

Factors that Indicate Foreign Language Teachers' Positive Impact on Students to Maintain Their Interest

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Abstract

Americans lack foreign language skills, and there is no solution in sight as various issues compound the already dire situation, including failure to understand the importance of acquiring other languages, instructional and curricular problems, teacher shortage, and lack of long-term study. The latter was the focus of this study. By means of an online survey, this qualitative study investigated how foreign language teachers determine whether or not they have a positive impact on their students to maintain their interest in the languages for long-term study. Findings revealed that the teachers believed that the factors that were indicative of their ability to maintain their students' interest were, in order, the interest the students showed in the classes and the languages, their engagement during class activities and academic success, the motivation they demonstrated, the feedback they provided about their classes and activities, and their relationships with their teachers.

Keywords: foreign language proficiency, communicative competence, student interest, student motivation, teacher self-efficacy, student engagement, long-term study, student feedback

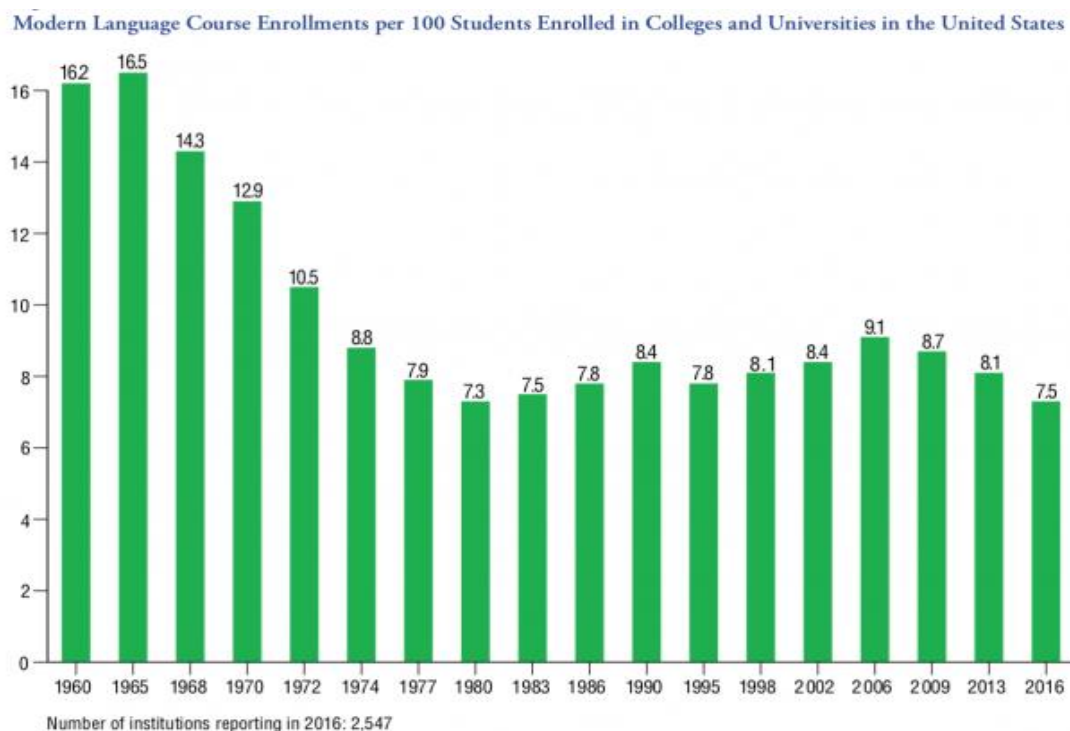
1. Introduction

America lags behind the rest of the world when it comes to foreign language skills. Seventy-five percent of Americans have no second language. Yet, according to the American Councils for International Education (2017), slightly less than 20% of U.S. students in Grades K-12 are learning a foreign language, including American Sign Language, while the median in the European Union is 92%. Some studies have shown that about 60% of Europeans are studying two or more foreign languages (Agudo, 2018; Mitchell, 2017). This situation prompted Matthews (2019) to write his article titled: "Half of the world is bilingual. What's our problem?" The American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the American Councils for International Education reports also stated that there is a critical need for qualified world language instructors (Mitchell, 2017). This crisis has been described as a threat to the nation's economic and military security as well as people's careers (Mitchell, 2017; Stein-Smith, 2013). According to Marty Abbott, executive director of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, "We're such a long way in this country from having it be normal to grow up learning other languages. Our future depends on our ability to engage with the rest of the world, and right now Americans have a very tough time doing that" (Mitchell, 2017, para. 5).

In order to address this issue, Agudo (2018) suggested that just as the Soviet Union's launch of Sputnik in 1957 prompted an educational renaissance in the United States, America should put similar energy into fixing the language deficit.

