

BEYOND THE SCRIPT: ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF TEACHER ENTHUSIASM ON TASK COMPLETION AND FLUENCY IN EFL CLASSROOMS

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Abstract: *While Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task Based Learning (TBL) provide robust frameworks for language acquisition, the effectiveness of these approaches is often mediated by the instructor's affective presence. This action research study explores the relationship between teacher enthusiasm—operationalized through vocal variation, physical movement, and positive affect—and measurable student performance. Conducted in a secondary English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, the study compares student fluency and task completion rates across varying degrees of teacher vitality. Initial findings indicate that high levels of teacher energy serve as a catalyst for learner flow, contributing to increased Student Talking Time (STT) and greater accuracy in task outcomes. The paper concludes that teacher enthusiasm should be understood not as a fixed personality trait, but as a core professional competency essential to effective language instruction.*

Annotation: *This action research study examines the impact of teacher enthusiasm—defined through vocal variation, physical movement, and positive affect—on student fluency and task completion in a secondary EFL classroom. Drawing on frameworks of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) and task based learning (Willis & Willis, 2007), the study compares student performance across high enthusiasm and neutral enthusiasm conditions. Findings indicate that intentional teacher vitality increases Student Talking Time and task accuracy by providing emotional scaffolding, catalyzing fluency, and fostering kinesthetic synergy. The article concludes that teacher enthusiasm should be reconceptualized as a trainable professional competency rather than a fixed personality trait, with direct implications for lesson planning and teacher education.*

Keywords: *teacher enthusiasm, affective presence, task based learning (TBL), Student Talking Time (STT), flow theory, action research, EFL instruction, emotional scaffolding*

Introduction

The evolution of English Language Teaching (ELT) has seen a definitive shift toward learner centered frameworks, most notably Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task Based Learning (TBL). These methodologies prioritize authentic interaction and the successful completion of goal oriented tasks as the primary drivers of second language acquisition (Richards & Rodgers, 2014; Willis & Willis, 2007). However, while the structural design of a task is critical, the “human” delivery of the lesson—the teacher’s emotional and physical presence—is often treated as a background variable rather than a core pedagogical tool. In many instances, a technically perfect lesson plan fails to achieve student engagement not because of a methodological flaw, but due to a lack of affective energy from the instructor. This

affective dimension is captured by the concept of affective presence (Eisenkraft & Heiman, 2009), which describes the consistent emotional influence one person has on others.

This study argues that teacher enthusiasm is a significant catalyst that can transform lesson delivery and student engagement. Following the behavioral criteria established by Rosenshine and Furst (1973), enthusiasm is defined here through measurable indicators such as vocal inflection, physical gesturing, and movement. While Kunter et al. (2008) distinguish between enthusiasm for the subject matter and enthusiasm for the act of teaching, this research focuses on the latter as a primary driver of student performance. By modeling high vitality, the instructor facilitates a state of flow—the optimal experience of engagement where learners lose self consciousness and increase their linguistic output (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Egbert, 2003). Through action research, this article examines how this energetic “script” directly impacts task completion rates and oral fluency in the EFL classroom.

Methodology

This action research was conducted over a six week period in a secondary EFL classroom at an academic lyceum in Tashkent. Participants were 32 students (14–16 years of age) with a pre intermediate proficiency level. The study employed a repeated measures design, with the same students exposed to alternating conditions across six parallel task based lessons drawn from the Willis and Willis (2007) framework.

In high enthusiasm sessions, I deliberately deployed vocal variety (pitch variation, strategic pauses), sustained physical movement (circulating among groups, gesturing), and positive affect (smiling, encouraging intonation). In neutral enthusiasm sessions, I maintained even vocal tone, stationary positioning, and affectively neutral delivery while covering identical task content and structure.

Student Talking Time (STT) was measured by audio recording each session and calculating total seconds of student speech using a standardized coding protocol. Task completion accuracy was assessed using a four point rubric measuring alignment with task outcome criteria. Additionally, I maintained a reflective journal documenting student behaviors and engagement patterns following each session.

Findings

Comparison of the six sessions revealed consistent differences between conditions. Under high enthusiasm, average STT per task was 142 seconds, compared to 79 seconds in neutral sessions—an increase of approximately 80%. Task completion accuracy also improved: 84% of groups achieved full or high accuracy under high enthusiasm, versus 53% under neutral conditions.

My reflective journal documented qualitative patterns that complemented these numbers. In high enthusiasm sessions, students volunteered more readily, laughed more frequently, and rarely needed prompting to begin tasks. Off task behaviors—such as looking at phones or side conversations—dropped noticeably. In neutral sessions, by contrast, I observed longer pauses before students responded, more frequent requests for reassurance (“Is this right?”), and visible signs of hesitation such as looking down or avoiding eye contact.

The following discussion interprets these findings through the theoretical lenses introduced earlier.

