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## Modeling the Association between EFL Students' Boredom and Enjoyment: The Mediating Role of Teacher Humor Style

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### Abstract

This study sought to explore the association between English as a foreign language (EFL) students' foreign language learning boredom (FLB) and foreign language enjoyment (FLE) (i.e., personal enjoyment, teacher appreciation, and social enjoyment) as well as the mediating role of student-perceived teacher humor styles (i.e., affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive, and self-defeating). In doing so, we firstly investigated the relationship between 229 (67 male and 162 female) Turkish EFL university students' FLB, FLE, and perceived teacher humor styles. We then probed to determine whether perceived teacher humor styles predict their FLB and FLE. The results indicated that all three indices of FLE had significant negative correlations with FLB. While affiliative and self-enhancing humor styles were significantly and positively correlated with FLE, they were negatively associated with FLB. Aggressive humor had only a significant negative correlation with the teacher appreciation subscale of FLE whereas self-defeating humor indicated a significant positive correlation with FLB. The results also showed that FLE could negatively predict FLB. Finally, the results of the mediation analysis indicated two significant mediation relationships which were significantly related to FLB through affiliative and self-enhancing humor. Implications are discussed in the context of teacher education.

**Keywords:** foreign language learning boredom, foreign language enjoyment, teacher humor

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## 1. Introduction

In the field of second language acquisition (SLA), the role of emotions has frequently been neglected for approximately thirty years due to an emphasis on cognitive aspects rather than the emotional aspects of language learning (Richards, 2020). Additionally, the primary emphasis regarding the role of emotions in SLA has primarily revolved around negative attributes like anxiety (see Gkonou, 2017). Due to the increasing prominence of positive psychology (PP) within SLA, there has been a greater recognition of the significance of positive emotions in both general education and the field of language education. This shift has resulted in increased attention being given to positive emotions (Derakhshan, 2022; Derakhshan & Fathi, 2023; Derakhshan, Fathi, et al., 2022; MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012; Wang et al., 2021).

With the emergence of PP, the prominence of emotions in the field of SLA has considerably increased (Bigelow, 2019; Derakhshan, Wang, et al., 2023; Fan & Wang, 2022; Pan et al., 2023; Shakki, 2022; Solhi et al., 2023; Wang, Derakhshan, & Azari Noughabi, 2022; Xie & Derakhshan, 2021; Zare et al., 2023) and many studies have been carried out to explore a great variety of emotions both in foreign and second language (L2) classes (Al-Obaydi et al., 2023; Derakhshan, Greenier, et al., 2022; Han & Wang, 2021; Li, 2021; Wang & Derakhshan, 2023; Wang, Derakhshan, & Pan, 2022). The PP urged language practitioners and researchers to shift attention from solely investigating negative emotional factors such as anxiety, stress, fear, and burnout to the exploration of negative as well as positive emotions in L2 learning and teaching (Derakhshan, Dewaele, et al., 2022; Derakhshan, Solhi, et al., 2023; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). Foreign language enjoyment (FLE) is one of the positive personality traits that have recently been taken into scrutiny in SLA studies (e.g., Botes et al., 2022; Dewaele et al., 2018), which mainly indicate that learner-external factors play significant roles in the emergence of L2 enjoyment than learner-internal factors (Dewaele et al., 2018; Dewaele & Dewaele, 2017; Jiang & Dewaele, 2019; Li, Huang, et al., 2021). Hence, FLE appears to be a socially constructed phenomenon that is highly susceptible to contextual factors such as teachers' roles and teacher-related variables (see Dewaele et al., 2022; Dewaele et al., 2018, Elahi Shirvan & Taherian, 2020). One of these positive teacher-related variables which is closely associated with the construct of enjoyment is teacher humor (Bieg et al., 2022). Even though there is a bulk of studies that argue in favor of humor as a facilitating construct in educational

settings, the studies on the role of teacher humor in classroom settings are scant (e.g., Dewaele et al., 2022b; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2019; Neff & Dewaele, 2022).