The situation is even grimmer at the university level, where language enrollment has been steadily declining and now stands at 7% of total college enrollments, and this very low enrollment is heavily concentrated at elementary levels and in the Spanish language (Friedman, 2015; Ryan, 2018; Stein-Smith, 2013). This is down from 8.1% from three years ago after falling 9.2% from 2013 to 2016, which was the second largest drop since 1958 (Flaherty, 2018). *USA Today* (Agudo, 2018) reports that with the exception of 1980, this year's number is the lowest since the 1950s (Figure 1). This decline is due partly to the fact that some departments have eliminated their foreign language requirements and some universities have done away with some foreign language programs (Johnson, 2019; Stein-Smith, 2019). Johnson (2019) reports that between 2013 and 2016, higher education lost 651 of its foreign language programs (10%), and that some academics claim that the decline is due partly to colleges' prioritization of STEM programs and to the long-term effects of colleges dropping language requirements, which began in the 1970s. Of the fifteen most commonly taught languages, only Japanese and Korean showed increases in enrollments from 2013 to 2016 (Looney & Lusin, 2018).

Figure 1 (From Flaherty, 2018)



There are also instructional issues that have contributed to the decline. Many studies have revealed that, according to students, some of the reasons why they discontinue the study of foreign languages are related to curricular and instructional practices (Andress et al., 2002; Horwitz, 2000; Ortiz, 2011; Pratt, 2010, 2016, 2017; Pratt et al., 2009; Ramage, 1990; Ryan, 2018; Speiller, 1988; Stein-Smith, 2013; Wesely, 2010). Additionally, there is evidence of a significant mismatch in the perspectives of the students and their teachers with regard to these contributory factors (Andress et al., 2002; Pratt, 2010, 2016, 2017; Pratt et al., 2009). Yet, there are no studies that report on the outcomes of the implementation of the recommended strategies or how the teachers are determining whether or not they are succeeding in bridging the gap between themselves and their students and impacting the students positively to keep them in the programs. There is a lack of teachers' voices about their perspectives regarding how they view the outcomes. The need to include teachers' voices became even more evident to these investigators when they discovered in a recent study that in spite of the instructional and curricular difficulties that are contributing to the attrition, the teachers overwhelmingly believed that they were successfully maintaining the interest of their students in the languages, although their self-efficacy scores were only mildly high (Pratt et al., in press). This study therefore investigated what teachers believe is indicative of their successful maintenance of their students' interest in the target languages, as part of an investigation into the outcomes of the implementation of the proposed strategies and recommendations.

2. Discontinuation of Foreign Language Study

While short-term foreign language learning is not the only cause of the U.S. foreign language deficit, it is a serious issue, as the high attrition rate impacts the dilemma significantly. In spite of the substantial amount of literature that has been produced in relation to the problem and the proposed strategies for solutions, the United States continues to fall behind the rest of the world, and the low priority given to foreign language study that Simon (1980) emphasized decades ago continues unabated. Most students still typically do not study a language beyond two years, and the downward trend persists (Alonso, 2007; Andress et al., 2002; Garfinkel, 1987; Pratt, 2010, 2016, 2017; Ramage, 1990; Speiller, 1988). Cummins (2008) distinguished between two differing kinds of language proficiency, namely basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP). BICS is the basic proficiency one needs for socialization, while CALP is the proficiency needed to meet academic demands. While BICS can be acquired in approximately two to three years in a foreign language setting, CALP takes much longer to develop, between five and seven years. Given that most American students study a language for a period of only two years, they do not even have an opportunity to reach an adequate level of BICS. That deficiency, compounded with the issue of some instructional incompetence and inappropriate curricula, results in inadequate foreign language education. Yet, that is the required period of study for college entrance as well as the undergraduate foreign language requirement in the universities where requirements still exist. As stated above, many universities no longer even have these requirements, which mean that most Americans are not reaching any type of proficiency level in foreign languages that enables them to function with the language.

Studies continue to find decreasing numbers among continuing high school students, students transitioning to college, and college students moving from lower-level to advanced-level classes (Wesely, 2010). The latest ratios of college introductory enrollments to advanced enrollments (Goldberg et al., 2015; Looney & Lusin, 2018) confirmed that the trend is as follows: Italian: 10:1 in 2009, 11:1 in 2013, and 10:1 in 2016; French and German: 4:1 in 2009, 5:1 in 2013, and 5:1 in 2016; Arabic and Latin: 7:1 in 2009, 2013, and 2016; Japanese and Spanish: 5:1 in 2009, 2013, and 2016; Chinese: 4:1 in 2009 and 2013, and 3:1 in 2016; Korean: 3:1 in 2009, 4:1 in 2013, and 5:1 in 2016; and Portuguese and Russian: 3:1 in 2009, 2013, and 2016. All the ratios show significant reductions from lower-level to upper-level classes. The consequences include low proficiency levels, lack of communicative competence, a serious shortage of fluent speakers and certifiable teacher candidates, inability to participate in global communities including international careers, and threatened national economic and military security as the attrition rates continue to escalate (Flaherty, 2018; Mitchell, 2017; Pratt et al., in press).

