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## BRIEF REPORT

# Antecedents of Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) in the French Classroom

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Antecedents of foreign language enjoyment (FLE) are important for practitioners and researchers to understand as FLE has been linked to important concepts like motivation and language achievement. The literature on antecedents is, however, rather scarce and overly dependent on top-down qualitative coding to fully understand this phenomenon. This report seeks to add to the knowledge of sources of FLE by investigating the antecedents of FLE in U.S. learners of French. The present study uses data collected from an open-ended survey and analyzed via an interpretive approach. The survey was sent out to students enrolled in undergraduate French courses at a large Southeastern university and a total of 50 participants responded to the questionnaire out of 183 directly solicited, for a response rate of 27%. The results revealed that content, teacher personality, and a sense of community were sources of FLE, with the sense of community taking the lion's share of responses. This report argues that this sense of community, which was previously unattested in the literature, can be explained adequately within the second language and positive psychology (L2EPP) theory of emotions. Theoretical implications and future directions are discussed.

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### ANTECEDENTS OF FLE

Understanding the antecedents or sources of foreign language enjoyment (FLE) is crucial as FLE has been linked to motivation (Dewaele et al., 2023), achievement in foreign language learning (Jin & Zhang, 2021), and the overall enjoyment experienced by students in a classroom setting. However, research on antecedents remains limited and heavily relies on data obtained from the FLE scale (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014) and factor analysis, hindering a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. This report seeks to contribute to the knowledge about sources of FLE by qualitatively investigating the antecedents of FLE.

Most studies investigating antecedents use the FLE scale (created by Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014), which measures students' level of enjoyment via a Likert-type questionnaire, in conjunction with a factor analysis (e.g., exploratory, principal components, confirmatory) for their specific context. They then identify the factors, and finally code their qualitative data with the factor name. In such studies, the qualitative data serves as an example of what the quantitative dimensions show. They identify line items that cause significant variance then name them as a factor, for example, in Aridayani and Waluyo's (2022) study the line item was 'My teacher is nice to me/Peers are nice to me' and the identified factor was "Teacher and Peer support" (p. 8). Qualitative data, usually from open-ended questions, are then coded under these factors.

Dewaele and MacIntyre (2016) used principal component analysis with an international sample and identified two dimensions of FLE: social and private. The social dimension includes items outside of the learners' control (teaching pedagogy, teacher support, peer

support, and teacher skill) while the private dimension includes things in the learners' control (e.g., the realization of progress). Other studies have introduced FLE to different contexts and created their own list of factors, sometimes replacing the 'social' factor with a 'teacher' one. (Li et al., 2018; Yang, 2021). While there are certainly similarities between the sub-codes under any one factor, it is important to note that different studies' factors represent different sub-codes and concepts depending on the study. For example, Yang (2021) uses the code 'teacher' to encompass teacher praise, support, and content curation/pedagogy, while for Yeşilçınar and Erdemir (2023), teacher praise/support is grouped separately from pedagogy. This disparity means that having categories like 'social' or 'learner-internal' are not useful in determining what antecedents fall under it. Therefore, Table 1 lists each of these studies with the raw codes.

**Table 1**  
*Studies with Antecedents of FLE Reported*

Study	Context	Target Language	Two most Widely Reported Antecedents Reported (based on number of codes)	Theoretical Grounding
Deweale and MacIntyre (2014)	Europeans – 67% Asians – 13.1% N = 1746 (p. 245)	English: 49% French: 15.8%	Specific Classroom Activities – 41% Peer recognition – 13% (p.256)	BB mentioned in literature review and analysis
Li et al. (2018)	High schoolers from Anhui Province, China N = 64 (p. 186)	English	Teacher recognition, non-traditional pedagogical practices, content – 43% Realization of progress, performance, pushing one's limits – 35% (p. 191)	BB and CV mentioned in literature review
Yeşilçınar and Erdemir (2023)	Turkish High Schoolers and University students in various locations across Turkey N = 13 (p. 458)	English	Teacher (social) – 38% Teaching Methodology (including activities) – 25% (p. 462) <i>Researcher converted to percents</i>	Socio-Cultural theory mentioned in analysis
Yang (2021)	Chinese Sophomore University students in North-West China N = 26 (p. 277)	English	Private (realizing progress, pride in accomplishment, performance) – 69.2% Teacher (strategies, support) – 21.1% (p. 281) <i>Researcher converted to percents</i>	BB and CV mentioned in literature review, but only BB mentioned in analysis

