

Emotions and SLA

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Affect at the heart of foreign language (FL) learning & teaching process

- **Yet:** “affect & emotion are terms that have been in the shadows of discussions of classroom foreign language learning, where the primary focus has been on the development of knowledge and use of the language”
(Garrett & Young 2009: 209)

Emotion & SLA

- **MacIntyre (2002):** “attitudes alone are not sufficient to support motivation! To understand differences between un/engaged learner, researchers need to delve into emotions students experience during language learning”
- **MacIntyre, MacKinnon & Clément (2009):** “emotions are fundamentally important motivators”
- **Swain (2011):** Emotions are like ‘the elephant in the room’. Everyone is aware of them but they reflect an unspoken truth: that they have a significant impact on what has happened in the past, what is happening now, & what will happen in the future

Robert Murphy: Why should SLA study incorporate the study of emotion? What is the connection between emotion and learning (beyond motivation)? *THE LANGUAGE TEACHER* 34, 2010

Zoltan Dornyei: ***I propose that we completely rethink the role of emotions in SLA***, and in the discussion of learner characteristics (...) ***I treat the emotional system as equal to the cognitive and motivational systems.***

Dörnyei, Z., & Ryan, S. (2015) *The psychology of the second language learner revisited*. New York: Routledge.

Affective factors linked to use & learning of LX

Mercer (2006) university learners kept journal focusing on emotional experience of FL classroom

Garrett & Young (2009) longitudinal case study on development of affect in Portuguese course for beginners (8 w)

Bown & White (2010) Case studies of 3 students learning Russian, importance of regulation of affect to learning experiences & choices

Arnold & Fonseca Mora (2011) Special issue *Focus on Affect in Language Learning* in *Anglistik* 22

MacIntyre & Gregersen (2014) Special issue *Positive psychology in SLA* in *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching*

MacIntyre, Gregersen & Mercer (eds.) (2016) *Positive Psychology in SLA*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters

Studies on specific emotions in FL classrooms

- **Shame** (Soen Leonhard, in progress; Galmiche, in progress)
- **Love & enjoyment** (Pavelescu, 2016)
- **Achievement, epistemic, topic & social emotions** (Piniel & Albert, 2016)
- **Minute to minute variation in FLE & FLCA** (Boudreau, McIntyre & Dewaele, in preparation)
- => Special issue (2018) in *Studies Second Language Learning and Teaching on Emotions and SLA*

Emotions drive FL

- **MacIntyre, MacKinnon & Clément (2009):** “emotions are fundamentally important motivators” (p. 47)
- **Kramsch (2009):** “desire” is at the heart of FL; = close to affect, “but in more concrete sense than just emotional reactions or metaphysical illuminations of the soul” (p. 16)
- Desire to learn a new TL reflects, “urge to escape from a state of tedious conformity with one’s present environment to a state of plenitude and enhanced power” (p. 14)

Lack of emotion in FL classes

- Why are emotions so conspicuously absent in foreign language teaching? Don't learners need to be able to express & recognize anger, sadness, shame, happiness in the L2?
- Moreover, because vocabulary of emotions & emotion scripts are different from language to language (culture to culture), it seems doubly important to focus on differences & similarities between L1 & TL (Dewaele 2005, 2010, 2011, 2014, 2015)
- => make FL curriculum emotionally richer!
- => make it intrinsically more interesting
- => have learners reflect on their emotions in the FL

Anxieties during first FL class

- **Dörnyei & Murphey (2003)** initial mixed emotions that learners experience: general anxiety, social anxiety, FL Anxiety
- => relate less to the TL or teacher than to other members of the group: “it is comparable to walking into a party when you hardly know anyone there” (p. 14)
- Learners on their guard, unsure, observing each other, avoiding embarrassment, wondering what hierarchy will be established within new group
- Concerns about ability to do well, worry about fact that others may be more proficient
- + lack of confidence, restricted identity, certain awkwardness
- Budding positive emotions: expectation / anticipation of learning something new

Foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA)

- **MacIntyre & Gardner (1991)**: “the worry & negative emotion reaction aroused when learning a using a L2” “distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings and behaviors related to classroom learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process” (**Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope 1986**)
- Horwitz (2017): Communication Apprehension, Test Anxiety, & Fear of Negative Evaluation = conceptually related to FLCA, but **the sum of the 3 is not FLCA**

Foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA)



Multilingual Matters, April 2017

Foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA)

- Link with L2 performance (**Horwitz 2001**)
- High levels of FLCA in classroom => abandonment of language study (**Dewaele & Thirtle 2009**)
- FL teachers need to identify learners who struggle with high levels of FLCA (**Gregersen 2007**)
- **Şimsek & Dörnyei (2017)**: narrative approach: *The ‘anxious self’* => “helping learners to produce constructive narratives about their overall anxious selves might offer a way to re-process their anxiety-related experiences positively, thereby combating some of the harmful effects of debilitating anxiety”.

Foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA)

- **Lower levels of FLCA linked to:**
 - Knowledge of **more languages**, **higher frequency of use** of TL, stronger **socialization** in TL, use of TL with a larger **network** of interlocutors, higher level of **self-perceived proficiency** (Dewaele Petrides & Furnham 2008, Dewaele 2010).
- **Lower levels of FLCA linked to psychological factors:**
 - Higher **Trait Emotional Intelligence** (Dewaele et al 2008), lower **Neuroticism**, higher **Extraversion & Psychoticism** (Dewaele 2013)
 - Higher **Tolerance of Ambiguity** (Dewaele & Tsui 2013)
 - Lower levels of **Perfectionism** (Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002, Dewaele, 2017)

Foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA)

Macro- & micro Affective factors:

- **attitudes toward TL** (historical & political context: Russian in Poland, French in Flanders, Dutch in Wallonia (Mettewie, de Smet & Galand 2016))
- **attitudes toward language teacher & his/her practices:**

Cultural context: JAPAN (King & Smith, 2017): *Social Anxiety & Silence in Japan's Tertiary Foreign Language Classrooms*: learners' avoidance of talk = **social inhibition** => '*hazukashii*', supported by unhelpful pedagogical practices + higher-level sociocultural themes relating to the value of discretion & caution in public encounters

Overview of trends in FLCA research

(MacIntyre 2017)

- 1. Is anxiety **facilitating** or **debilitating**?
=> debilitating
- 2. Is anxiety a **cause** or **effect** or language performance? => anxiety = both consequence & cause
- 3. Is language anxiety an **internal state** or **socially constructed**? => Anxiety has both internal & social dimensions

Foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA)

Role of the teacher:

Acknowledge existence of anxiety (Horwitz 1997). Overt teaching of anxiety management strategies like relaxation techniques, positive self-talk & breathing exercises, as well as offering advice about language learning is recommended (Horwitz 1997, Kim 2009, Oxford, 2017)

Systematic Desensitization: confront trigger(s) that provoke FLCA, give learners a means to practice coping efforts (MacIntyre & Gregersen 2013, Oxford, 2017)

FLCA-free classroom?