The literature provides an exhaustive list of factors that motivate students to discontinue studying foreign languages. Ramage's (1990) study on high school students of French and Spanish revealed bad grades in class, low interest in learning to speak the language, low intrinsic motivation, unreasonable expectations in terms of the time and effort involved in language learning, completion of college requirement, unrealistic expectations about the level of understanding of the culture, low priority of foreign language study in relation to other subjects, and lack of promotion of foreign languages in their environments. Speiller (1988) also discovered, in a study on high school students of French and Spanish, low level of progress and low grades, high level of difficulty of the courses, and low priority of languages in relation to other subjects. Additionally, she highlighted a lack of faculty input as well as the students' lack of interest in classroom activities. The students ranked teacher-student relationships low as an influence on their decision to continue with language study, and the strongest influence on their decision was the inability to take another elective if they continued to study the foreign language. Andress et al.'s (2002) findings in a study involving middle and high school students of German also revealed that their reasons for discontinuation included the difficulty of German, low grades, classroom activities that are not enjoyable, not knowing they would feel comfortable, not relevant to their majors, no signs of progress or fluency, inability to use the language in everyday life, not fitting into their schedule, and not relevant to other academic subjects or careers. Pratt et al. (2009) discovered, in a study about high school students of Spanish, similar motivations for discontinuation as those from Ramage (1990) and Speiller (1988), as well as lack of validation of effort, unrewarding learning experience, and ineffective instructional practices (the students indicated they would especially like to participate in communicative activities and games). Pratt et al. (2009) also made a very important discovery, which was the fact that the teachers' perspectives about what motivated their students did not coincide with the students' responses. Specifically, while the students truly wanted to learn the language well enough to be able to use it, the teachers were of the opinion that having fun was of more importance to the students than acquiring the language.

Along the same lines, Pratt (2010) found, in a study about students transitioning to college, discontinuation because of low grades, lack of progress and fluency, inability to use the language in everyday life, and lack of enjoyable classroom activities (the students indicated they would especially like to have music and games). Pratt (2012) also discovered, in a study about African American foreign language students, that discontinuation could be due to lack of role models, a parental support system, integration into the classroom, adequate career counseling, and opportunities to achieve communicative competence stemming from difficulties in the classroom environment and lack of exposure to target communities.

Finally, Pratt (2016) also revealed, in a study with high school students of French, that low grades, no progress or fluency, and lack of enjoyable classroom activities (especially games, music, culture, and communicative activities) could all contribute to discontinuation.

All the studies discovered dissatisfaction on the part of the students, as their needs were not being met in the classroom. The issue of disagreement between what students expect and the teachers' approaches has been verified by numerous studies over many decades (Despain, 2003; Gibson & Shutt, 2002a, 2002b; Horwitz, 2000; Mueller & Harris, 1966; Mueller & Leutenegger, 1964; Papalia & Zampogna, 1972; St. Pierre, 2008). Pratt (2010) also described the role of teachers in the maintenance of students' interest in the language as crucial. One theoretical framework which, according to Wesely (2010), can help make sense of the literature is Tinto's (1975) model for dropout from higher education, in which Tinto proposes that the process of interaction between the individual and the institution (peers, faculty, administration, etc.) is what dictates the decision whether to continue in a program of study (Tinto, 1975; Wesely, 2010). Wesely (2010) sums it up by saying: "Ultimately, instruction as a cause of FL [foreign language] student attrition has been identified in the literature as an issue of an incongruity between the student's understanding or beliefs about language education and the instructional decisions made by the teacher. When students have not understood the purposes of why a specific FL course is taught in a specific way, they have been more likely to leave that course of study" (p. 809).

These studies, among others, recommended a meeting of the minds between students and teachers, or, to use the words of Wesely (2010), between the individual and the institution. This echoes Speiller's (1988) assertion many decades ago that the results of the studies "should encourage educators to re-examine and re-evaluate the classroom activities" (p. 543). Speiller concluded by saying: "Since this aspect of foreign language study is entirely under the control of the foreign language teacher, it is possible that the activities could be redesigned to appeal more to the continuing students and to inspire discontinuers to continue. Dialogue with students might reveal what types of activities they prefer" (p. 543).