A factor closely, although negatively, related to FLE, the one that has recently seen a surge of interest in L2 studies, is foreign language learning boredom (FLB). Although FLB is the most intense and most often perceived academic emotion, research on the prevalent emotional experience of this emotional state has only recently become the central focus of attention (Goetz et al., 2014; Li, 2021; Li & Dewaele, 2020; Solhi et al., 2023). FLB has been identified to negatively correlate with academic enjoyment as well as educational achievement (Li & Wei, 2022; Putwain et al., 2018). Indeed, investigating the moderating role of teacher humor in the associations between FLE and FLB would highlight the prominence of teacher humor in L2 classes. The modeling of the correlation is in line with the previous empirical findings and theoretical assumptions, which indicate that student's FLB is negatively correlated with student-perceived teacher humor while their FLE is positively associated with students' perceived teacher humor (Bieg et al., 2022). In addition, teacher's humor can have more positive effects on students' level of boredom than other teacher variables such as teacher enthusiasm (see Goetz et al., 2020). In doing so, in the present study, we aimed to investigate the relationship between students' FLB and FLE mediated by perceived teacher humor so as to identify whether students' perceived teacher humor styles predict their FLB and FLE. It is noteworthy that this study seems to be the first to model the associations of the three constructs in the L2 literature.

## **2. Literature Review**

### ***2.1. Foreign Language Enjoyment***

Being identified as “the emotion that fuels the second language learning process and that boosts performance in the second language” (Dewaele, 2022, p. 190), enjoyment is defined as “the sense of satisfaction and reward generated from the activity and/or the outcome of the activity” (Ainley & Hidi, 2014, p. 206). Li et al. (2018, p. 184) also define enjoyment “as good feelings coming from breaking through homeostatic limits and stretching beyond oneself to accomplish something new or even unexpected, especially in the face of some difficult tasks”. FLE, as conceptualized by Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014), is metaphorically introduced as

the learners' right feet on their path to foreign language learning (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2016), and has been shown to possess major facilitative roles in language acquisition (Botes et al 2022).

FLE has been investigated in associations with positive affective variables such as willingness to communicate (Lee, 2020), intellectual humility (Moskowitz & Dewaele, 2020), motivation and personality traits (Pan & Zhang, 2021), and L2 grit (Derakhshan & Fathi, 2023; Elahi Shirvan et al., 2021; Pan, 2022) as well as in association with negative emotions such as anxiety (Dewaele & Dewaele, 2017; Dewaele et al., 2022a; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Dewaele & Li, 2022; Elahi Shirvan & Taherian, 2021; Jiang & Dewaele, 2019), and boredom (Dewaele & Li, 2021; Kruk, Pawlak, Elahi Shirvan, Taherian, et al., 2022). Furthermore, the construct of FLE has been explored in relation to varied L2 variables and has been identified to be related to collaborative teaching (Murphy et al., 2004), L2 achievement (Avery Gomez et al., 2010; Botes et al., 2022), teacher talk (Chen et al., 2020), learner attitudes and motivation (Dewaele & Proietti Ergün, 2020), L2 development (Dewaele et al., 2018), teacher characteristics (Dewaele et al., 2019), thinking skills (Boardman, 2004), and multilingualism (Botes et al., 2020).

The learner-internal (e.g., motivation, intelligence, and gender) and learner-external (e.g., teacher and classroom environment) factors have also been taken into account when probing FLE. Based on the findings, learner-external factors appear to possess a more salient role in the construction of FLE than learner-internal factors (Dewaele & Dewaele, 2017; Dewaele et al., 2018). For instance, Li, Huang, et al. (2021) indicated that learner-external variables such as classroom environment are more likely to influence FLE than learner-internal factors such as emotional intelligence. This is echoed in a strand of studies (e.g., Dewaele et al., 2019; Fang & Tang, 2021; Jiang & Dewaele, 2019) which revealed that FLE is more subject to peer- and teacher-related factors than to learner-internal variables. Dewaele and MacIntyre (2019) similarly pointed out that teacher-related variables are the main predictors of FLE, while learner-internal variables such as personality trait were only predictive of L2 classroom anxiety. In addition, in line with the abovementioned findings, the study indicated that the teacher is the main cause of FLE experiences while classroom anxiety was found to be connected to the individual factors. Dewaele and Dewaele's (2020) study on the role of the teacher on student's enjoyment similarly indicated that FLE is more teacher-dependent than L2 classroom anxiety. In a recent study on the three indices of FLE, Dewaele et al.