Role of learners: take responsibility for their own learning
(increase agency by learning to deal with catastrophic thinking, which is usually “paralyzing & unrealistic”)
(Oxford, 2017)

Role of teachers:

Break the ice, create a “safe” environment where learners are not afraid to speak up and gradually feel they contribute to a collective identity

Make sure to be comprehensible, convince learners of value of learning TL (Arnold & Fonseca 2007)

Humor, such as joking, can help anxious learners deal with negative emotions & difficult experiences (Oxford 2017)

Keys to beat FLCA & create a positive mood

- Use **non-threatening techniques** + pertinent & appealing subject matter immediately linked to learners' concerns
- Support & promote group **solidarity** while “having fun” (Ewald 2007)
- Establish a good “**rapport**” => important element of motivation
- Crucial trait of effective language teachers: “ability to **communicate freely & to radiate positive feeling**” (Borg 2006)
- **Supportive emotional** environment (Arnold 1999, 2011)
- Develop relationship of **trust** with students
- Boost **hope & optimism** (Oxford 2017)

Teachers not all-knowing & fearless

- When learners realise that they do not risk being the object of ridicule for making errors, that the teacher may have suffered similar fears, & that the teacher will appreciate them trying something new in the FL, their levels of FLCA will drop

TL is more than a tool

- **Dewaele (2011):** “language teachers could use their own emotions & feelings, their own multilingual subjectivity by presenting the TL not just as a tool for communication, but as an opportunity for learners to expand their symbolic selves, get emotionally and cognitively involved in the FL process and develop tertiary socialisation” (p. 37).

Positive psychology



2016 P. MacIntyre, T. Gregersen & S. Mercer
(eds.)

- => **Positive emotion** facilitates building of resources because positive emotion tends to broaden a person's perspective, opening individual to absorb TL (Fredrickson, 2003, 2007)
- => **Negative emotion:** opposite tendency, narrowing of focus + restriction of range of potential language input
- “what could be healthier for language growth than learners who want to play, explore, integrate and establish relationships?” (MacIntyre & Gregersen 2012: 209)

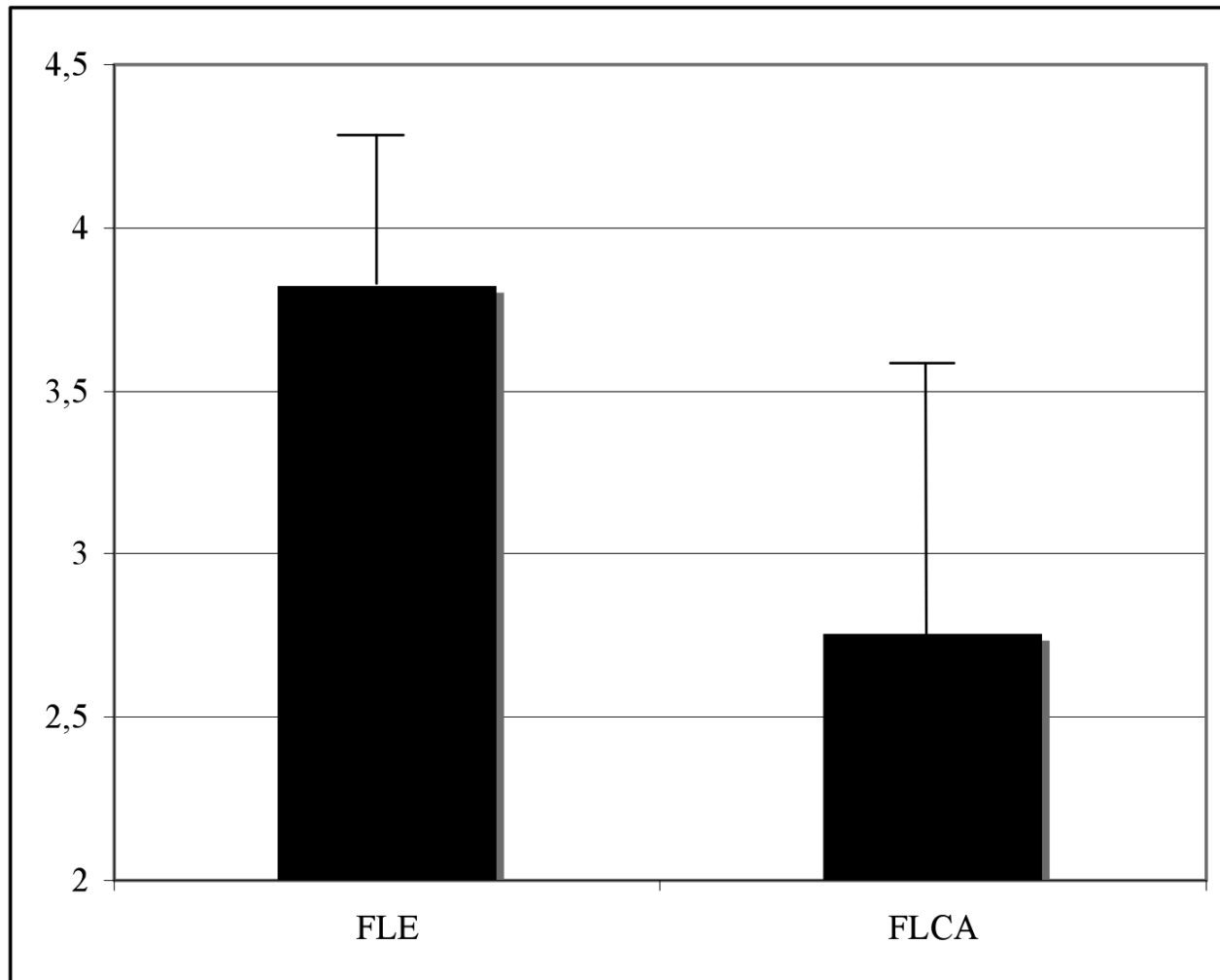
Foreign Language Enjoyment

- **Dewaele & MacIntyre (2014)**: Link between FLE & FLCA in FL Classroom
- 1746 current FL learners from around the world
- FLE, based on Likert scale ratings of 21 items, FLCA based on 8 items extracted from FLCAS (Horwitz et al., 1986)
- Significant negative Pearson correlation between FLE & FLCA ($r = -.36$, $p < .0001$) => these two variables share 13% of variance, very small effect size