As revealed by the above-mentioned studies, there is substantial data on studies based on students' voices but very little on teachers' perspectives, in spite of the fact that the studies point to curricular and instructional practices as contributory factors to the problem. Additionally, as was pointed out earlier, an important finding has been the fact that there are significant differences between the students' motivations and their teachers' perceptions of what those motivations are (Andress et al., 2002; Pratt, 2010, 2016; Pratt et al., 2009). It is therefore paramount that studies focusing on teachers' understanding of the discontinuation of students and their perspectives about their students' motivations are conducted in order to hear their voices also and determine the best course for a meeting of the minds. The focus of this study was therefore not on student attrition but rather on teachers' perspectives. While there are numerous suggestions about instructional strategies that can be implemented as suggested by the investigators of the above-mentioned studies, there is a dearth of studies that focus on how the teachers can determine whether or not they are succeeding in meeting the needs of their students. Specifically, these investigators are of the opinion that a missing link that has not been addressed is what the teachers perceive as indicative of their success in maintaining their students' interest in the languages. In the investigators' view, this perception on the part of the teachers can either be accurate, and contribute to the solution to the problem, or misguided, and perpetuate the problem, unbeknownst to the teachers.

Given that the success of teachers in this regard is crucial for their students' continued study of the languages, it is paramount that these perceptions and beliefs are discovered and examined. To that end, the present study departed from the focus on students to focus on teachers and investigated how they determined whether or not they were impacting their students positively to maintain their interest for long-term study. The central question was: What factors do foreign language teachers believe are indicative of their positive impact on their students to maintain their interest in the languages? Given that the lower-level to advanced-level ratio continues to rise, the hypothesis was that the teachers would demonstrate some uncertainty about whether or not they were having a positive impact on their students.

3. Method

3.1. Participants

The investigators compiled a list of e-mails of middle and high school and lower-level college foreign language teachers (first two years) in different parts of the United States to whom they had access through their network. A request for participation was sent to them via e-mail, and those who were willing to participate clicked on a link to complete the survey voluntarily. One hundred and thirty-one of the approximately 250 teachers contacted responded, and 120 were selected for the study, as the remaining surveys were not complete. The sample was diverse based on age, ethnic affiliation, gender, languages spoken and taught, grade levels taught, and length of teaching experience. There were 87 females (72.5%) and 33 males (27.5%), who ranged in age from 22 to 62 years, with a mean age of 36.5.

Fifty of them (41.67%) self-classified as Caucasian/White, 45 (37.5%) as Hispanic/Latino, 20 (16.67%) as Asian/Other Pacific Islander, 1 (.83%) as Black/African American, and 8 (6.67%) as other. High school teachers constituted 45.8% of the sample, and the percentages for college instructors and middle school teachers were 34.6% and 19.6%, respectively.

The length of time in the foreign language teaching profession ranged from one semester to 32 years, with 6 to 10 years constituting the highest range, and Spanish made up 54.92% of the languages the participants taught. The other percentages were 12.3% for Chinese, 7.38% for French, 6.56% for German, 4.92% for Latin, 3.28% for Italian and Russian, 2.46% for Arabic, 1.64% for Japanese and American Sign Language, and .82% for Portuguese and Turkish. With regard to the training they had received, 18 (15%) believed it was very effective, 60 (50%) indicated it was effective, 24 (20%) reported it was neither effective nor ineffective, 11 (9.17%) considered it ineffective, and 7 (5.83%) thought it was very ineffective. Additionally, 85% of them had attended workshops, with the number of workshops ranging from one to “countless.” Sixty-three of them (52.5%) were native speakers, and 73.33% were fluent in the languages they were teaching.

3.2. Instruments

The investigators developed two instruments for the study (see Appendix). The Teacher Academic and Demographic Questionnaire (TAD) consisted of 20 multiple-choice and open-ended questions and was used to solicit personal information including age, gender, teacher preparation, in-service training, length of teaching experience, instructional strategies and skills, and beliefs about their impact on students. The second instrument, the Foreign Language Teachers’ Sense of Efficacy Scale (FLTSE), corresponded to Question 21 and included 31 sub-questions rated on a scale from 0 to 100% to indicate the teachers’ levels of certainty regarding their efficacy. It was adapted from Zaier (2011), which was based on Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk-Hoy (1998), as well as Bandura (1997).

3.3. Data Analysis

The responses to Question 18: “How do you know that you have a positive impact on your students to maintain their interest in the foreign language(s) or not?” were extracted and coded to determine the emerging themes. To ensure reliability, the researchers coded the data separately and categorized them individually before coming together to generate the final themes and calculate their percentages. The results were used to answer the research question.

4. Results

4.1. What factors do the teachers believe are indicative of their positive impact on their students to maintain their interest in the languages?

Descriptive coding was used because survey Question 18 solicited a direct answer to the research question and the relevant information was not hidden (Saldaña, 2018). On a few occasions, it was necessary to do interpretive coding as the information was not obvious. There was a pre-coding discussion on the avoidance of researchers’ influence in order to eliminate any implicit biases. The team also discussed the determination of anchor codes but decided that it would not be necessary as the responses directly answered the research question and all the collected data for that question were specific to the research question. The first cycle of analysis consisted of individual coding by two of the three investigators to identify as many codes as possible, label them, and categorize them into themes. They used Microsoft Excel Review to code them manually, and then consolidated them. The codes presented by the individual investigators were very similar, and a total of 16 themes were identified. They were academic improvement, attitudes, continued interest, engagement, enjoying classes, feedback, good behavior, importance of language, interest, major or minor in the language, motivation, participation, study abroad, teachers’ actions, teacher-student relationships, and no impact. The third investigator reviewed the coding and the sorting and suggested that some of the themes could be combined, for a total of six categories.

