

**Delilah Cawello**

# Foreign Language Enjoyment and Spoken Language in the EFL Primary Classroom

**Master's Thesis**

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**Master Thesis**

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Education

Date of Submission: July 28<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

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## List of Abbreviations

A1, A2...	Activity 1, Activity 2...
CC	Core Curriculum
CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference for Languages
CLT	Communicative Language Teaching
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
FL	Foreign Language
FLA	Foreign Language Anxiety
FLE	Foreign Language Enjoyment
FLL	Foreign Language Learning
FLP	Foreign Language Performance
L1	First Language
L2	Second Language
RQ	Research Question
S1, S2...	Student 1, Student 2, ...
TBLT	Task-Based Language Teaching

## 1. Introduction

*Shopping dialogues, conversations, giving directions, introducing oneself, songs, rhymes, and chants.*

All of these terms refer to spoken language activities that primary school children stated that they strongly enjoy in the English lesson. It is a well-known fact that the most important competence in *foreign language learning* (FLL) is speaking (Eddie and Aziz, 2020: 304). Besides listening comprehension or reading and writing, oral speech production helps the learner to acquire a language most effectively (Dewaele & Alfawzan, 2018: 28; Eddie & Aziz, 2020: 304, Becker & Roos, 2016: 9; Enever, 2011: 34). It is not only essential for succeeding but also places the focus on the learner who actively performs and speaks in the new language to learn it. The result of active involvement is substantial enjoyment, as Dörnyei (2001: 73) claims. In primary schools, this is especially the case when the activities conducted are designed in such a way that they elicit *foreign language* (FL) learners' interest by meaningful implementations or authentic content that applies to their own life (Dörnyei, 2001: 42). For a long time, research mainly focused on the widespread construct of *foreign language anxiety* (FLA), a negative emotion that hampers the learning process due to fear or insecurity and thus can be seen as devastating in FLL (Loewen, 2015: 162; Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2014: 1). On the other hand, the positive opponent has not been investigated as much but is viewed as crucial in the FLL process, which is why it will be closely explored in this thesis (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2019: 264).

*Foreign language enjoyment* (FLE) is "the emotion that fuels the second language learning process and that boosts performance in the second language" (Dewaele, to appear 2021: 1). In combination with *spoken language*, these two factors will be the main focus of this thesis, as two variables that are essential in terms of teaching the English subject in schools (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2016: 215). How do teachers convert spoken language into their lessons nowadays? Moreover, do they gain the desired outcomes of brisk contribution that flows from language enjoyment? Accordingly, this thesis aims to answer these questions in relation to the two previously-mentioned variables. Further, the main aim of this empirical study is to investigate FLE in young learners. It focuses specifically on enjoyment emerging throughout the process of spoken language within the EFL primary classroom (Dewaele & Alfawzan, 2018: 28). Besides that, potential reasons for the necessary appearance of the emotion of FLE are identified qualitatively and examined based on an empirical approach. To ascertain how primary school children's FLE is implemented in the English lessons – especially within spoken language activities – primary school students are interviewed and questioned according to this matter, before spoken language activities are performed by the learners. By examining the outcomes, conclusions can be drawn on what types of oral activities young learners find

significantly enjoyable. The overriding purpose of this study is to gain useful knowledge and insights for the primary school teaching profession.

In the current debate, FL researchers discuss and try to determine what methods can most effectively promote FLE. They agree that *task-based language teaching* (TBLT) and *communicative language teaching* (CLT) are the most effective teaching methods to convey the FL to young learners successfully (Mackey, 1999: 583; Mackey, Kanganas, Oliver, 2007: 306). Nonetheless, teaching techniques and methods are viewed as only one aspect of important features to be considered in teaching FLs (Pinter, 2017: 12-18). Learning achievements and thus learning enjoyment are also based on other factors, such as the teacher role, classroom atmosphere, and social peer interactions, among other (Bensalem, 2011: 11; Dörnyei, 2001:42). Moreover, it is necessary to acknowledge internal and external components in the process of FL teaching, like the language proficiency level or the age of a learner (Dörnyei, 2001: 40-42). These facets will be examined in this paper and verified in a qualitative research study.

Before outlining the findings of this thesis in the second half of this paper, a theoretical background (see chapter 2 and 3) provides information on FLL, the emotion of FLE, spoken language, and how enjoyment can be transferred and implemented into spoken language teaching. In addition, factors that can evoke FLE is presented, and an overview of different international studies is provided. Subsequently, the participants and the elicitation instruments are described. Furthermore, the results of the qualitative data analyses are presented. Finally, the research findings are discussed, and a brief conclusion is drawn at the end of this thesis.

## **2. Foreign Language Learning and Young Learners**

“[...] The mastery of two foreign languages seems to be a necessity nowadays” (Griva, Semoglou & Geladari, 2010: 3700). Based on this statement, Griva et al. investigated the advantages of FLL. Thus, it was assumed that being able to speak two languages can lead to higher competency levels (Singleton, 2002: 3-5), and convey long-term cognitive advantages as well as academic achievement (Bialystok, 2001: 1-3). Lightbown and Spada (2009: 111) highlighted how languages are learned mainly through imitation. Further, they listed a few statements according to how languages are to be learned: parents correct young children when they commit errors, intelligent people are good language learners, the earlier that an L2 is introduced in school programs, the higher the success rate, most of the mistakes that L2 learners make are due to interference from their L1, and learners' errors should be corrected as soon as they are made to prevent the emergence of bad habits (ibid.: 111-116). Griva et al. (2010: 3700) indicate that learning should predominantly be stimulating and enjoyable for learners. Among other things, this can be achieved by letting students participate actively in

interactive stimulations and physical activities (ibid.). In the following sub-chapters, this matter will be addressed in detail.