Jiang and Deweale (2019)	First year students at a university in Beijing N = 564 (p. 16)	English	Teacher (specific classroom activities, validation, support) – 85.5% Peer (interaction, support) – 9% (p. 20) <i>Researcher converted to percents</i>	BB mentioned in literature review
Apridayani and Waluyo (2022)	First Year students in a Thai university in an online synchronous setting N= 118 (p. 5)	English	Teacher and peer support Class satisfaction and personal pride Learning atmosphere Personal feelings (p. 9) <i>The authors did not give a breakdown of codes, so it is assumed that these themes were evenly distributed</i>	BB mentioned in literature review

When looking at the sub-codes without the names of the overarching factors, rather few similarities appear among the results. Some studies found autonomy to be a chief driver of FLE: in Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014), these were ‘specific classroom activities’ which referred to both “unusual” and activities with high student autonomy, for example the use of toy cars to understand directional prefixes (p. 257). Yang (2021) and Li et al. (2018) point to similar antecedents, though they also include certain teacher-centered actions directed at students, like ‘praise’ and ‘content presented.’ However, other studies (Apridayani & Waluyo, 2022; Yeşilçınar & Erdemir, 2023) suggest that social elements, such as the qualities of the instructor and feeling of ease in the learning environment are the main driver of FLE.

Overall, there are few discernable patterns from the current data, and factors like target language, participant age or level, and the style of classroom don’t seem to influence the antecedents. This lack of patterns contributes to the perplexing nature of antecedents in the literature. Due to these disunited results, more studies are needed to understand antecedents to FLE, specifically qualitative studies, given their lack in the literature (Dewaele, 2022). This current study seeks to fill this gap.

## THEORIES IN FLE

A theoretical framework would help in comprehending the differing results for sources of FLE. The theoretical basis of FLE is Fredrickson’s (2001) Broaden-and-Build (BB) theory (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). Control-value (CV) theory (Pekrun & Linnenbrink-Garcia, 2012) has also been used to interpret the antecedents of FLE in a few studies (Piechurska-Kuciel, 2017). Of the three theories mentioned in Table 1 (above), CV alone has a conceptualization for factors which act as antecedents to emotions. CV argues that the higher perceived control results in more positive emotions, and thus FLE (Dewaele, 2022). Even though CV allows for conceptualization of antecedents that would seem to explain well the higher student autonomy antecedents of FLE results, none of the studies in Table 1 used it in their analysis. Many studies mention BB, but its mention is confined to the conceptualization

of FLE as a phenomenon. While BB does not account for antecedents, other theories like the Second Language Emotions and Positive Psychology (L2EPP) model (Shao et al., 2020) combines BB and CV to argue for a cyclical nature of emotions. Thus, one could understand BB as being its own antecedent (i.e., positive emotions encourage social connection which in turn encourage positive emotions). In this light, BB could explain the studies that report more social antecedents like teacher and peer support, but once again due to its lack of use in analysis, there is not a comprehensive understanding available.

In light of the above discussion, this study uses a qualitative approach to investigate the antecedents of FLE of French university students to add to the current literature and make clearer the blurry picture of antecedents. The research questions guiding the study are:

1. What do French university students report as the source for their FLE?
2. How does a theoretical framework help explain the results?