(2022a) adopted a longitudinal approach to investigate associations between FLE, L2 classroom anxiety, and attitudes/motivation between the start and the end of the course. While personal enjoyment and social enjoyment dimensions remained unchanged over time teacher appreciation dimension dropped significantly. Put simply, L2 learners kept enjoying themselves, and continued to enjoy the group solidarity over the course of one semester although values for their teacher appreciation decreased significantly. The findings highlight the fact that although FLE is more susceptible to learner-external factors than to their personal factors, L2 learners' group solidarity can play a prominent role in their FLE. Furthermore, their internal factors seemed to be more significant than teacher appreciation in their long-term experience of FLE. L2 boredom, which has gained considerable attention in L2 research in recent years, is a factor that is closely, albeit negatively, associated with FLE.

## **2.2. L2 Boredom**

Boredom is a multifaceted negative emotional state (Pekrun et al., 2010) that is challenging to be defined by virtue of being a self-referential variable and a multidisciplinary phenomenon (Pawlak, Kruk, et al., 2021; Solhi et al., 2023; Wang, 2023). Compared to more intense and more immediately observable emotional states like anxiety or anger, boredom represents an unobtrusive or "silent" emotion in disguise (Goetz et al., 2014, p. 2). Ohlmeier et al. (2020) highlight the fact that the construct of boredom is a social phenomenon, and they argue that boredom is a social emotion rather than an interpersonal state, being influenced by a strand of factors which may include cultural norms, organizational factors, position in the social structure, and in interaction processes that an individual is involved in.

The construct of boredom has been extensively taken into scrutiny in association with sociological as well as psychological variables (see Hager et al., 2020; Tam et al., 2022; Waterschoot et al., 2021). For example, boredom has been identified to be significantly and negatively correlated with mental well-being (Marshall et al., 2019), health-related quality of life (Schwartz et al., 2021), and enjoyment (Stupnisky et al., 2019). In different studies, boredom has been identified to negatively predict subjective well-being (Bai et al., 2021), and lower levels of boredom have been predictive of greater subsequent achievement (Putwain et al.,

2018). In general, the studies highlight the direct and indirect debilitating psychological effects of boredom on individuals' well-being and personality traits.

Foreign language learning boredom (FLB) is a relatively new learner emotion that has garnered significant interest in L2 research (e.g., Derakhshan et al., 2021a, 2021b; Dewaele & Li, 2020; Li, Deweale, et al., 2021; Pawlak et al., 2020). FLB is defined as “a negative emotion with an extremely low degree of activation/arousal that arises from ongoing activities...[that] are typically over-challenging or under-challenging and/or of little significance, relevance, or meaning to the learners” (Li, Deweale, et al., 2021, p. 12). Hence, FLB refers to an unpleasant emotional state in L2 classes, corresponding with low physical activation and cognitive stimulation (Li, 2021) which may manifest itself in a variety of behavioral boredom coping strategies (Nett et al., 2010), including yawning, slouching in the chair, continuously watching the clock, being drowsy, and resting head on hand. Over the last years, FLB has also been a subject of detailed investigations in L2 studies, and research has presented important findings about the nature of the phenomenon, sources of boredom as well as coping strategies (e.g., Kruk, 2016, 2022; Kruk et al., 2021; Pawlak et al., 2020). These mostly mixed-methods studies exploited a micro-perspective, investigating trajectories and causes of boredom by small as well as large samples of L2 learners during single English classes or a whole academic term. FLB has also been explored in different educational settings such as online classes (e.g., Derakhshan et al., 2021a, 2021b; Kruk, Pawlak, Elahi Shirvan, et al., 2022; Li & Dewaele, 2020; Pawlak, Derakhshan, et al., 2021a, 2021b), and virtual learning environment (Kruk, 2016, 2022). The studies on online FLB have explored the causes, effects, and coping strategies under the influence of different factors with a small as well as a large cohort of L2 students. These studies have been carried out in different educational contexts such as Iran, Poland, and China. In a recent study, Pawlak et al. (2022) also conceptualized after-class boredom, revealing the extent students are likely to feel bored when they attempt to practice the target language in their own time outside the class.

