor 8).  I think that and doing something different each class in that regard makes them interested and enjoy the learning process more (Instructor 3).

## RESULTS

The results are organized around the two research questions that guided this study. The first section presents instructors' perceptions of FLE, which directly addresses Research Question 1. This includes both how instructors define FLE and how they believe it affects their students. These two aspects are closely intertwined, as instructors often described FLE through its observable outcomes. The second section focuses on the classroom practices instructors use to promote FLE, in response to Research Question 2.

### Instructors' Perceptions of FLE

The data analysis showed that the participants had differing views on FLE. Participants were very divided on the definition of FLE, as a third of the participants stated that FLE was based on proficiency, a third said that it was about enjoying learning the language, and three of the instructors commented that it was about learning another culture. Four instructors thought that it was a lack of anxiety. Instructor 6 said, "Well, I guess you know, like being able to communicate in a language that's completely new to you." Other instructors focused on enjoying the foreign language. Instructor 13 explained that FLE for them is when "You're speaking the language, you're producing the language. Yeah, just enjoying being in an atmosphere where you get to improve that foreign language skill." Some of the instructors equated FLE with a lack of FLA. Instructor 8 stated, "To me, foreign language enjoyment means that you actually kind of alleviate the anxiety, and there's not that stress of, oh, I have to go study for a language because it is quite a daunting task." Finally, culture was an important part of FLE for some instructors. Instructor 9 explained, "Foreign language enjoyment to me means opening doors to a different culture." The definitions given by the participants for FLE showed that the instructors had differing opinions about what FLE means.

The data analysis revealed that the instructors identified physical responses and performance effects as two subthemes of positive effects caused by FLE. Instructors had similar experiences with their students' physical responses to FLE. The two physical responses to FLE mentioned by most instructors were body language, smiling, and laughing. Body language that the instructors used to identify FLE in their students included looking less tense, posture, eye contact, and increased gestures. Instructor 8 explained that they noticed their students were enjoying a class as "rather than like looking down or kind of crunched up, they might lean back a little bit in their chair and just have a bit more relaxed posture when they're doing an activity or speaking with other students." Instructor 4 stated that when their students are experiencing FLE, "they're really leaned in, or they're very like relaxed in their seats, and they are looking around the room, and they're using gestures." Instructor 12 said that they can tell if their students are enjoying an activity if "they're doing it, their laughing, smiling." Instructor 1 said, "If someone is just smiling, happy, showing their teeth, laughing, then you know that they're having a good time." Apart from physical signs of FLE, the instructors also gave examples of the performance-related effects of FLE.

The performance-related effects of FLE that were described the most frequently by instructors included participating more, paying more attention, and increased language acquisition. Instructor 13 said that students having FLE "can only be positive if they enjoy their actions. Then, they've got they've got more chance of improving. The more you practice, the

more you enjoy it, the more you will practice.” Instructor 6 explained FLE during the interview:

It greatly impacts their language acquisition. You know, if you enjoy doing something, then, you know, like you’d spend more time doing it right. And I also find that if they feel comfortable, they enjoy speaking in English, you know. Then it helps them, of course, to first learn more, and at the same time become more confident in any context, whether it be in class or whether it be, you know, at home studying, or whether it be like, you know being able to watch a movie without subtitles.

Regarding paying attention, Instructor 15 stated about FLE: “I feel like it definitely improves they’re wanting to learn or just their attention span in general.” Most instructors agreed that FLE improved their students’ foreign language acquisition. Instructor 1 said, “People who are happy in the classroom and excited about it are going to acquire a language a lot faster.” However, Instructor 15 said, “Just because you necessarily enjoy something doesn’t mean you can actually acquire it.” The descriptions given by the instructors of the effects of FLE show that although they have different opinions about what FLE is, they can recognize its impact.

## Practices to Increase FLE

The data analysis showed that the instructors employed a variety of instructional practices to help increase their students’ FLE. Instructional practices that the participants frequently mentioned to increase FLE included how students are grouped, making things relevant for their students, using technology, playing games, and having variation. Eight instructors stated that they used grouping in their classrooms to increase FLE. As described by the instructors, a typical grouping practice to increase FLE involved doing activities where the students had to work together in groups. Instructor 3 explained, “Maybe activities where they can interact with each other, they tend to enjoy more.” Instructors also said that students enjoyed working in pairs but differed in their opinions on who they enjoyed working with. Instructor 12 stated, “So, when they are with friends, it is more enjoyable, and they kind of can jab each other a little more.” Conversely, Instructor 1 stated, “Once they actually start talking to someone new, they really seem to enjoy it.” After grouping, the instructional practice for increasing FLE that the instructors said they use the most is making things relevant for their students.