## METHODS

### Instrument

A qualitative survey design was chosen in part for its ability to gather a lot of data at once (Heigham & Croker, 2009) and in part to mirror previous studies on sources of FLE, as many used an open-ended survey question for their qualitative data (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Li et al., 2018). This survey was initially based on the FLE subscale (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014) targeting the emotions of FLE (fun, interest, pride, creativity) and those of affective engagement (autonomy, purpose, willingness, attitude), however in this report, only the responses to the FLE question is addressed. It was tested in a focus group with undergraduate students of German (of the same ages and levels as the participants of this study) at a large Southeastern university which led to the changing of Dewaele and MacIntyre's (2014) question, which asked about a specific 'event' that caused enjoyment to a more broad question of "What things do you enjoy about your current French class and why do you enjoy them?" This change was due to the focus group's understanding of the latter as asking about antecedents/sources and their assumption of the former being a question asking directly about content/pedagogy. This was important to avoid as the literature is clear that not only pedagogy or content could be sources of FLE. Participants were asked to respond to all questions in as much detail as possible and an example was given (see Appendix A).

### Participants

An invitation to take the survey online was sent via email to 183 students enrolled in undergraduate French courses at a large Southeastern university. Per the IRB, these students were contacted directly after their instructors gave permission and emailed the researcher their class roster. No instructor declined to share their class list. 50 students (or 27%) completed the entire questionnaire. In line with anonymity standards, they were able to choose whether or not to report gender or class level. Ten chose not to share this information. 25 reported being enrolled in lower division French courses and 15 in upper division. Thirty participants identified as female and ten as males. Participants were all between the ages of 18 and 22.

### Data Analysis

To get a bottom-up understanding of the data, an interpretive approach was adopted (Drewelow, 2023). Due to the diversity of results from previous studies, the researcher did not want to have preset codes that could influence the coding process. The interpretive approach allowed the participants' subjective experiences to emerge. However, it is important to note that the researcher carries biases with them that may affect the analysis of the data; perhaps the most notable is being an American with extensive experience in U.S. schools. While the researcher has tried to limit bias, it is impossible to completely prevent it from influencing the interpretation of the results.

Following Murray's (2009) suggestions, the data was first read through twice before coding, then coded based on reported antecedents (e.g., if a student reported that they enjoy giving class presentations, this was coded as 'presenting'). The initial coding was done by hand, then it was uploaded to NVIVO 14 where responses were re-coded. The individual codes were grouped according to themes. This process was done twice by the researcher for reliability. The sub-codes and themes matched for each iteration.

## FINDINGS

Table 2 shows the breakdown of the three themes that emerged from the data. 'Community' was represented in the majority of responses, while 'teacher personality' and 'content' were mentioned about equally. 'Teacher personality' will first be discussed followed by content and finally community.

**Table 2:**

*Themes from the Data*

Theme	Percent of codes in theme	Example Item
Community	55%	"I feel like I am going to hang out with a funny group of people every time I go to class"
Teacher Personality	22%	"The whole atmosphere the professor provides...Always happy to be here"
Content	22%	"...we watch music videos [and] have fun projects"

### Teacher Personality

This theme was designated for personality traits of the teacher that the participants found enjoyment in, as opposed to content choices or teaching styles. There were two broad strands of this theme: the agentic power of a teacher's personality and pleasant personality traits.

The teacher does a great job getting everyone involved and making sure everyone is having a good day.

I enjoy the professor getting us involved in class.

These two quotations show what the participants perceive to be in the teacher's control: getting people involved in the classroom. Other respondents mentioned the teacher's role in creating a good 'atmosphere.' These responses seem to highlight the teacher as being in control of their source of FLE, especially in the two examples using the word 'getting' removes some of the agency on the part of the participants. Two responses even directly compared this class with other classes saying the instructor makes it "more fun than I have experienced in other classes," which highlights this agentive role the students place on the instructor. This theme mirrors the results of Yeşilçınar and Erdemir (2023), and to some extent, it could be applied to the teacher-controlled variables that Dewaele and Dewaele (2020) explore. It could also be understood to fit into the 'community' theme given the interaction required of the teacher, but because it has already been attested in the research, it remains separate here.