A series of recent L2 studies have also established that a negative relationship exists between FLE and FLB. For example, Dewaele, Albakistani, et al. (2022) indicated that students experience significantly more FLE and less FLB in in-person classes than in emergency remote teaching classes. Likewise, Dewaele, Botes, et al.'s (2022) study indicated negative associations between FLE and FLB. In their study, FLE was also found to be subject to teacher behavior. Echoing Dewaele and

colleagues' findings, Li and Han's (2022) study on the predictive effects of FLE and FLB on learning outcomes in online English classes has revealed a medium to high negative correlation between the constructs. Similarly, Li and Wei (2022) explored the predictive effects of FLE and FLB on L2 achievement over time. Their findings showed that while FLE is the strongest and most enduring predictor of L2 achievement, FLB completely loses its predictive power over time. With respect to the mediating role of L2 emotions, in a study on the mediating roles of FLE, FLB, and anxiety between class environment and L2 willingness to communicate, Li et al. (2020) found that FLE has the largest mediating effect on this association, followed by anxiety and FLB.

### **2.3. Teacher Humor**

Humor— mostly defined as a pleasant and prosocial concept— is a multi-dimensional construct that includes behavioral habits such as a sense of humor or comic commentary, ability or maximal behavior including detecting or comprehending jokes, and a coping strategy to regulate emotion (Tanay et al., 2013; Chen & Martin 2007). The coping strategy can be thought of as a self-defense mechanism to manage negative emotions and alleviate harmful feelings (Freud, 1960). Recently, there has been a surge of interest in the psychology of humor (Martin & Ford, 2018; Solhi Andarab & Kesen Mutlu, 2019), and research has revealed that humor has a positive influence on, say, well-being (Jiang et al., 2020), life satisfaction (Heintz et al., 2020), and mental health (Schermer et al., 2019). In L2 studies, humor has been indicated to improve classroom atmosphere (Dewaele et al., 2018) and reduce anxiety (Tarone 2000).

Humor styles vary depending on the way people use humor in their daily lives (Martin et al., 2003) and individuals' humor styles are strongly associated with mental health (MacDonald et al., 2020). Neff and Dewaele (2022) have classified eight humor strategies (e.g., cartoons, puns, faces, props, voices, spontaneous, memes, and role plays) in L2 class, indicating that FLE and student attitude towards in-class humor have a major effect on their preferred strategies. As regards individual differences, the use of humor styles is grouped into four categories: (a) to benignly enhance the self (self-enhancing) (b) to improve one's benevolent relationships with others (affiliative), (c) to develop the self while being malignant to others (aggressive), and (d) to foster relationships with others while being

detrimental to self (self-defeating) (Martin et al., 2003). Self-enhancing humor style centers around utilizing humor to improve the self in a way that is tolerant and non-detrimental to others while the affiliative humor style aims to improve one's relationship with others in a gentle and self-accepting way. Individuals utilizing a self-enhancing humor style engage in sharing funny things about themselves. Positive moods and emotions, as well as extraversion, self-esteem, intimacy, and cheerfulness, are all related to self-enhancing humor style. Affiliative humor aims to benignly reinforce the individual's social bonds without being detrimental to oneself or others through, say, cracking jokes, narrating humorous remarks, or being involved in a spontaneous humorous speech to entertain others. Self-enhancing and affiliative humor styles are conducive to psychosocial well-being and are thought to promote psychosocial well-being. On the contrary, aggressive humor style denotes malicious uses of humor such as ridiculing, excessively teasing, alienating, or belittling others. Apparently, using aggressive humor frequently could be harmful to well-being because it is likely to harm relationships (Martin et al., 2003). Finally, the self-defeating humor style refers to excessively self-belittling or denigrating oneself by saying or doing funny things so as to gain or maintain the approval of others. Self-defeating humor style, akin to aggressive humor style, if used excessively, is hypothesized to be potentially detrimental to well-being since it involves downgrading the self and excluding emotional requirements (Martin et al., 2003).