During the third stage, the team worked together to combine the themes and generate new themes, and they agreed with the recommendation of the third reviewer that the themes could be reduced to six. The codes that were closely related constructs or shared an underlying meaning were collapsed into one theme. Engagement, academic improvement, attitudes, enjoying class, good behavior, and participation became engagement and academic success; motivation and importance of language became motivation; interest, continued interest, major or minor in the language, and study and travel abroad became student interest; teacher-student relationships and teachers’ enthusiasm became teacher-student relationships; feedback remained the same, and no impact remained the same. The final six themes were engagement and academic success, feedback, motivation, student interest, teacher-student relationships, and no impact. In order to confirm that the sorting had been done correctly, each investigator also individually reassigned all the codes to the six themes and double-checked the numbers.

The investigators then met again to confirm the themes and defined them in order to clarify the content of each theme. After that, the frequencies were assigned (Table 1). Engagement and academic success included how engaged students were in class as well as the improvements they made in terms of acquisition of the language. Feedback included the feedback that was received from students, other teachers, and supervisors, as well as course evaluations, reviews, and surveys. Motivation encompassed all the behaviors exhibited by the students that were indicative of their instrumental, integrative, intrinsic, and extrinsic motivations, including the efforts they made to learn and their awareness of the importance of the languages. Student interest included the various ways in which they demonstrated their interest (and continued interest), as well as what they did beyond meeting language requirements, such as participating in study abroad and majoring in the languages. Teacher-student relationships included all the actions that demonstrated the development of positive, lasting, and encouraging relationships between teachers and students, as well as teachers' experiences and recognitions that proved their abilities to establish the relationships and help the students. No impact referred to all the demonstrations of self-doubt and uncertainty on the part of the teachers, as well as the student behaviors that were indicative of lack of interest.

Table 1 - Themes

Themes	No. of Excerpts	Percentage of Excerpts
Student Interest	93	37.2%
Engagement and Academic Success	42	16.8%
Motivation	41	16.4%
Feedback	33	13.2%
Teacher-Student Relationships	21	8.4%
No Impact	20	8%

In terms of frequencies, all the excerpts that carried meaning were counted, so a single response could generate a number of excerpts. There were 250 excerpts. With a score of 93 or 37.2%, student interest emerged as the factor that mostly demonstrated to the teachers that they had a positive impact on the students to keep them interested in the languages. Second with a score of 42 or 16.8% was engagement and student success; third was motivation with a score of 41 or 16.4%; fourth was feedback with a score of 33 or 13.2%, and fifth were teacher-student relationships with a score of 21 or 8.4%. With a score of 20 or 8%, no impact was the least frequent factor.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

The goal of this study was to determine what factors foreign languages teachers believe are indicative of their positive impact on their students to maintain their interest. The results revealed that the most obvious indicator of students' continued interest, according to the teachers, is the interest they demonstrate and what they do over and above meeting language requirements. Some of the specific examples that the teachers mentioned were the following: enroll in upper-level classes and tests; study the language in college; continue to take classes in the language beyond the requirements; minor in the language; major in the language; seek teaching certification to teach the language; demonstrate an interest in the class; show an interest in the culture; classes filled to capacity; participation in study abroad and other travel abroad; and personal interest in the target languages. As indicated above, an overwhelming number of excerpts pertained to this category, indicating that for the most part, what the teachers perceived as validation of their efforts to maintain their students' interest was what they believed to be actions that demonstrated the students' continued interest in the languages.

The role of interest in learning cannot be underrated, but the focus of this study was to ascertain if the teachers are right in believing that they are having a positive impact on their students because of the interest demonstrated by their students. Renninger, Hidi, and Krapp (1992) denoted interest as a phenomenon that emerges from an individual's interaction with his or her environment. They put forward two types of interest. Based on their model, individual interest is always specific to individuals and develops over time. It is relatively stable and usually associated with increased knowledge, positive emotions, and increased reference value. It can be dispositional, in which case it is enduring or actualized, emanating from an interaction between internal and external conditions. This therefore involves not only the individuals but also what they interact with, such as how they interact with classes, tasks, projects, and activities. It includes not only the characteristics of the object, but also other things associated with it, so instead of only a text that is read in class, the instructional methods that are implemented are also included. It also includes social relationships, such as with classmates and teachers. Individual interest can change under external influences such as peers and development of career interests. On the other hand, situational interest is generated by certain stimulus conditions such as novelty or intensity, or by factors contributing to the attractiveness of the situation, and tends to be common across individuals (Krapp, 1999; Tobias, 1994).