Another strand of responses in this theme focused on the qualities of the teacher's personality more so than the ability of the teacher themselves. Some respondents reported that the teacher's 'enthusiasm' and 'passion' were what they enjoyed about the class. Other adjectives included 'fun', 'excited' and 'accessible.' These differentiate themselves from the more agentive area because they seem to represent more stable qualities while the act of 'getting a class involved' or creating a good atmosphere requires a choice on the part of the teacher.

## **Content**

For content there were mainly two strands, the first being the authentic materials in TL and the other being 'silly' projects/activities. For authentic materials, one upper-level participant described the act of reading comedic plays as enjoyable even if "the instructor has to explain exactly why [they are funny]." Another mentions how "videos, articles, and talking about subjects that affect my daily life helps me have more fun" as opposed to material from the textbook. Two others mentioned music and music videos as a source of enjoyment. The comment about materials that 'affect my daily life' is particularly illuminating as to why authentic materials can cause enjoyment because they show real-world things that students can relate to. This is the case with the plays as well, these are real-world items that affect the lives of students, meaning they still matter outside the classroom. The same can be said about music and music videos. These authentic materials seem to give students license to use their imagination and continue thinking outside of class.

The other strand, 'silly' projects/activities, corresponds well with Dewaele and MacIntyre's (2014) 'unique activities.' One participant mentions, "Our projects are sometimes silly (apocalypses and writing about whatever you want)," and another mentions that their "tongue twister day was fun because we all sounded ridiculous." These two strands share a feeling of vulnerability on the part of the students: in the case of the silliness, students have to be willing to be silly, and in the case of the authentic materials, students have to be willing to let the material affect their life. This parallels with the proposed idea of risk-taking as a prerequisite for FLE (Piechurska-Kuciel, 2017), meaning that one must be vulnerable to feel the full effects of enjoyment.

## **Community**

Community is the biggest theme that emerged from these data and it is the least attested in the literature. Community is different from personality qualities or peer/teacher support in that it requires interaction from all parties involved. These following two quotations highlight this interaction:

I like all of my classmates, I like the lessons. I also like that we do have fun in the class, not just working or lessons. The other day we threw a birthday party for our teacher that she absolutely loved.

We are able to get to know each other and work together effectively

In these citations, it is not simply the quality of the classmates or the teacher, it is the interaction between the participant and them. In the first quotation, the respondent starts off with qualities of classmates (they like them), then continues to talk about throwing a birthday party for the instructor. Throwing someone a birthday party is not typically done just because you like them, it is evidence of a more profound social structure underneath. In a similar vein, the second quote highlights the ability for students to get to know one another within the matrix of this community. One upper-level participant talks about being comfortable discussing current events with their classmates and instructor because they “really understand you no matter what walk of life they come from.” This sort of understanding is not something developed merely by qualities or support from peers or the teacher. Rather, it hints at a community social structure. Another respondent highlights how this community might grow:

Some things I enjoy about my French class is socializing with my classmates. It was difficult to do at the beginning of the semester, but as we learn more information about each other we feel better and more comfortable with speaking.

The word ‘socializing’ is what suggests community here, as it implies a give-and-take, an interaction. This respondent went further to talk about the process of learning more about their classmates which made their class more communal. Another respondent said that their class was “very collaborative and conversational” and the word collaborative suggests interaction. Perhaps no response is more illustrative of this theme than, “It’s always fun because I feel like I’m going to go hangout with a funny group of people every time I go to class.” This shows that interaction and community are key sources for FLE in this context.

## DISCUSSION

Throughout the findings, many familiar themes arose; the ‘content’ theme, which closely resembles the ‘specific classroom activities’ reported by Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) and Jiang and Dewaele (2019), and the non-traditional teaching practices reported by Li et al. (2018). The ‘teacher personality’ theme resembles what was reported by Dewaele and Dewaele (2020), Yeşilçinar and Erdemir (2023) and Aridayani and Waluyo (2022). The present study does show a ‘community’ theme that was previously unattested in the research, though it is very possible it was there and instead grouped under ‘teacher and peer support.’ The community theme is unique in the sense that it was the most widely reported antecedent and it does not fall under learner-internal or external, as it pertains to both. In response to the first



research question, it seems that content, teacher personality and community are the sources of FLE for university L2 French students.