The participants described how they make topics, activities, and examples relevant to their students to increase their FLE. Using topics relevant to their students was a practice used by some of the instructors to improve FLE. Instructor 9 said they “make it as fun as possible by just getting them to talk about stuff they’re passionate about.” One possible issue is that there was no consensus among instructors about what topics are relevant to their students’ interests. Instructor 6 said, “But if it’s like a topic like bike sharing, things that they do every day, I think, yeah, that engages them a lot more.” Instructor 7, on the other hand, stated, “They don’t get it, or they just don’t care. It’s like I don’t care about like free bike programs, like who cares about that?”

The data analysis revealed that using technology was seen as an effective practice for increasing FLE by the participants. Instructor 9 said, “Anything that involves technology, it feels like, if I give them the chance to do something on their phones, they get very psyched.” The instructors said that technology used in the classroom included YouTube, online quizzes, and cell phones. Instructor 8 discussed how they use technology in the classroom by stating,

And then online quizzes, I use Kahoot to make my online quizzes. Again, they don’t think they’re learning, but actually they are. Kind of it’s like when you have a pet, and you have to hide their medicine in their food, just hide the actual learning activities in games and other fun things.

Instructors also described using games in their classrooms to increase their students’ FLE.

The data collected from the interviews showed that some instructors incorporate games into their lessons to increase their students’ enjoyment. Instructor 8 said, “Games, such as any kind of grammar or vocabulary games they like so that I can incorporate them into my class, then they really enjoy it.” Instructor 10 explained that even simple games could increase their students’ enjoyment, “Oftentimes we play little games, but games that they know like rocks, scissors paper. I think the other one is cham cham cham.”

Although many of the instructors in this study described using games and varied activities to increase their students’ enjoyment, some explained that institutional constraints made it difficult to use these strategies in their credit courses. Instructor 11 stated that they were hesitant to include games in their credit classes, saying,

You know I'm not the most creative teacher. So, sometimes, I feel as if I could utilize different games or different activities. But for my credit courses, I have to walk a fine line because I need to get the material across so they can take their exams and that the grades are fair. So, I'm always just a little bit nervous that if I do some activity in the class, it's not going to connect all of the necessary material.

This highlights the difficulty that some instructors face when trying to balance enjoyable activities with institutional expectations related to content delivery and assessment. Even though they recognized the benefits of activities like games, some instructors felt limited by curriculum demands and the need to prepare students for tests. This suggests that instructors' ability to foster FLE is not only influenced by their own teaching beliefs and practices, but also by the structural and institutional context in which they work.

Variation was the final significant instructional practice revealed in the data analysis. Some of the instructors stated that variety played an essential role in the enjoyment levels of their students. Instructor 12 said, "There are some great aspects to having a routine, but also, you have to have a little bit of variety. Otherwise, it can get pretty stale." Instructor 8 remarked, "So every week, I kind of try to change the activities that we do so that they don't get used to it and get bored with what we're doing." Those instructors recognized that there are benefits to having a classroom routine, but that variety has a positive effect on students' levels of enjoyment.

Alongside instructional practices, the data analysis showed that instructors do other things in the classroom to increase their students' levels of enjoyment. In particular, the instructors tried to show their students that they enjoyed teaching the classes and shared stories with them. Related to instructors offering that they want the classes, Instructor 8 explained, "Making it fun in the way of how not being a clown and performing but just showing them that I'm also enjoying teaching them instead of making it look like this, is a drag for me as well." Instructor 13 commented on how they use a combination of showing they enjoy the class and sharing stories in their classroom: "You've got to seem like you're enjoying it yourself, and when it is a bit dry, perhaps, you know, just introduce some personal story, you know, trying to connect with them in that way." The interview data revealed that instructors used a variety of practices to increase their students' levels of enjoyment.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The multitude of ways that the instructors used to define FLE in this study emphasizes how complex a concept FLE is. Participants described FLE in terms of proficiency, enjoyment of learning, cultural exploration, and reduced anxiety. This range of perspectives is unsurprising, given that the literature tends to depict FLE as a broadly defined positive emotion that enhances language acquisition (Botes et al., 2022). However, the present study builds on this foundation by identifying specific elements that instructors consider essential in fostering enjoyment. The insights shared by the participants offer a more detailed and contextually grounded understanding of FLE, which may help refine existing theoretical models.

The differing definitions of FLE provided by the instructors suggest that promoting enjoyment in the classroom is a complex and multifaceted task. While some instructors saw proficiency as the main source of FLE, others focused on cultural engagement, emotional comfort, or the absence of anxiety. These varied interpretations imply that instructional approaches to fostering FLE often reflect individual teaching philosophies and learner needs. However, if institutions aim to incorporate FLE more systematically into their teaching practices or curriculum guidelines, a shared understanding of what FLE entails may be helpful. Without a common definition, it may be challenging to develop coherent institutional strategies, provide targeted training, or evaluate the effectiveness of practices to increase FLE. Future research could explore how differing conceptions of FLE influence pedagogical choices and how a more unified framework might support broader instructional efforts.