Dewaele & MacIntyre (2014)

(N = 1745, t = -41.1, p < .0001)

Figure 2: A comparison of mean FLE and FLCA scores (with SD)



Main themes in feedback of 1076 participants on enjoyable episodes in FL class (Dewaele & MacIntyre 2014)

Theme	Frequency	%
Specific activities	441	41.0
Peer recognition	146	13.6
Other	141	13.1
Teacher recognition	116	10.8
Realisation of progress	108	10.0
Teacher skills	98	9.1
Authentic use of FL	26	2.4

FLE & FLCA: The right & left feet of FL learning?

Dewaele & MacIntyre (2016)

Principal Components Analysis of FLE & FLCA items revealed 3 dimensions explaining 45% of variance:

1) **FLCA** (26% of variance)

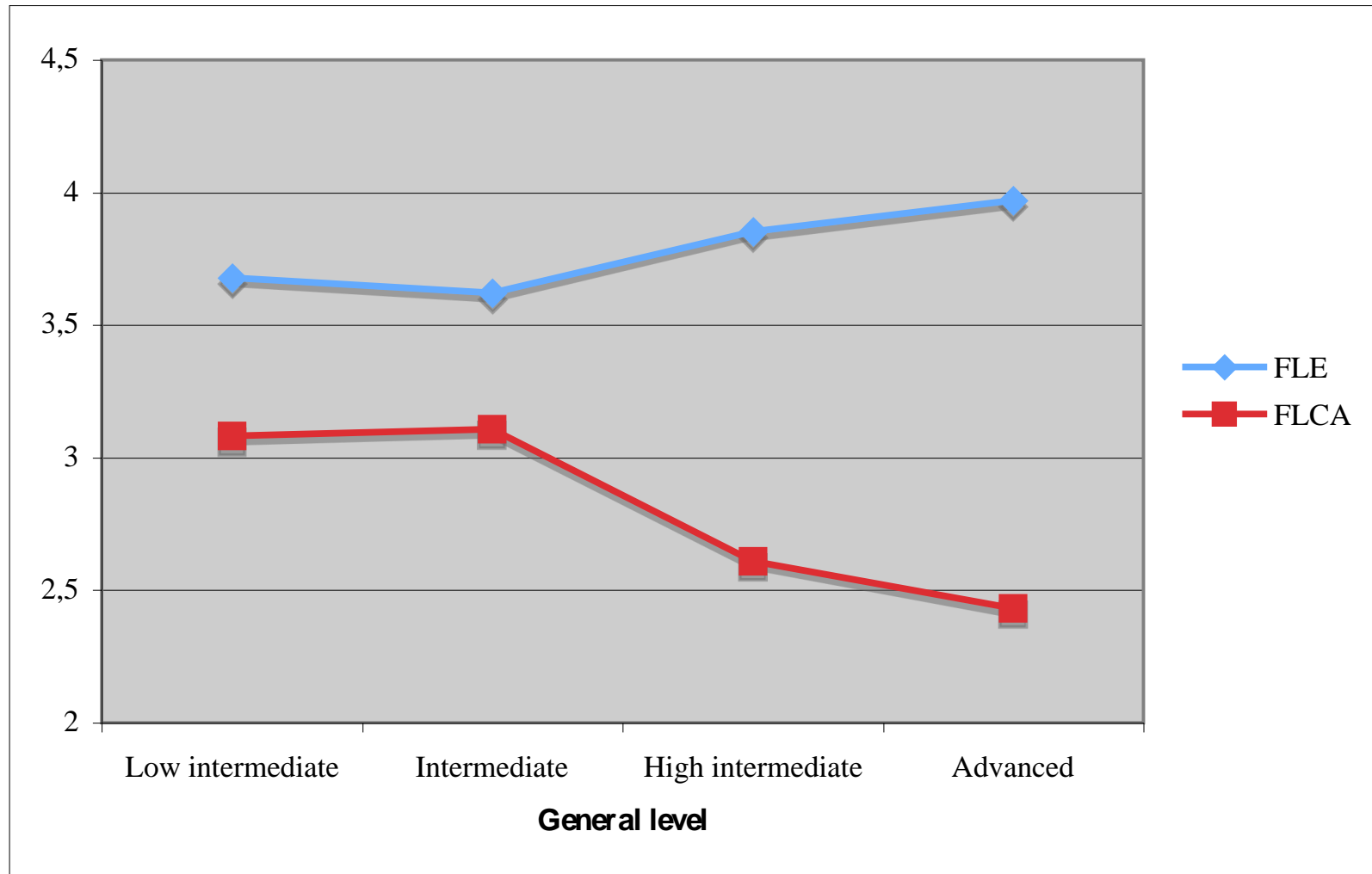
2) **Social FLE** (13% of variance) => satisfaction that learner can draw from buzzing, positive FL classroom (cf. Mercer, yesterday: no learner is a island; sum of unique relationships with peers, other FL users, teacher?)