Yeşilçınar and Erdemir (2023) posited that the socio-constructivist approach explained their social factor quite well as the learning environment cannot be separated from the social, and that approach could perhaps work well for the results presented here. However, because the socio-constructivist approach is not an emotional theory, this may not greatly help the comprehension of these results in a broader context. The L2EPP (Shao et al., 2020) theory goes further in explaining the results of this study as it allows for BB to act as its own antecedent. This especially fits the community theme observed. It is possible that initial teacher personality or peer support provides the positive emotions to seek out connections which in turn provides more positive emotions eventually leading to community, which then acts as the antecedent to FLE in this context. For the second research question it seems that L2EPP sufficiently explains these results.

More generally, using L2EPP (Shao et al., 2020) in analysis can better explain why results are so diverse and allow for pedagogical adaptability. Shao et al. (2020) list 'institution' factors as quality of 'teaching,' 'teacher-student relationship,' 'peer relationship,' 'school' and 'classroom.' The 'quality of teaching' could be applied to studies who found pedagogy to be the largest antecedent (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Jiang & Dewaele, 2019; Li et al., 2018), while the 'school' and 'relationship' categories could be used to explain the 'community' antecedent in this study alongside Apridayani and Waluyo (2022) and Yeşilçınar and Erdemir (2023). Finally, the 'characteristics' section could explain the private feelings present in Yang (2021). In this framework the question then becomes why these dimensions play different roles in different contexts. Li et al., (2018), for example, posit that Chinese culture is more teacher-centered and that the antecedents of FLE will thus reflect this. Future research could use thick qualitative descriptions to describe the 'institutions' or 'characteristics' in the L2EPP model in the study's given context, paired with the quantitative scales to define the phenomenon of FLE more accurately. This would allow for the calibration of these antecedents for different contexts and would inform on what these contexts are (e.g., language-specific, classroom-specific, school-specific). Overall, a more flexible theoretical base would explain the differences in results, account for the social realities that surround FLE, and render these antecedents more applicable to instructors, while still combining the two most popular theories in emotion research.

## **CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS, AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

This study adds to the research surrounding antecedents of FLE, but due to its exploratory nature it has significant limitations. A qualitative open-ended survey design was selected in order to capture many participants' voices at once, but semi-structured interviews or narrative inquiry paired with this survey would produce more in-depth results. This brief report is also contextually limited as it only focused on students of one language in one country. Future studies could further elucidate the phenomenon of FLE in different contexts. This study only focuses on FLE, while the majority of studies have included other emotions and emotion related concepts. Future studies could incorporate more emotions in a longitudinal design, for example, by investigating the emergence of a classroom community and its effects on sources of FLE.

Using a theoretical framework during analysis is critical to the understanding of the antecedents in FLE as this renders the findings more actionable to practitioners. Future studies could continue to use the L2EPP theory to interpret results, which would strengthen/calibrate the many components. Overall, more in-depth qualitative studies with theory-driven analysis will greatly help our comprehension of this complex phenomenon. While this study is qualitative and not generalizable, it would perhaps be pedagogically advantageous for practitioners to encourage the formation of a classroom community. This community formation could take shape in many different ways, but as participants reported in this report the act of socializing with their classmates gives them enjoyment.

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## Appendix A

Please respond to the following questions in as much detail as possible. There are no right or wrong answers!

When asking for ‘detail’, we are curious about the specifics. Below is an example of the type of answer we are looking for:

How do you feel when you’re leaving your French class?

*I usually feel tired because my class is in the morning. Often my brain is tired from speaking French for hour. My social batteries are drained sometimes because of how much socializing I have to do in a short period of time. Every now and then I feel pumped because I answered something right in class and the professor was excited about it*

In the above example the answer went through the most common ways they might feel after a class, we would like you to do this with each question! Remember this is not graded, it is okay if your paragraphs are too long/short or if you start a sentence with ‘because’; the only thing that matters is your perspective!