Although participants differed in how they defined FLE, they consistently agreed that it plays a crucial role in shaping students' emotional responses to language learning and overall performance. This aligns with prior research linking FLE to higher motivation (Zeng, 2021), increased classroom engagement (Botes et al., 2022), and improved language proficiency (Li & Wei, 2022). Notably, this study expands on those findings by highlighting specific strategies—such as incorporating culturally relevant content and utilizing technology—that instructors use to enhance FLE. While these strategies were commonly mentioned by participants, they have received limited attention in previous research, which suggests the need for further exploration.

The broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 2001) provides a useful framework for interpreting these findings. This theory proposes that positive emotions not only enrich immediate learning experiences but also support the development of

long-term personal and cognitive resources. In this study, instructors described several benefits of FLE, including improved participation, increased focus, and enhanced language acquisition. A key premise of the broaden-and-build theory is that positive emotions can also counterbalance negative ones. The findings suggest that cultivating FLE may reduce the impact of FLA, helping to create a more supportive and effective learning environment. While the broaden-and-build theory explains many of the emotional benefits of FLE, additional longitudinal research is still needed to determine how well these short-term emotional gains translate into sustained language learning outcomes.

In addition to supporting the broaden-and-build framework, the findings of this study are consistent with previous research on the causes and variables that influence FLE. As highlighted in the literature review, previous studies have consistently shown that teacher-related factors, such as enthusiasm, supportiveness, and classroom management, play a major role in shaping FLE (Dewaele et al., 2018; Saito et al., 2018). This was also evident in the present study, where instructors described their efforts to build rapport, reduce anxiety, and create a supportive classroom atmosphere. The role of classroom activities, particularly those that are collaborative, level-appropriate, and engaging, was also emphasized in both the literature (Elahi Shirvan et al., 2021; Wang & Jiang, 2022) and by the interviewed instructors. In terms of private factors, this study confirmed previous findings that learners tend to experience enjoyment when they see evidence of progress or when they successfully use the language (Özer & Altay, 2021; Su, 2022).

However, one area where this study offers new insight is in the diversity of how instructors define FLE. While the literature often treats FLE as a multidimensional construct, few studies have shown how varied instructors' personal interpretations of FLE can be. By identifying different conceptions, ranging from proficiency and enjoyment of learning to emotional safety and cultural engagement, this study adds nuance to how FLE is understood and enacted in real classrooms. In doing so, it highlights the potential need for a more unified definition of FLE if it is to be systematically supported in language programs.

The findings of this study, along with previous research, suggest several practical ways that instructors can help increase FLE in their classrooms. One of the most common and effective approaches is to create a positive, friendly, and low-stress atmosphere. When students feel relaxed and supported, they are more likely to take risks and participate. This point is often mentioned in the literature (Dewaele et al., 2019; Dikmen, 2021; Özer & Altay, 2021; Su, 2022) and was also highlighted by instructors in this study.

Another important factor is the teacher's personality and emotional attitude. Teachers who are kind, encouraging, and show empathy were more likely to create enjoyable learning environments (Kun et al., 2020; Liu & Wang, 2021; Saito et al., 2018). Several instructors said they used humor, praise, and emotional support to build stronger relationships with students and reduce anxiety. Instructors also pointed out that the types of activities used in class can influence FLE. Enjoyment was more likely when tasks were well-organized, matched to students' levels, and gave them opportunities to be creative or work together. This included group work, games, role-plays, and using media, strategies that also appear in the literature (Elahi Shirvan et al., 2021; Wang & Jiang, 2022). However, some instructors also shared that they could not always use these strategies due to institutional limits, such as strict syllabi or assessment requirements. This suggests that increasing FLE is not only about what teachers do individually, but also about whether they are given the space and support to do so. Greater flexibility and institutional support may be needed for enjoyment-focused teaching to become a regular part of language instruction.

While this study offers valuable insights, some limitations should be acknowledged. It focused on instructors at a single university in Korea and does not aim for statistical generalization. However, the findings may offer transferability to similar educational contexts. The insights gathered may also support analytical generalization by contributing to a broader understanding of how instructors perceive and promote FLE within institutional settings. In addition, since the data rely on self-reported perceptions, future research could incorporate student perspectives or observational methods to provide a more comprehensive understanding of FLE dynamics. Longitudinal studies may also help determine how FLE evolves over time and its long-term impact on language proficiency. Although this study explored both instructors' definitions of FLE and the practices they use to promote it, it did not specifically investigate how individual conceptions of FLE may have influenced their classroom strategies. Future research could examine this relationship more closely to better understand how teachers' beliefs about enjoyment shape their instructional choices.

In sum, this study contributes to the ongoing exploration of FLE by demonstrating how instructors conceptualize and cultivate it in foreign language classrooms. By refining our understanding of FLE and identifying concrete strategies for enhancing it, the findings offer a foundation for further research on the role of positive emotions in language acquisition. Future studies could examine the long-term effects of FLE on language retention and investigate its relationship with other psychological factors, such as motivation and resilience.

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