Discussion: the impact on performance

The findings—increased STT and higher task completion accuracy under high enthusiasm conditions—invite deeper interpretation. Why does a teacher’s vocal variety, physical movement, and positive affect yield such measurable gains? The answer, I argue, lies in three interrelated mechanisms: enthusiasm as emotional scaffolding, its direct influence on fluency, and the kinesthetic synergy it creates between teacher and learners. Together, these mechanisms suggest that teacher enthusiasm is not an accessory to sound lesson planning but a foundational component of it.

Enthusiasm as emotional scaffolding

Task Based Learning, as operationalized by Willis and Willis (2007), proceeds through a task cycle: pre task, task, planning, and report. Each phase presents distinct affective challenges. During the task phase, learners grapple with real time communication under pressure; during the planning and report phases, they face the vulnerability of public presentation. In the present study, high enthusiasm conditions appeared to provide what might be termed emotional scaffolding—affective support that helped learners navigate these demanding moments.

Csikszentmihalyi’s (1990) theory of flow offers a lens for understanding this process. Flow requires clear goals, immediate feedback, and a balance between challenge and skill. In the neutral enthusiasm condition, my delivery was affectively flat; learners often hesitated, seeking implicit reassurance that rarely came. In contrast, high enthusiasm sessions were characterized by animated goal reminders (“You’ve got this—let’s see how many ideas you can list!”) and immediate, positively inflected feedback (“Yes, exactly like that!”). Such behaviors, grounded in Rosenshine and Furst’s (1973) definition of enthusiasm as vocal variety and physical expressiveness, created conditions conducive to flow. Learners reported feeling “pushed but not overwhelmed”—a balance Csikszentmihalyi identifies as essential for optimal experience.

Moreover, enthusiasm served as a buffer against task induced anxiety. Egbert (2003) demonstrated that flow in language learning is closely tied to perceived control and intrinsic interest. In my observations, students in high enthusiasm sessions exhibited fewer signs of avoidance (e.g., eyes down, silent withdrawal) and more proactive engagement. For instance, during one high enthusiasm task, a usually reticent student initiated a complex question to her partner without waiting for my prompt—something she never did under neutral conditions. Such moments suggested that my energy effectively “held” the emotional space, allowing learners to risk communication.

From teacher vitality to student fluency

The most striking quantitative finding was the marked increase in Student Talking Time during high enthusiasm sessions. This is not merely a matter of students having more to say; it speaks to the quality of the interactive environment. Kunter et al. (2008) distinguished between enthusiasm for the subject and enthusiasm for teaching, noting that the latter more strongly predicts instructional quality. The present study extends that finding by linking teaching enthusiasm directly to a measurable production outcome.

Why does teacher vitality unlock student fluency? One explanation lies in the concept of affective presence (Eisenkraft & Heiman, 2009). Individuals consistently influence the emotions of those around them; a teacher with a positive, energetic affective presence creates

an emotional climate where students feel safe to take linguistic risks. Fluency, after all, is not merely a cognitive skill—it is a willingness to speak without self correction or hesitation. When the teacher models fearlessness through animated, enthusiastic delivery, students implicitly receive permission to do the same.

Additionally, the dynamic delivery characteristic of high enthusiasm—vocal variety, strategic pauses, physical proximity—functions as implicit scaffolding. During the Willis and Willis (2007) task phase, for instance, enthusiastic teacher moves (circulating among groups, leaning in with a warm smile) served as non verbal “go aheads” that kept talk flowing. In neutral sessions, students more frequently paused to consult the teacher about “correctness,” indicating a subtle reliance on external approval. The reduction of such pauses in high enthusiasm sessions aligns with Csikszentmihalyi’s (1990) claim that flow reduces self consciousness, freeing cognitive resources for the task at hand.

Kinesthetic synergy: the embodied classroom

The third mechanism—kinesthetic synergy—emerged from the interplay between teacher movement and student physical engagement. In the high enthusiasm condition, I deliberately employed Rosenshine and Furst’s (1973) behaviors: moving from the front of the room to circulate, using hand gestures to punctuate instructions, and mirroring student gestures to create rapport. This physical presence seemed to elicit a corresponding physical energy from learners.

This phenomenon resonates with the concept of embodied pedagogy, which holds that cognition and emotion are grounded in bodily experience (Gibbs, 2006). When the teacher models physical engagement, it signals that learning is not a sedentary, passive act but a dynamic, participatory one. During tasks that involved physical manipulation (e.g., moving cards, standing to form groups), the alignment between my energy and the students’ activity was particularly pronounced. I observed that in high enthusiasm sessions, transitions between task phases were faster and off task behavior minimal; the class moved together as a coherent ensemble.

