

Teacher Enthusiasm Matters to Faculty and Student Performance in the DLIFLC Learning Context

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Enthusiastic teachers, driven by intrinsic and extrinsic motivators, transform classrooms into dynamic environments that boost student engagement and academic success. This article examines the influence of teacher enthusiasm as a predictor of faculty wellbeing and academic achievement, providing practical strategies to enhance teacher passion and student outcomes within the DLIFLC learning context.

Keywords: *Student Engagement, Academic Success, Teacher Enthusiasm, Faculty Wellbeing, Practical Strategies*

INTRODUCTION

Teacher enthusiasm is essential for teacher wellbeing and student engagement, and it is linked to improved instructional quality, higher faculty self-confidence, and greater job satisfaction (Kunter et al., 2011). Driven by genuine interest in teaching and supported by institutional benefits and rewards, enthusiastic teachers often demonstrate superior classroom management, encourage deeper thinking, and offer stronger support for students (Kunter, 2013).

How does teacher enthusiasm affect faculty wellbeing and student performance? What are some actionable steps to develop it? This article is intended for DLIFLC faculty and supervisors seeking practical strategies to strengthen teacher enthusiasm and improve student outcomes.

WHAT IS TEACHER ENTHUSIASM?

According to Keller et al. (2016), teacher enthusiasm is a two-dimensional construct that combines a teacher's internal enjoyment with its external manifestation and is influenced by both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators. Within language pedagogy, this enthusiasm serves as a powerful, contagious positive emotion that cultivates student motivation, reduces classroom

boredom, and boosts engagement for improved academic success. Enthusiastic teachers leverage nonverbal immediacy, subject passion, and constructive feedback to cultivate a supportive, proactive environment that enhances language acquisition.

Teacher enthusiasm is a key driver of student confidence and classroom engagement (Brigham et al., 1992, as cited in OECD, 2019). When teachers are highly enthusiastic, it can foster student engagement for students who have both fixed and growth mindsets (Lei, 2026). Furthermore, sustained teacher enthusiasm enables faculty to maintain the long-term empathy necessary to support student achievement (Santana-Monagas et al., 2025).

Intrinsic Drives

Motivation from within to fulfill career and life goals offers deep psychological benefits. Curiosity, aspiration for professional development, and a sense of accomplishment have lasting impacts on fostering teacher enthusiasm. Teachers find intrinsic motivation in witnessing their students' growth and active engagement (Stenlund, 1995, as cited in Keller et al., 2016). Conversely, disruptive and underachieving students can dampen teacher enthusiasm and drain their motivation (Kunter et al., 2011).

Extrinsic Motivators

Teacher enthusiasm is closely related to contextual school conditions. Incentives like bonuses, time off, and flexible work schedules motivate teachers to stay enthusiastic. Teachers are more motivated and enthusiastic when working in a respectful, transparent, and supportive environment that offers genuine appreciation, a healthy work-life balance, and a respect for teacher autonomy (Zhou et al., 2024).

Faculty Wellbeing

As a critical element of pedagogical competence, teacher enthusiasm elevates job satisfaction and makes job performance both more enjoyable and sustainable. Enthusiastic teachers maintain high motivation, creating a lively classroom atmosphere that actively drives student engagement and learning outcomes. Research has found that teachers who experienced higher levels of enthusiasm reported higher levels of job and life satisfaction and lower levels of emotional exhaustion (Kunter et al., 2008, 2011, 2013, as cited in Keller et al., 2016).

FOSTERING FACULTY ENTHUSIASM AT DLIFLC

To foster faculty enthusiasm at DLIFLC, schools and supervisors must cultivate a supportive work environment that offers ample professional development opportunities, while instructors simultaneously commit to regular reflection on their pedagogical purpose for ongoing growth. Here are some practical strategies:

Cultivating a Productive Work Environment

To cultivate a collaborative work environment and provide practical classroom solutions, schools should offer targeted workshops and conferences addressing instructors' real-world needs, focusing on immediate challenges such as burnout and skill gaps. Supervisors should implement the following strategies:

- Cultivate a culture of trust: establish an environment built on open communication where teachers feel safe sharing ideas and providing feedback.
- Invest in professional growth: provide actionable training, effective mentorship, and a clear career path to boost skill development, dedication, and engagement.
- Recognize and value contributions: promptly and consistently acknowledge both instructors' small wins and major milestones to ensure they feel valued and refreshed in their roles.