It can be evoked suddenly by something in the environment and often has only a short-term effect and marginal influence on a person's knowledge and reference system (Renninger, Hidi, & Krapp, 1992). It may also develop into relatively enduring individual interests.

According to Hidi (1990), individual interest and situational interest do not occur in isolation but can be expected to interact and to influence each other's development. For instance, long-lasting individual interest can develop out of situational interest triggered by environmental factors. Both types of interest also lead to academic achievement (Friedman & Willis, 1983; Hidi, 1990; Schiefele, 1998; Todt, 1985). Both individual and situational interests are represented among the responses provided by the teachers. Given that the literature asserts that individual interests tend to last longer, the recommendation is that teachers implement strategies that strengthen individual interests in order to ensure that their students' interest is maintained, as situational interests are likely to wane.

The second indicator for the teachers is how engaged students are in class activities and their academic success with regard to the language. Specific examples that were given included the following: enjoy classes; make friends in class; show excitement about class; participate well in class; perform well in class; show positive attitudes and good behavior; show improvement in assessment scores; and demonstrate that they are learning. Student engagement in class can be the result of intrinsic motivation and be exclusively personal, but it can also result from the students' interest in classroom activities, in which case the interest would be due to the teachers' positive impact. The literature reports that students are more interested in communicative activities, games, culture, and music than in grammar (Andress et al., 2002; Pratt, 2010, 2016; Pratt et al., 2009). The literature on the relationship between academic success and the continuance of foreign language study has been consistent. From earlier studies to present studies, all the findings have reported that academic achievement correlates positively with continuance. Therefore, continuing students have higher achievements in the language than discontinuing students (Gardner & Smythe, 1975; Lucas, 1995; Myers, 1978; Ramage, 1990; Saito-Abbot & Samimy, 1997; Speiller, 1988; Trayer, 1989). With regard to Tinto's framework, as noted by Wesely, "students' ability to achieve academically and the assessment provided by the institution could have a great influence on the students' decisions whether to continue" (2010, p. 810). Clearly, in relation to this theme of engagement and academic success, there is a possibility for teachers to play a major role in influencing the outcomes. Ensuring that they have an impact on maintaining the students' interest will therefore require consistent validation of effort to assure students of continuous progress, as recommended by Andress et al. (2002) and Pratt et al. (2009), as well as a meeting of the minds by means of interactions between the individual and the institution to maintain academic achievement and subsequently continuance.

The third indicator for the teachers is motivation, which constitutes the behaviors by the students that are indicative of their instrumental and integrative motivations (Gardner & Lambert, 1959), intrinsic and extrinsic motivations (Deci & Ryan, 1985), the efforts they make to learn, and their awareness of the importance of the languages. Specific examples included the following: request extra tutoring; speak Spanish after class; do out-of-class activities; use the language; enjoy hearing the language; like to speak the language; show enthusiasm; enjoy learning the language; proud to be bilingual; make efforts; and understand the importance of the language, bilingualism, and multilingualism. Gardner and Lambert (1959) proposed integrative and instrumental motivations, where the aim in language study is to learn more about the language group on one hand and reflect the more utilitarian value of linguistic achievement on the other. According to the self-determination theory of Deci and Ryan (1985), intrinsic and extrinsic motivations are on a continuum of self-determination, where the former is based on the learner's internal interest in the activity itself and stems from the learner's innate need for competence and self-determination, and the latter is based on rewards that are extrinsic to the activity, such as monetary gains.

The plethora of studies confirm the influence of motivation in foreign language study and demonstrate that continuing students are characterized more by intrinsic and integrative motivations (Andress et al., 2002; Baldauf & Lawrence, 1990; Gardner et al., 1976; Goldberg & Noels, 2006; Noels, 2001; Pratt et al., 2009; Ramage, 1990; Speiller, 1988; Wesely, 2010). This is due to the fact that continuing students tend to be motivated to increase their own knowledge, learn the language thoroughly, and know the culture, with traces of other motivations. It appears, therefore, that the teachers' perception that the motivations the students demonstrate are indicators of continuance is supported by the literature. However, this is not necessarily a result of the teachers' influence but could also be simply intrinsic and integrative on the part of the students to learn the language. Nevertheless, considering that the literature confirms that what leads to long-term study are intrinsic and integrative motivations, only part of what the teachers see as indicators of a positive impact on their students for continuance actually lasts. Therefore, just as Ramage (1990) affirmed, teachers do not need to instill new motivations in their students to try to maintain their interest in the language. Instead, they need to "strengthen the more latent intrinsic motives (proficiency in the language and its benefits) of which they already show signs" (p. 208).

Feedback is the fourth indicator for the teachers and includes the feedback the teachers receive from students, other teachers, and supervisors.