3) **Private FLE** (6% of variance)=> private thoughts & feelings, internal **pride & satisfaction** learner can experience when something difficult has been achieved

Effect of general level in FL on FLE & FLCA

(Dewaele & MacIntyre 2014)

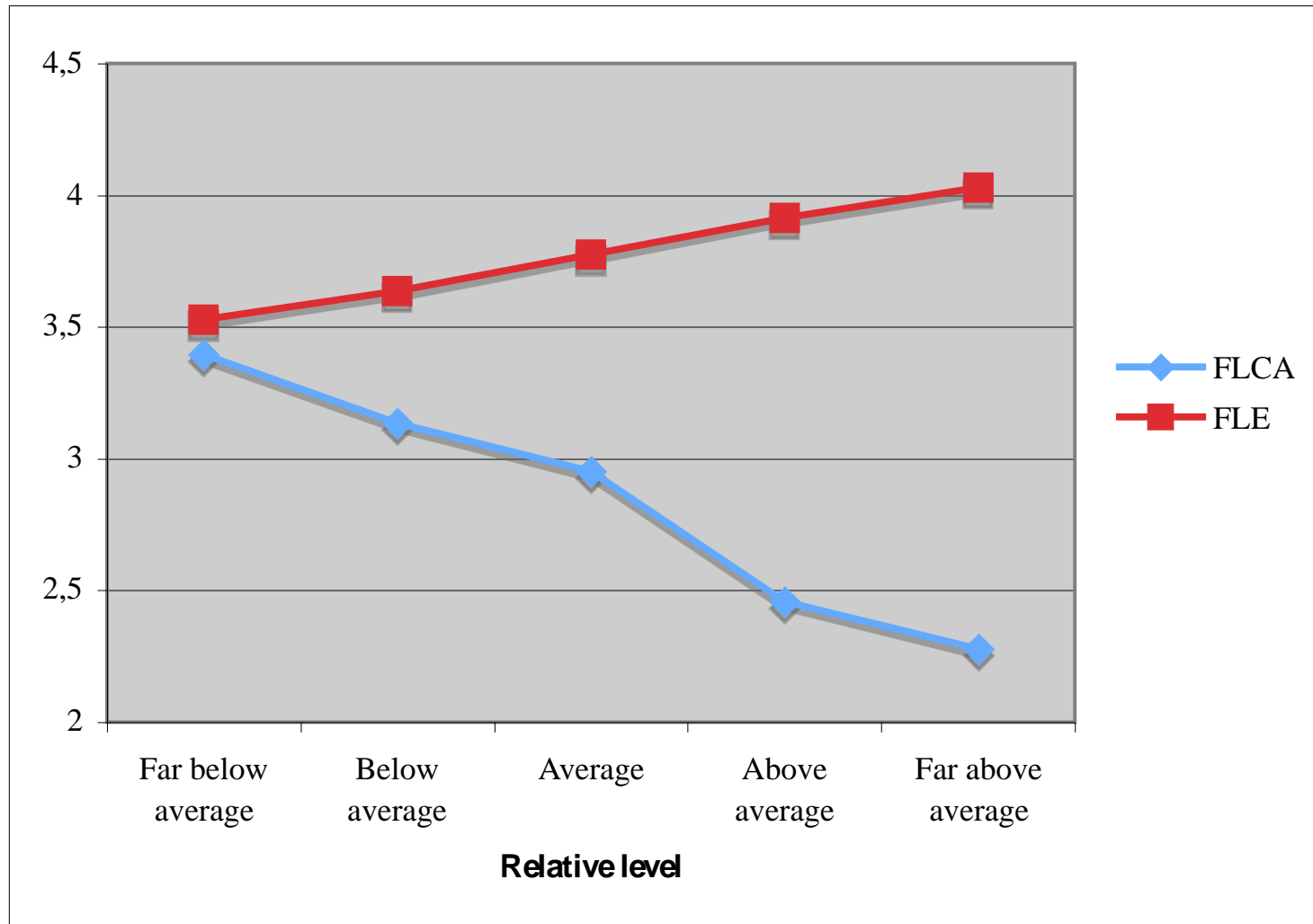
$\eta^2 = .062$ & $\eta^2 = .099$



Effect of relative standing on FLE & FLCA

(Dewaele & MacIntyre 2014)