A bulk of studies have indicated a link between the four styles of humor and different variables related to mental health. For example, significant positive correlations were found between positive humor (i.e., self-enhancing and affiliative humor) and happiness (Ford et al., 2016), emotional intelligence (Karahan et al., 2019), and mental health (Schneider et al., 2018), whereas positive humor styles were negatively correlated with personal distress (Hampes, 2010), and social anxiety (Tucker et al. 2013). In contrast, the negative humor styles (i.e., aggressive and self-defeating) were positively correlated with loneliness (Schermer et al., 2017), and depressive symptoms (Tucker et al., 2013) whereas they were negatively correlated with well-being (Kuiper & Nicholl, 2004) and happiness (Ford et al., 2016). In brief, negative humor has been found to be associated with mental health problems, while positive humor has been linked to enhanced mental well-being (Schermer et al., 2019).

Karahan et al.' (2019) study revealed that self-enhancing and affiliative humor



styles were positively connected with problem-solving abilities among a sample of trainee instructors. Furthermore, research has indicated that problem-solving skills are positively correlated with both self-enhancing and affiliative humor styles, whereas they are negatively correlated with aggressive and self-defeating humor. In their study, women exhibited a higher level of the tendency to utilize amusing than offensive humor. In addition, Ho's (2016) and Tmkaya's (2007) studies indicated that self-enhancing and affiliative humor styles were negatively correlated with depersonalization and emotional exhaustion while having a positive correlation with accomplishment. In another study by Kuiper and McHale (2009), the affiliative humor style was found to have a facilitating role in creating a social support network. Indeed, these studies emphasize a connection between teachers' psychological well-being and their humor styles. They also suggest that affiliative and self-enhancing humor styles contribute to an improved subjective well-being, whereas aggressive and self-defeating humor styles have a detrimental effect on subjective well-being (Jiang et al., 2020).

Some studies have also been conducted on student-perceived teacher humor style and its association with student well-being. For example, Freitas's (2018) study with a cohort of college students indicated a significantly positive relationship between student-perceived instructors' use of humor and their ability to engage and intellectually stimulate students in the class. More precisely, in the study, teachers' humor significantly predicted students' engagement, academic interest, and intellectual stimulation. The study highlights the beneficial effectiveness of teacher humor orientation to enhance learning in educational settings. In a similar study on elementary and junior high school students' perception of teacher humor, Tsukawaki and Imura (2020) explored whether teacher's humor styles (aggressive humor and affinity humor) are predictive of students' mental health. Their results indicated that affinity humor is a significant positive predictor of emotional well-being and self-esteem, while aggressive humor turned out to be a significant negative predictor of emotional well-being and a significant positive predictor of stress response. Results also revealed that students' mental health is related to the teachers' humor.

Despite the wealth of studies on the role of L2 teacher characteristics such as teacher's enthusiasm (Dewaele, & Li, 2021), teacher's behaviors (Dewaele et al., 2022; Titsworth et al., 2013), teacher's first language (Dewaele et al., 2019), and teacher's teaching methodology (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012) on students' FLE,

the present study seems to be the first to investigate the relation between students' FLB and FLE and the way teacher humor styles can play a mediating role between them. Apparently, the studies on the construct of humor in class have generally taken into consideration the self-perceptions of the teachers (e.g., Aşlıoğlu, 2021; Liao et al., 2020) rather than their perceived humor. Thus, given that there is a scarcity of research on the students' perceptions of the utility of teacher humor styles in L2 educational settings, we decided to explore the relationship between students' FLB and FLE and their perceived teacher humor styles. To this end, we formulated the following research questions:

RQ1. What is the relationship between students' FLB, FLE, and perceived teacher humor styles?

RQ2. Do perceived teacher humor styles predict EFL learners' FLB and FLE?