Fostering Intrinsic Motivation

Teachers are intrinsically motivated to enhance skills they personally value. To foster this drive, instructors can set small achievable goals and incorporate rejuvenating activities. Effective strategies include actively engaging in professional development—such as workshops, conferences, and webinars—along with self-directed pursuits such as reading, writing, volunteering, and exercising.

Here is an example of selfless, passionate teaching driven by intrinsic motivation. Dr. Donna Maurer is an experienced educator known for her genuine assistance and dynamic engagement with students (Dempsey, 2024). I value the eight-week online course I took with her a decade ago. It was a model of structure and engagement that featured explicit guidelines, empathic online interactions that validated student concerns, rapid inquiry responses, and fair, actionable feedback on assignments. During a recent email exchange regarding teacher enthusiasm, she shared that her motivation stems from the opportunity to learn new things herself and, “if fortunate,” to engage with the one or two students each term who are genuinely enthusiastic and appreciative.

Using Reflective Journaling

Reflective journaling fosters teacher balance and resilience. By tracking classroom behavior and experiences, instructors can more clearly identify areas for improvement and set more effective goals. These journals serve as a comprehensive record, covering pedagogical adjustments, key workplace interactions, students' challenges and achievements, the teacher's emotional highs and lows, and critical incidents, to facilitate professional growth.

I maintain a daily reflective journal to analyze student academic and emotional data, synthesize professional development insights, and process workplace experiences. This practice enables me

to proactively address pedagogical challenges, cultivate a proactive classroom environment, and increase job satisfaction.

Navigating Learner Behavior Challenges

Student misconduct, ranging from disruption to blatant disrespect, compromises the learning environment and stifles instructional passion. I've faced challenging management situations in my classes—such as a student putting on makeup and another placing their feet on the desk—and immediately addressed them. However, the students' subsequent disengagement and sullen attitudes created a challenging environment that gradually diminished my enthusiasm. To deal with these challenges, I revamped classroom management to sharpen student focus with a more composed, intentional style:

- De-escalation: use subtle non-verbal cues to lower tension.
- Private chats: hold private chats to maintain student dignity.
- Positive redirection: utilize positive framing to redirect behavior.
- Team collaboration: collaborate with teaching team members, supervisors, and MLIs to enforce consistent behavior expectations.

By implementing these strategies, I've successfully mitigated minor disruptions, including slouching, talking out of turn, technology misuse, and occasional lateness, resulting in increased student engagement, heightened classroom focus, and revitalized teacher enthusiasm.

Analyzing Student Feedback

Constructive student feedback regarding lessons and guidance significantly boosts teacher enthusiasm, whereas unfair or unfounded comments can rapidly erode it. Like other DLIFLC instructors, I receive anonymous student feedback through sensing sessions, the Mid-Course Student Questionnaire, and the End-of-Program Student Questionnaire. In feedback from a recent class, one student commented on my teaching style as “very well-tailored to myself specifically. I very much enjoy his teaching style and feel that it has [been] a big help for me”; whereas another briefly wrote, “He’s very cut and dry about our downfalls.” While the first student’s positive review was motivating, the latter’s ambiguous feedback proved difficult to address effectively.

It is natural for instructors to feel unsettled by student comments that express opportunities for professional development. However, professional resilience requires separating student feedback from their immediate emotional state. Often, these comments reflect external stressors—such as personal, situational, or military-related pressures—and learning difficulties, rather than an accurate reflection of the actual classroom environment. To sustain teacher enthusiasm, supervisors should employ a constructive, calm, and open-minded approach that helps instructors process the feedback by:

- Objectively analyzing feedback: fairly evaluate both praise and criticism to identify strengths to maintain and areas for growth.
- Consistently demonstrating confidence: regularly express trust and support in the teacher's work ethic and abilities.

TRANSLATE TEACHER ENTHUSIASM INTO STUDENT OUTCOMES

Enthusiastic teachers cultivate a lively, inviting, and well-managed classroom through empathetic, positive engagement to improve academic achievement. Here are some actionable, research-backed strategies for translating teacher enthusiasm into improved student outcomes.