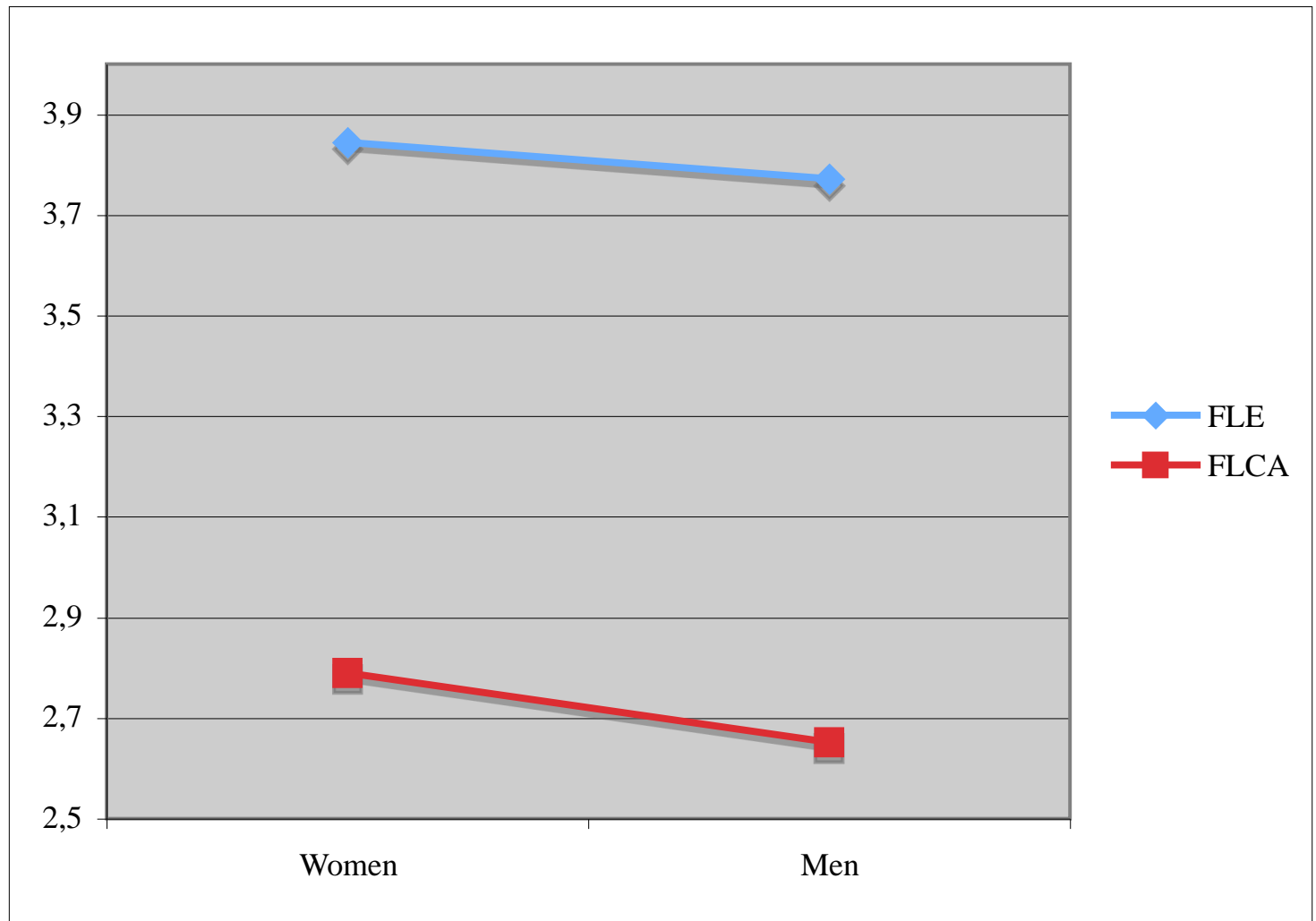
$\eta^2 = .059$ & $\eta^2 = .128$



Effect of participant's sex on FLE & FLCA

(Dewaele & MacIntyre 2014)

$t(1734) = 3.1, p < .002$ & $t(1734) = 2.8, p < .004$



Effect of participant's gender on FLE & FLCA

MacIntyre, Boudreau & Dewaele (2016)

Female participants had more **fun, pride, enjoyment, excitement, interest** in the FL class + more **worry** about mistakes & **less confidence**. Tended to feel that other students were better, tended to feel more nervous & confused, more likely to have a pounding heart in the FL class

Positive & negative emotions do not operate in seesaw fashion => higher FLCA + higher FLE is not a contradictory result => Female FL learners seem to care more about their FL performance and their progress in the FL perhaps because they find it intrinsically appealing, fun & of value

When FLE & FLCA go hand in hand

MacIntyre,
Boudreau & Dewaele (2016)

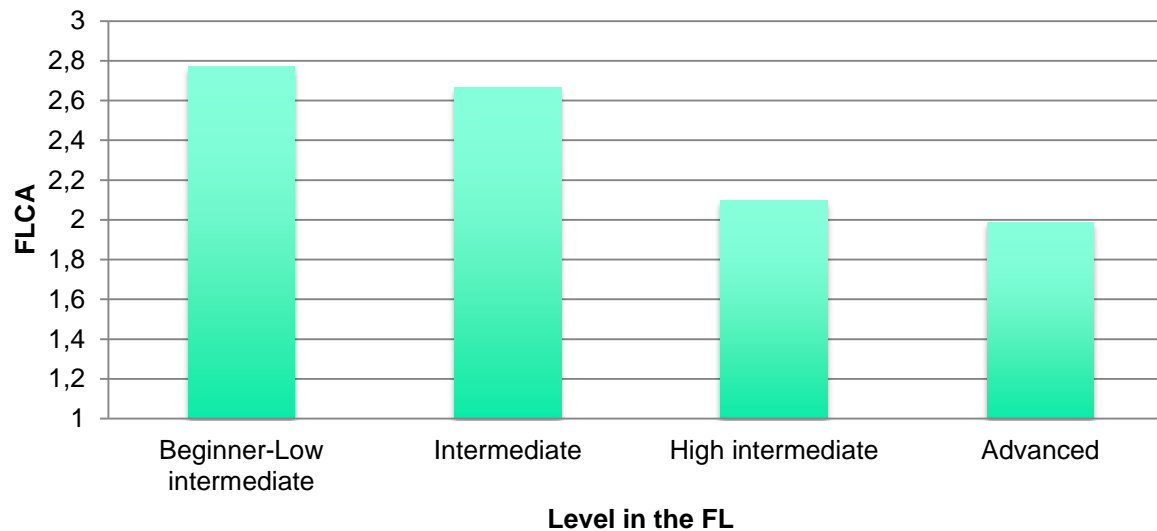
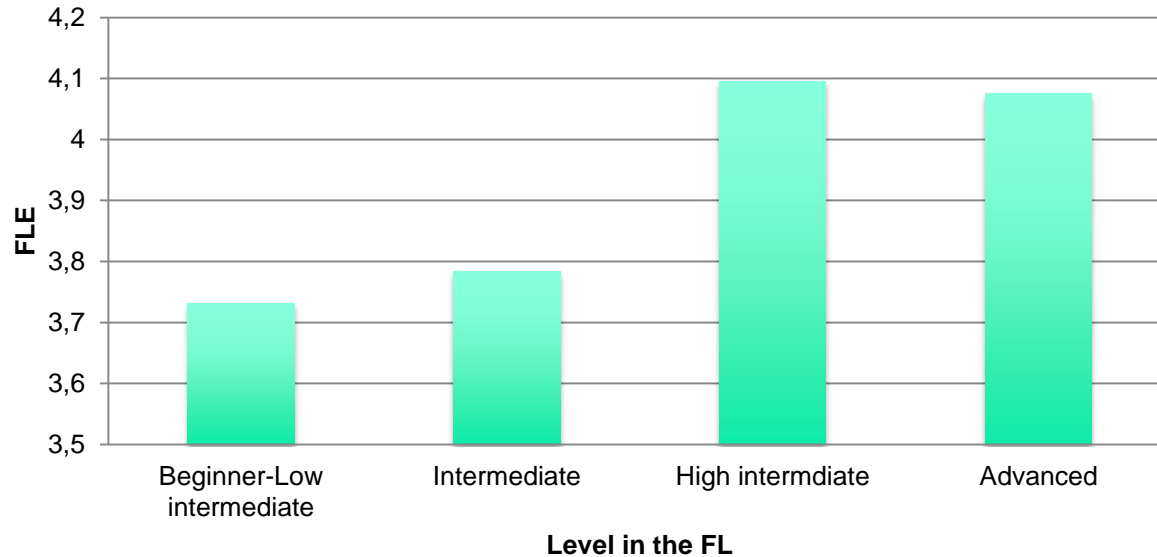
Simona, female, 22, Macedonian: We were supposed to have a 2-minute speech before our peers and our professor on a topic we chose. All of my peer's presentations were great and I really loved experiencing the feeling when I was talking before all of them. It was really special, even if **at first I was a bit nervous and felt my heart pounding, but it felt great standing there and expressing my opinion and knowing that all of the other students are listening to you with attention.**