Willis and Willis (2007) emphasize that task cycles rely on smooth transitions to maintain momentum. My experience suggests that teacher enthusiasm is a critical engine for that momentum. When I moved with purpose and vocalized with variety, students mirrored that purposeful energy. In neutral sessions, by contrast, my stationary posture and even tone seemed to invite lethargy; transitions dragged, and students required repeated prompts to initiate tasks.

Enthusiasm as a core planning tool

Taken together, these three mechanisms—emotional scaffolding, fluency catalysis, and kinesthetic synergy—elevate teacher enthusiasm from a matter of personal style to a professional competency. The data suggest that when enthusiasm is intentionally deployed, it directly influences the conditions for flow, the willingness to produce language, and the embodied coherence of the classroom. This finding aligns with Kunter et al. (2008), who argued that enthusiasm for teaching is a distinct and malleable component of instructional quality, and with Rosenshine and Furst (1973), whose early work identified enthusiasm as a trainable teaching behavior.

For the novice or experienced teacher alike, this reconceptualization has practical consequences. Lesson planning should explicitly include decisions about when to employ high energy (e.g., during task initiation, during feedback), how to use physical space and voice to scaffold different task phases, and how to calibrate enthusiasm to avoid overstimulation. Teacher education programs can incorporate micro teaching exercises that focus specifically on vocal variety, movement, and positive affect, treating these as skills to be practiced rather than traits to be possessed.

In the final analysis, the present action research suggests that the “performance” angle of teaching—the deliberate, skilled use of one’s own presence—is not a superficial add on but a pedagogical lever. When employed intentionally, teacher enthusiasm has the potential to transform a well planned lesson into a lived experience of flow, fluency, and collective engagement.

Conclusion and Implications

This action research set out to explore whether teacher enthusiasm—operationalized through vocal variety, physical movement, and positive affect—exerts a measurable influence on student performance in EFL classrooms. The findings consistently indicate that high levels of teacher vitality correlate with increased Student Talking Time (STT) and greater task completion accuracy. More importantly, the qualitative observations reveal how this influence operates: enthusiasm functions as emotional scaffolding that helps learners navigate the affective demands of the task cycle; it catalyzes fluency by creating a safe, risk taking climate; and it generates kinesthetic synergy that transforms the classroom into a coherent, engaged learning ensemble.

Reconceptualizing enthusiasm

These findings invite a fundamental reconceptualization of enthusiasm in language teaching. Historically, enthusiasm has been treated as a desirable but elusive personality trait—something teachers either possess or lack. The present study, however, aligns with the work of Rosenshine and Furst (1973) and Kunter et al. (2008) in demonstrating that enthusiasm is composed of discrete, observable behaviors that can be deliberately deployed and cultivated. When teachers intentionally vary their voice, move purposefully through the classroom, and project positive affect, they are not simply performing; they are deliberately constructing conditions conducive to flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Egbert, 2003). In this sense, enthusiasm is not an add on to a well planned lesson—it is a pedagogical lever that activates the lesson’s potential.

Implications for practice

For classroom teachers: Lesson planning should include explicit consideration of where and how to infuse enthusiasm. Decisions about vocal emphasis, movement patterns, and moments of positive feedback are as integral to a lesson plan as timing and grouping. Teachers can treat enthusiasm as a skill to be practiced: recording oneself, seeking peer feedback on delivery, and deliberately experimenting with vocal and physical variety in low stakes parts of the lesson.

For teacher education and professional development: Pre service and in service programs should incorporate micro teaching exercises that isolate and develop enthusiastic delivery.

Trainees can benefit from video analysis of their own vocal inflection, gesture use, and physical positioning, learning to see these not as extras but as core instructional moves.

For institutional culture: Schools and departments can recognize teacher enthusiasm as a professional competency rather than a matter of personality. Peer observation protocols might include criteria related to affective presence, and mentoring programs can pair less experienced teachers with mentors who model strategic use of enthusiasm.

Limitations and Future Research

As an action research study conducted in a single secondary EFL context, the findings are context specific and not intended for broad generalization. My dual role as teacher and observer introduces the possibility of bias, and the small sample size limits statistical power. Future research could extend this work by employing larger samples, video based coding of teacher enthusiasm using established observation instruments, and longitudinal designs to examine whether sustained use of enthusiastic delivery produces lasting gains in language proficiency. Additionally, exploring student perspectives through structured interviews could enrich our understanding of how learners experience and respond to teacher vitality.

Final Reflection

In an educational landscape increasingly focused on methodological frameworks, curricular standards, and assessment metrics, the human dimension of teaching can sometimes be undervalued. This study suggests that the opposite should be true. The “performance” angle of teaching—the deliberate, skilled use of one’s own presence—is not a superficial performance but a fundamental driver of student engagement and achievement. When a teacher moves beyond the script and brings authentic, intentional enthusiasm into the classroom, students respond not merely with attention but with language: more words, more risk taking, more flow. For language teachers, that is a particularly valuable outcome.

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