Displaying Enthusiasm

Students feel higher levels of enjoyment and engagement when teachers visibly display enthusiasm (Keller et al., 2018). When teachers show passion for their subjects and related inherent values, it inspires students to explore them further. Enthusiastic teachers utilize emotional regulation to project a positive attitude despite their personal, pedagogical, or classroom challenges. According to Collins (1978, as cited in Keller et al., 2016), enthusiastic teachers boost student engagement through nonverbal immediacy, including:

- Vocal animation: employing varied intonation and pitch
- Consistent eye contact: making direct, engaging eye contact with students
- Demonstrative gestures: using hand and arm movements to emphasize points
- Active body movements: moving around the classroom or changing postures
- Dynamic facial expressions: smiling, nodding, and displaying expressions that show interest
- Precise word choice: utilizing clear and engaging language
- Validation of input: being responsive to student ideas and feelings
- High energy level: maintaining a lively, dynamic classroom presence

Using Positive Reinforcement

Strategic positive reinforcement significantly enhances classroom engagement and behavior outcomes, establishing a reciprocal cycle that improves student motivation and professional satisfaction. Focusing on praising desirable actions rather than merely addressing mistakes, enthusiastic teachers use this approach to foster a safer, more productive environment that strengthens teacher-student relationships.

Recently I was touched by a thank-you sent by a student on the day he was disenrolled, expressing his appreciation and interest in continuing to learn the language. The student was facing challenges and required tailored support and additional study time. As his mentor, I recognized his dedication to high-quality homework submissions, which took him a considerable amount of time to complete, while advising him to stay calm, be motivated, and improve time

management and test-taking skills. After two more quiz failures, for the first time he passed the subsequent three vocabulary quizzes in a row with impressive scores. Despite the teaching team's final decision to disenroll him, he kept a positive, hopeful attitude and expressed a desire to continue learning the language on his own.

In the high-pressure DLIFLC learning environment, positive reinforcement is vital for managing student stress, enhancing engagement, and boosting learning confidence. By providing genuine, timely, and specific feedback that rewards student efforts, instructors can cultivate a growth mindset and significantly improve academic outcomes.

Showing Empathy

Teachers who balance dynamic enthusiasm with empathetic understanding are better equipped to enhance student engagement and maintain an inviting learning environment. Santana-Monagas et al. (2025) argue that while teacher enthusiasm provides indirect emotional support for student motivation, empathic teaching fosters a stronger sense of school belonging and higher student outcomes. Their findings suggest that educators who truly understand students achieve superior results in both instructional efficiency and classroom management. To alleviate learning pressure and boost engagement, instructors can use the following strategies to cultivate empathy:

- Get to know students: take time to understand each student's unique background, interests, and strengths.
- Adapt to personalities: respect individual personalities and tailor interaction style to suit different students.
- Support emotional needs: normalize language learning anxiety and provide personalized coaching on areas such as time management and test-taking.
- Reframe sensitivity: shift the narrative for highly sensitive students to help them view their deep attention to detail and high empathy as an indicator of academic potential rather than setbacks.
- Provide a tailored environment: offer quiet, independent spaces or small group settings for students overwhelmed by larger classroom dynamics.
- Alleviate pressure: offer extra time to students with slower processing speeds to reduce performance pressure.

Establishing Inviting and Well-Managed Classrooms

An inviting and well-managed classroom can transform disengaged students into self-driven learners. To ensure a fair learning environment, I uphold consistent standards for every student in class regardless of their military rank or academic standing. In one instance, I worked with a student who struggled with engagement, seldom taking class notes and frequently requesting bathroom breaks even five minutes before a lesson ended. The student's confidence and motivation began to improve as we worked on active mentoring with detailed feedback and

fostering a growth mindset where mistakes are treated as learning opportunities. Gradually, the student stopped requesting breaks and moved from minimal participation to self-driven mastery, including the additional study of Chinese characters and authentic materials available through GLOSS.

To establish an inviting and well-managed classroom, instructors can:

- Establish clear protocols: set transparent expectations at the outset to ensure equitable classroom management and reduce behavior disruptions.
- Prioritize psychological safety: allow students to feel safe to make mistakes, viewing errors as learning opportunities.
- Build authentic rapport: balance professional boundaries with authenticity to help foster a sense of belonging.
- Tailor individual support: provide individual pedagogical support to mitigate student anxiety and strengthen academic resilience.

CONCLUSION

This article explores teacher enthusiasm as a primary driver of classroom engagement and academic success, while simultaneously examining its role in faculty wellbeing. By synthesizing empirical research with reflective practice, the paper provides practical strategies for leveraging teacher enthusiasm to enhance DLIFLC student outcomes. These approaches include:

- Building a supportive work culture: foster an environment of trust and collaboration with sufficient professional development opportunities to boost teacher motivation.
- Practicing reflective journaling: use regular journaling as a tool to process professional experiences and maintain mental clarity.
- Leveraging student feedback: analyze student comments to pinpoint specific, actionable areas for growth.
- Creating inviting and well-managed classrooms: combine enthusiasm and empathy to build a learning environment where positive reinforcement improves student outcomes.

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