Contextual vs individual effects on FLE & FLCA (Dewaele, Saito, Witney & Dewaele 2017)

- Do FLE / FLCA differentially predict **learner-internal & teacher/classroom-specific** variables within one specific educational context?
- 189 British high school students (aged 12-18) attending 2 London schools and studying mostly French L2, German L3
- High levels of **FLE** linked to positive **attitudes towards FL, FL teacher, FL use in class, proportion of time spent on speaking, test results, relative standing & stage of development**
- Lower levels **FLCA** linked to higher scores on **attitudes towards FL, test results, relative standing stage of development**

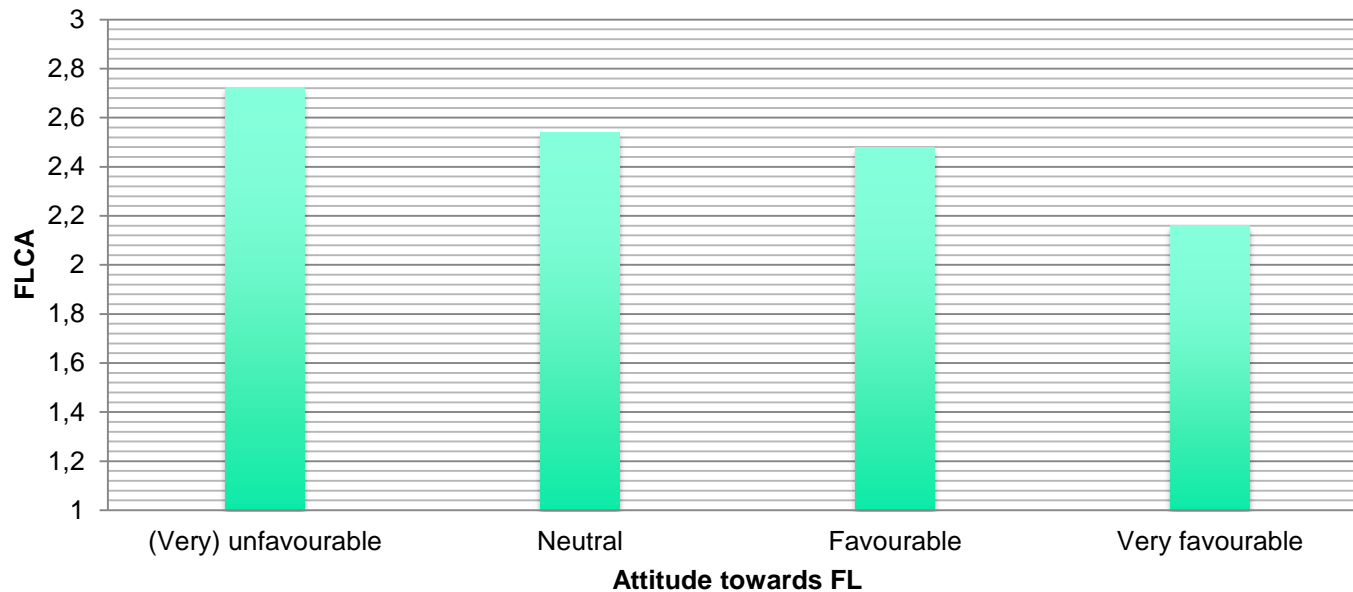
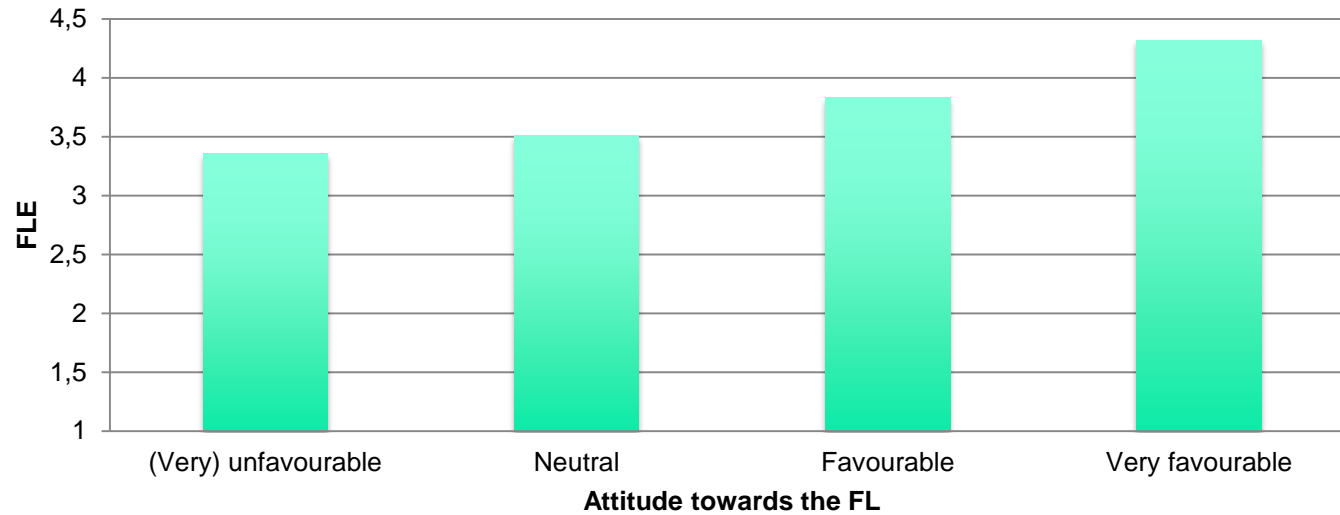
Effect of general level in FL on FLE & FLCA

FLE: $F = 4.4$, $p < .005$, $\eta^2 = .07$; **FLCA:** $F = 12.3$, $p < .0001$, $\eta^2 = .17$