Specific examples were course evaluations, reviews, surveys, and student comments. Kluger and DeNisi (1996) defined performance feedback as “actions taken by (an) external agent(s) to provide information regarding some aspect(s) of one’s task performance” (p. 255). It is used for improving performance and helps support teacher behaviors, teaching strategies, and classroom management, among other things (L’Allier, Elish-Piper, & Bean, 2010). It has been found to be most useful when the focus is on tasks rather than people. Given that performance feedback is a widely recognized tool for teacher performance evaluation and improvement, teachers value positive feedback, be it from peers or administrators. However, the evaluations are not always conducted by experts in a particular field, which means that some of the positive impact may not pertain to the maintenance of the interest of foreign language learners. Efforts must therefore be made to increase evaluations conducted by foreign language experts in order to ensure that the positive feedback is accurate. While students’ comments are very useful informal feedback, efforts must be made to infuse some structure into the feedback to verify and document it more formally and ensure that it is constructive, specific, focused, and truthful, thus avoiding misguided perceptions. Conversations with students are also highly recommended, in order to avoid the type of mismatch that has been discovered in various studies between teachers’ perspectives and students’ perspectives.

The fifth indicator is teacher-student relationships. Specific examples included the following: long-term relationship; students come back to visit; teacher’s enthusiasm for teaching and instinct; teacher talking about personal experiences; teaching awards; discussions between teachers and students; teacher’s encouragement to use the language; teacher gives students new ways to learn the language; and teacher helps students know more about other countries. The literature ranks this factor very high and recommends its positive implementation, because it is crucial for students’ confidence, sense of security, guidance, support, and a very useful resource for success (Pratt, 2010; Sparks, 2019). However, studies have discovered that it is not adequately utilized, and recommend that preservice programs make it an area of focus in order to prepare the teachers to ensure that they develop good relationships with their students with the goal of helping them become successful, which eventually leads to continuance. Sparks (2019) sums it up thus: “Students spend more than 1,000 hours with their teacher in a typical school year. That’s enough time to build a relationship that could ignite a student’s lifetime love of learning—and it’s enough time for the dynamic to go totally off the rails” (para. 1). Although teacher-student relationships are authentic indicators of teachers’ impact, they need to be well structured and properly assessed to determine their actual outcomes and impact, so that familiarity and friendliness are not mistaken for academic impact.

The final indicator is “no impact.” Only four teachers in the study responded with negative comments. Specific examples include: the teacher does not know what the outcome is; there is a resistant learner; the teacher experiences self-doubt; students show frustration; teacher cannot tell if she is making an impact or not; teacher wastes time on uninterested students; too many apathetic students; students are bored; students show no interest; students show no motivation; students do not participate; teacher is not sure; positive attitude turns into no interest; motivated students have to wait; teacher gets discouraged; and teacher hopes students develop a positive interest. A closer look at the data revealed that out of only seven teachers who indicated that they did not believe that they had a positive impact on their students to maintain their interest (Question 17), only two produced comments that were coded as “no impact” for Question 18. Further investigation into the self-efficacy scores of the two teachers (Question 21) revealed that they obtained 57.1% and 89.19%, meaning that only one teacher’s responses to the three questions matched, indicating that she did not believe she had a positive impact on the students to maintain their interest in the language, she had a low self-efficacy score, and also believed she had no impact on her students. This proves that there are some inconsistencies in the responses provided by the teachers. While the investigators were very surprised to encounter this theme of no impact, it also confirmed the fact that some teachers experience low self-efficacy, inadequacy, and frustration, and that the reasons must be investigated in order to find solutions.

While this study has provided insight into how teachers determine that they are having a positive impact on their students to maintain their interest in the target languages, which will help determine the best way to assess teachers’ progress in achieving that goal, the authors are also cognizant that further studies need to be carried out with students as well to verify the accuracy of these indicators. As the discussion demonstrates, although they appear to be good indicators, the actual impact that the teachers are having cannot be determined, because the indicators do not depend 100% on the teachers. Further studies are also needed to investigate why teachers who scored low on the self-efficacy scale believed that they were having a positive impact. These issues, among others, should be investigated in follow-up studies, in order to find solutions that will lead to long-term foreign language studies and have a positive impact on the U. S. foreign language deficit.

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Appendix

Questionnaire

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

1. What is your gender?
 - 1) Male
 - 2) Female
 - 3) Other
2. What is your age?
3. Which of the following best describes you?
 - 1) Asian/Other Pacific Islander
 - 2) Black/African American
 - 3) Caucasian/White
 - 4) Hispanic/Latino(a)
 - 5) Other. Please specify.
4. Which of the following best describes you? Please check only one.
 - 1) Upper class
 - 2) Uppermiddle class
 - 3) Middle class
 - 4) Lower middleclass
 - 5) Lower class
5. Please indicate the foreign language(s) you teach (or have taught so far)? Select all that apply.
 - 1) French
 - 2) German
 - 3) Italian
 - 4) Latin
 - 5) Spanish
 - 6) Other. Please specify.
6. Are you a native speaker of the language(s) you are teaching? Please check "Yes" or "No" for only the language(s) you teach.