## 2.1 Foreign Language Learning

While learning is a conscious process that takes place through education, acquisition occurs spontaneously and proceeds comparable to the way in which children acquire a first language (L1) (Lalleman, 1996: 3). Lalleman adds that the instruction of FLL can be studied from different perspectives, such as the psycholinguistic, educational or the sociolinguistic perspective (ibid.). They provide insights into the human mind working processes. Its general aim is to contribute to the development of language learning (ibid.: 5). While Lalleman refers to the different perspectives of FLL, Wolff argues that humans learn languages similarly (Wolff, 2011: 4). He claims that L1 as well as L2 learnings have a similar sequence of specific stages (ibid.). While there are individual differences noticeable for each type of language learning, these differences are accounted for by individual learner features (ibid.: 5). FLL researchers have highlighted that it is crucial to consider individual differences and circumstances that appear in the learning processes of foreign languages (Wolff, 2011: 3; Lalleman, 1996: 6). These features can refer to the age or the gender of FL learners on the one hand. On the other hand, motivation and learner preferences are more difficult features to consider (Wolff, 2011: 3). These kinds of differences have an influence on the results of the FL acquisition process and thereby lead to different linguistic skills or abilities in the FL (ibid.).

Dörnyei (2001: 40-42) emphasized the need to acknowledge internal and external learner components for FLL to succeed. He refers to the teacher component as an important factor in successful FL (Dörnyei, 2001: 42). Language teachers need to scaffold new content by using “pictures, diagrams or graphic outlines to illustrate complex ideas” and link what they talk about to learners’ prior knowledge (Gibbins, 2015: 25). Dörnyei (2001: 42) constitutes that since teachers aim at conveying their subject in the best possible way, it is their responsibility to

encourage a pleasant and supportive atmosphere by establishing a norm of tolerance, encouraging risk-taking and have mistakes accepted as a natural part of learning, bringing in and encouraging humor, encouraging learners to personalize the classroom environment according to their taste.

Arabski and Wojtaszek (2011: xvi) agree and claim that an important aspect of caring for individual learner needs is the teacher’s involvement to develop learner autonomy. Other researchers’ results have highlighted the role of both parents and teachers in shaping learners’ independence and initiative, including selected psychological variables (ibid.). These features will be further examined in the following chapters.

## 2.2 Foreign Language Learning in the EFL Primary Classroom

From the third grade onwards, English is part of the state primary school curriculum as a FL (Griva et al., 2010: 3701). Around that age, young learners usually show motives of enthusiasm and interest in exploration concerning a FL (ibid.: 3700). They tend to be less inhibited or anxious than older learners (ibid.). Nonetheless, Griva et al. argue that a young age alone does not guarantee success in FLL (ibid.). Instead, there are other factors to acknowledge, like the teaching quality or amount of time devoted to the goal of achieving to learn a L2 (ibid.). Therefore, they state that children's enjoyment in terms of playing games or their openness towards FLs or cultures need to be taken seriously in the language course (ibid.). Griva et al. (2010: 3701) highlight that playing games is a natural activity for children. Hence, since FLL should be linked with natural activities, an effective way to learn a FL at a childhood age can be through games (ibid.). Children learn best by discovery or experimentation, which can be motivated by a playful learning context (ibid.). Thus, this way of learning should be implemented as children can learn a new language as naturally as learning to run, play or jump (ibid.). In further ways, playing games in the FL lesson will support children in developing and improving their oral skills while functioning as a motivation to make the learning acquisition fun and relaxing (Griva et al., 2010: 3701; Lee, 1995: 35). Moreover, the learners' focus will be maintained, and their interest can be implemented (Griva et al., 2010: 3701.). Since the teaching principles and ways of effective teaching will be explored in depth in the following course of this thesis, the process of FLL by playing games will not be further implemented in this section.

Besides the playful way of teaching whereby language acquisition occurs, learning takes place in conversations (Pinter, 2017: 12). "According to Vygotsky, all learning happens in social interactions with others" (Pinter, 2017: 12). Just like parents support young children's language by carefully and clearly explaining new information to them, teachers are responsible for regulating children's learning (ibid.). Therefore, the teacher talk that emerges in the English primary classroom is significant for FLL<sup>1</sup> (ibid.). Their language use is often viewed as the main source of language input for children. Because children receive new language input and learn new language forms by listening to the teacher within meaningful contexts, the teacher's utterances are crucial for the modeling of pronunciation (ibid.). Equally important is giving the learners interaction opportunities with teacher and peers (ibid.). As a result, it is essential for teachers to find the best way to scaffold FL lessons (Van de Pol, Volman & Beishuizen, 2010: 271). They need to choose useful teaching techniques to evoke language from their students and "encourage children to use language meaningfully with each other" (Pinter, 2017: 12).

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<sup>1</sup> This will be further explained in chapter 2.4.2.