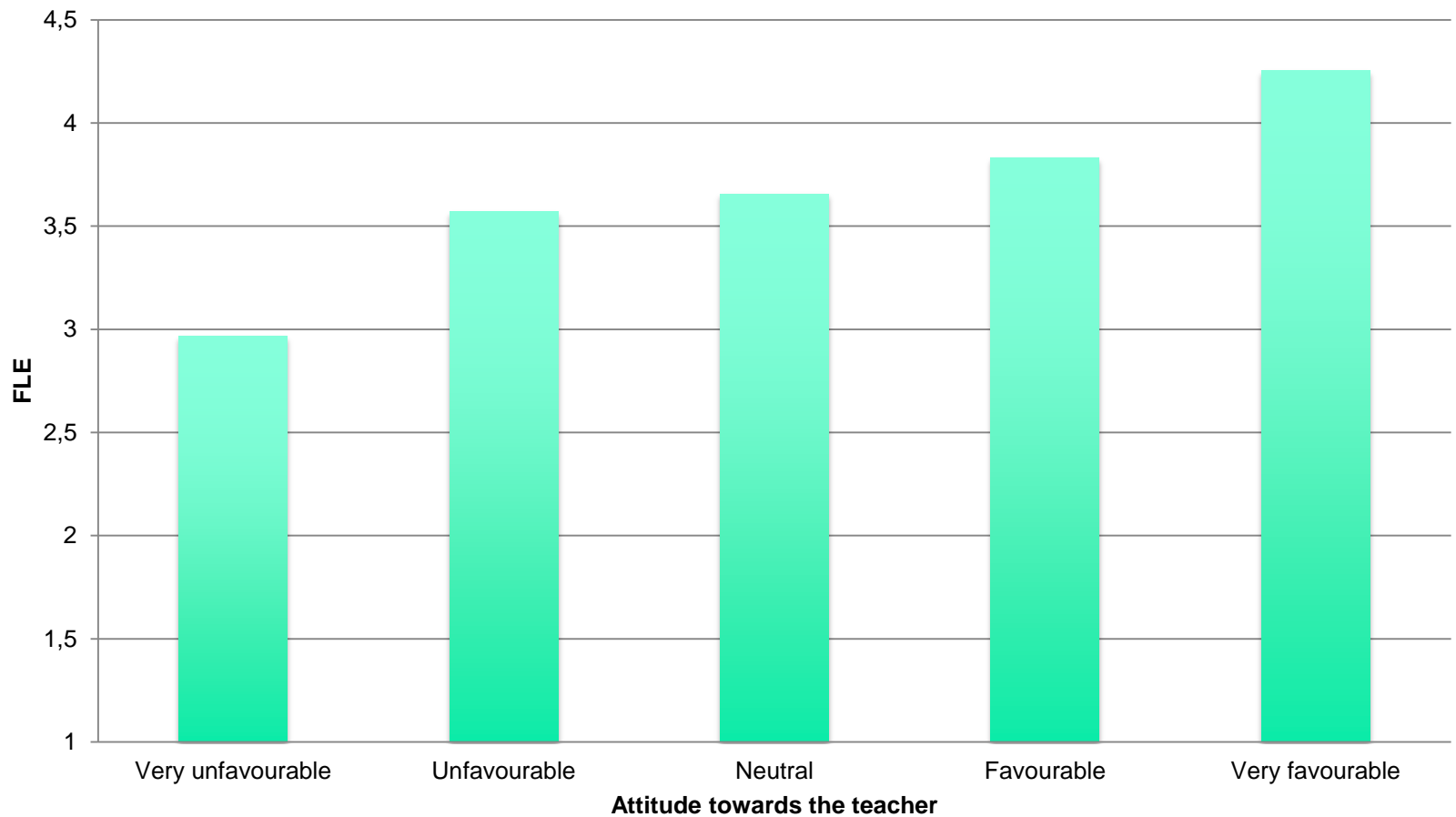
Effect of FL attitudes on FLE & FLCA

FLE: $F = 24.8$, $p < .0001$, $\eta^2 = .29$; **FLCA:** $F = 4.0$, $p < .009$, $\eta^2 = .07$



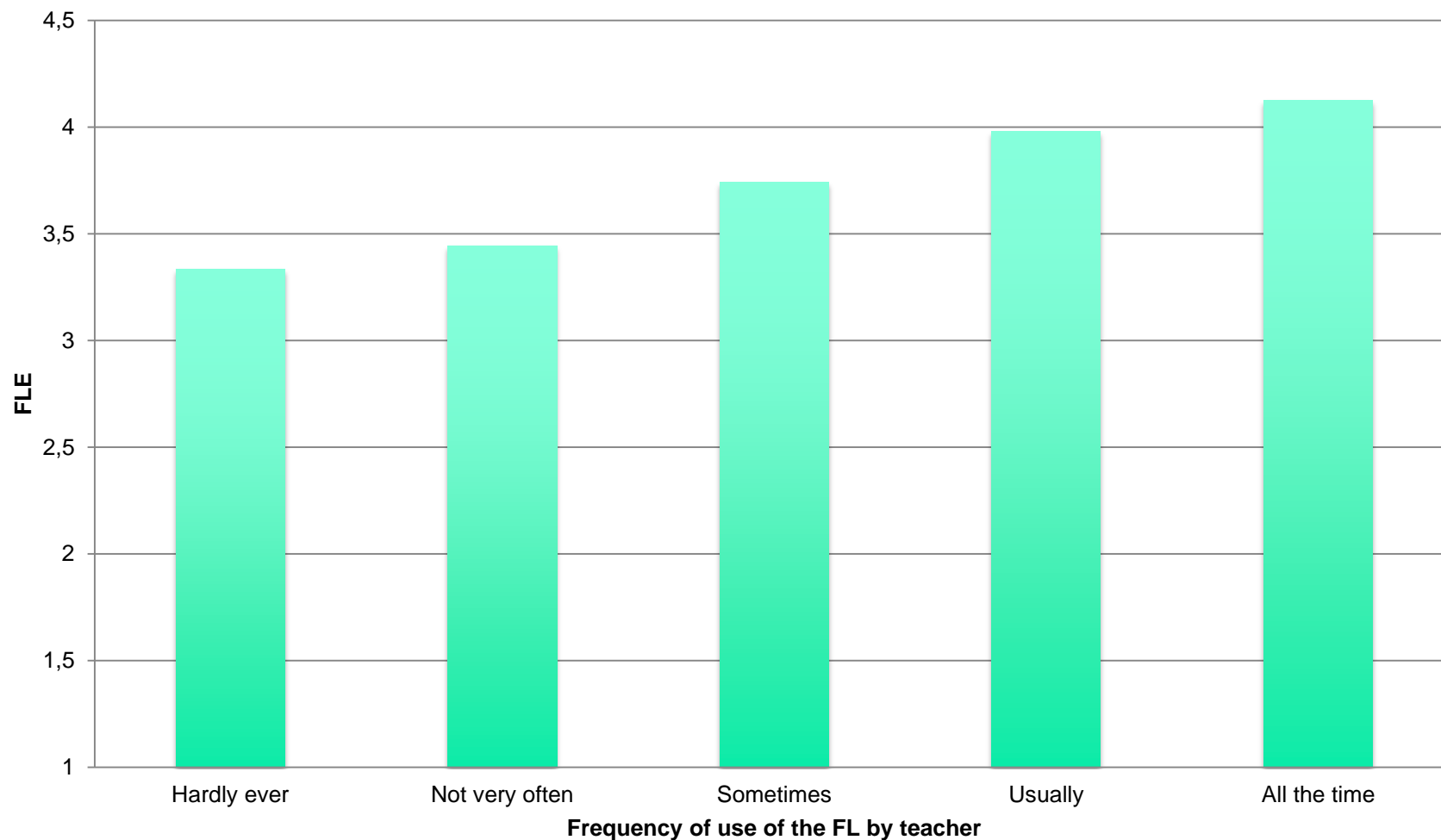
Effect of attitude towards teacher on FLE