	YES	NO
French		
German		
Italian		
Latin		
Spanish		
Other. Please specify.		

7. Please check all that apply but only those languages that apply to you. If the language does not apply to you, please check Not Applicable to me.)

The foreign language(s) you are teaching is/are your:

1stlanguage 2nd Language 3rd Language 4th Language Not Applicable to me

French

German

Italian

Latin

Spanish

Other. Please specify.

8. What do you find most challenging as a foreign language teacher in terms of your instructional abilities? Please check all that apply.

- 1) Proficiency in the foreign language you teach
- 2) Instructional strategies
- 3) Theoretical foundation
- 4) Selecting the most appropriate teaching approach (communicative, grammar-based, translation, etc.)
- 5) Other(s). Please specify.

9. How long have you been involved in instructional practices related to foreign language teaching (including student teaching, assisting a classroom teacher, observing a classroom teacher, tutoring, mentoring)?

- 1) Less than 6 months
- 2) 6-12 months
- 3) 1-3 years
- 4) 4-6 years
- 5) 7-10 years
- 6) Other. Please specify.

10. How long have you been teaching foreign languages?

- 1) 1 semester
- 2) 1 year
- 3) 2 years
- 4) 5 years
- 5) 6 - 10 years
- 6) 11-15 years
- 7) Other. Please specify.

11. What grade level(s) do you teach? Check all that apply.

- 1) Middle school
- 2) High school
- 3) College

12. Please list all the foreign languages you speak fluently?

13. How effective was your teacher education program in preparing you to teach foreign languages?

- 1) Very ineffective
- 2) Ineffective
- 3) Neither effective nor ineffective
- 4) Effective
- 5) Very effective

14. Have you ever participated in a workshop or training session about foreign language teaching in the past?

- 1) Yes
- 2) No

15. If your answer to Question 14 is "Yes" please answer this question:

How many workshops or training sessions about foreign language teaching have you attended in the past?

16. Where were these workshops?

- 1) On your school campus
- 2) At the central office
- 3) At Texas Tech University
- 4) Other. Please specify.

17. Do you believe you have a positive impact on your students to maintain their interest in the foreign language(s) you are teaching?

- 1) Yes
- 2) No

18. How do you know that you have a positive impact on your students to maintain their interest in the foreign language(s) or not?

19. Please name the main teaching strategies you use to maintain your students' interest in the foreign language(s) you teach.

20. Please indicate any factors you believe might prevent your students from continuing to learn the same foreign language(s) in college.

Foreign Language Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale

21. Please indicate your level of certainty about these statements by rating each of them on a scale from 0 (Entirely Uncertain) to 100 (Entirely Certain). Please choose any number from 0 to 100.

1. I have had successful experiences teaching foreign languages
2. I have not done poorly in teaching foreign languages.
3. I have not made mistakes when teaching foreign languages.
4. I have successfully helped students learn foreign languages.
5. My teacher education program prepared me to effectively to teach foreign languages.
6. I have been trained to deal with many of the learning difficulties students encounter when learning foreign languages.
7. My foreign language teaching skills have been honed by working with students.
8. I have learned how to effectively interact with foreign language students.
9. I have had opportunities to observe other teachers teaching foreign languages.
10. I have observed effective strategies other teachers use to teach foreign languages.
11. I see myself applying the same strategies used by other foreign language teachers to effectively teach foreign languages.
12. I see myself avoiding mistakes other teachers made while teaching foreign languages.
13. I have learned how to teach foreign languages by watching other skillful teachers.
14. My classroom observations of teachers of foreign languages are valuable to me.
15. I am able to improve my instruction of foreign languages by applying successful strategies I have observed experienced teachers use.
16. My teachers often told me that I was good at teaching foreign languages.
17. I have often been praised for my ability to teach foreign languages.
18. My family members have told me that I have a talent for teaching foreign languages.
19. My colleagues have told me that I am good at teaching foreign languages.
20. My colleagues have often praised my ability to effectively teach foreign languages.
21. My colleagues believe I am a successful foreign language teacher.
22. My college classmates told me I would be an effective foreign language teacher.
23. My colleagues tell me they learn a lot when they observe me teaching foreign languages.
24. I am passionate about teaching foreign languages.
25. Teaching foreign languages is not often frustrating.
26. I do not feel discouraged when I think about teaching foreign languages.
27. The idea of teaching foreign languages does not make me nervous.
28. I feel comfortable helping students learn foreign languages.
29. I feel happy when I teach well.
30. I am never worried about understanding the learning needs of foreign language learners.
31. I do not feel stressed when I think about teaching foreign languages.