FLE: $F = 16.7$, $p < .0001$, $\eta^2 = .27$



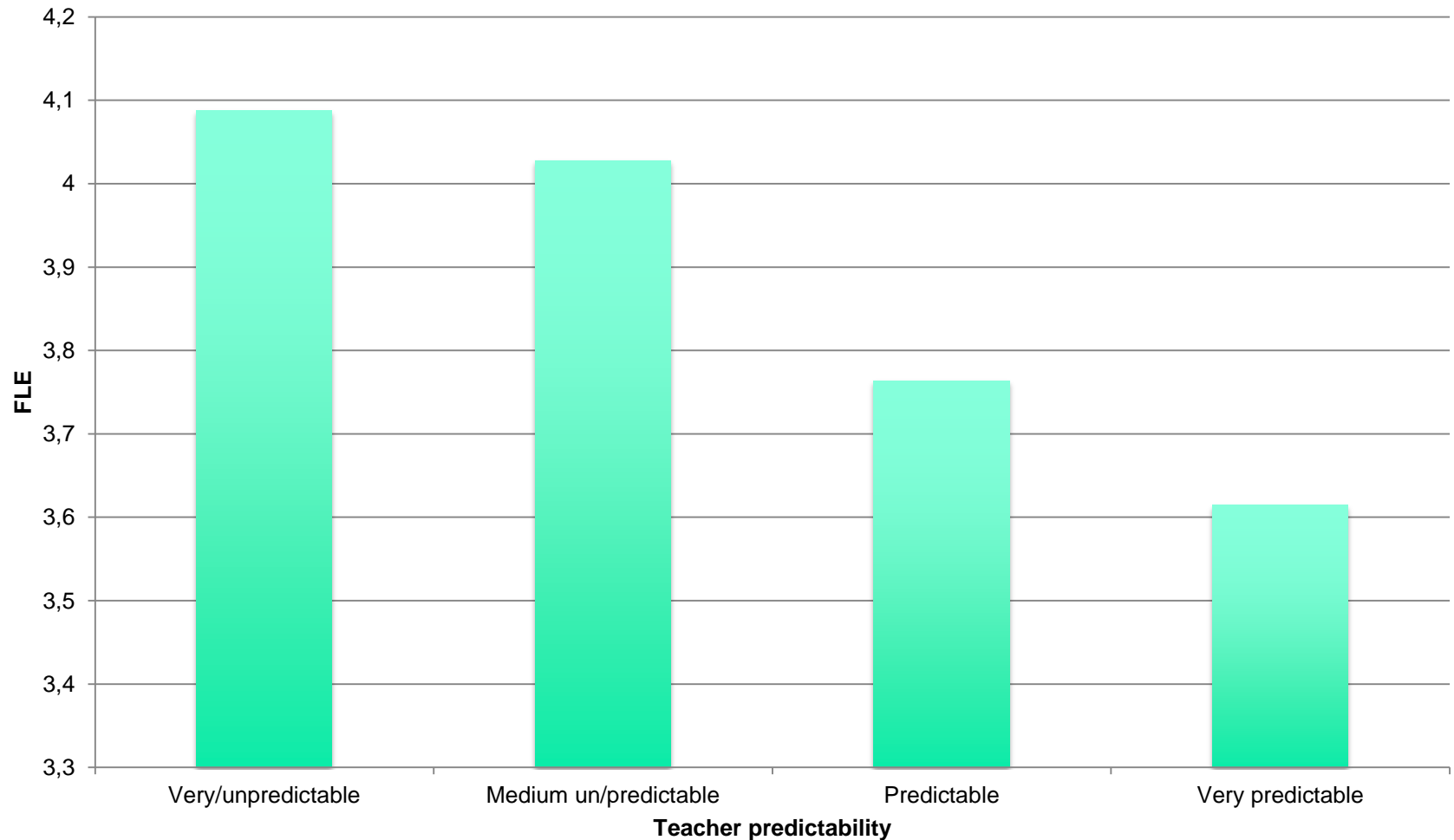
Effect frequency of teacher's use of FL on FLE

FLE: $F = 6.2$, $p < .0001$, $\eta^2 = .12$



Effect of teacher predictability on FLE

FLE: $F = 3.9$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .06$



Pedagogical implications

- **Predictability** kills enjoyment!
- teachers should strive to **boost FLE** rather than worry too much about students' FLCA
- make FL classroom environments **adequately unpredictable, surprising & challenging** for students
- teachers should **not be overly concerned about FLCA** as they do not appear to be the main cause of it

Conclusion

- FL teaching should include a component on **communication of emotion** in TL = inherently interesting! Write love letters!
- Lowering FLCA & **boosting FLE**: teachers need emotional thermometer! Learners need to experience flow and have fun (doesn't exclude hard work)
- Learners who experience **more emotion overall** in the FL classroom are more likely to progress (Dewaele et al, 2016)
- Acquiring FL = opportunity to **expand symbolic selves**, get **emotionally & cognitively involved** in FL process

Some references

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