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Participants and Procedure

The research population was Turkish EFL university students majoring in English language teaching (ELT) in Istanbul in spring 2022 (2021-2022 academic year). In Turkey, the candidates have to pass the standardized English proficiency exam of the university to be eligible for the ELT department. Hence, their level of proficiency was higher than upper-intermediate, and they were from different academic levels (i.e., freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior). The scales were shared through email in the form of a single Google Form to the cohort of students to voluntarily participate. Before filling in the questionnaire, the informed consent of the participation was obtained from the volunteers. After providing their demographic information, the participants responded to the items of three scales measuring their FLB, FLE, and perceived teacher humor styles. It is noteworthy that the participants were asked to complete the questionnaires by considering their department courses. A sufficient amount of time was allocated to the respondents for completing the scales, which were exclusively provided in the English language. After data collection, some responses were removed due to incompleteness. As a result, a total number of 229 responses (29.25 % males & 70.75 % females; mean age = 20.4 years) remained, which constituted an approximate rate of 94 %. In total, 62 freshmen, 61 sophomores, 57 juniors, and 49 seniors participated in the present study.

### 3.2. Instruments

**English (as a Foreign Language) Boredom Measure.** Li's (2021) adopted a 3-item English Boredom scale measures test-related boredom, learning-related boredom, and class-related boredom, and is used in an English language learning context. The three items are (1) *I get bored in [English] classes*, (2) *The [English] learning material bores me to death*, and (3) *I can't concentrate in [English] class because I am so bored*. In her study, the 3-item scale showed acceptable reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .78$ ). Dewaele and Li (2021) similarly used the 3-item scale to fit an EFL context. In their study, the scale also indicated satisfactory internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha = .783).

**Short Foreign Language Enjoyment Scale (S-FLES).** Botes et al.'s (2022) revised 9-item scale (S-FLES) measures L2 learners' level of enjoyment and consists of three dimensions: teacher appreciation (3 items; e.g., *The teacher is supportive*), personal enjoyment (3 items; e.g., *I am proud of my accomplishments*), and social enjoyment (3 items; e.g., *We laugh a lot*). Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). In Dewaele and MacIntyre's (2014) study, the Cronbach's alpha of teacher appreciation subscale, personal enjoyment subscale, and social enjoyment subscale was computed as  $\alpha = .92$ ,  $\alpha = .71$ , and  $\alpha = .77$ , respectively. They thus indicated a high to the acceptable internal consistency of the 9-item scale.

**Humor Styles Questionnaire.** The HSQ (Martin et al., 2003) is a 32-item scale of the frequency with which individuals adopt benign (i.e., affiliative and self-enhancing) and detrimental (i.e., aggressive, and self-defeating) humor styles that are either self-focused or other-focused. The first two are conducive to psychosocial well-being as they are employed to enhance the self or one's relationships with others, while the other two dimensions are deemed as less gracious and even potentially detrimental to well-being. The results exhibited a high reliability for the four subscales with Cronbach's alpha .83 for affiliative humor (8 items; e.g., *I laugh and joke a lot*), .78 for self-enhancing humor (8 items; e.g., *I can usually cheer myself up with humor*), .73 for aggressive humor (8 items; e.g., *I often tease others*), and .81 for self-defeating humor (8 items; e.g., *I let people laugh at me or make fun at my expense*). Vrabel et al.'s (2017) study also indicated a satisfactory internal consistency for the measure. We adapted Martin et al.'s 32-item Humor Style

Questionnaire so as to examine teacher humor styles from the perspectives of the students. In doing so, we replaced the “I” pronoun (e.g., *I usually don’t laugh or joke around much*) with “the teacher” (e.g., *The teacher usually doesn’t laugh or joke around much*) in all items. The items are rated from 1 (*totally disagree*) to 7 (*totally agree*).

### 3.3. Data Analysis

We tested the association between EFL students’ FLB and FLE as well as the mediating role of teacher humor styles using the structural equation modeling (SEM) in Mplus program.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Validity and Reliability of the Scales

At the outset, we tested the construct validity of the measures through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The tested model included personal enjoyment, teacher appreciation, and social enjoyment. Factor loadings were all higher than .40, except the factor loading of one item of self-defeating humor that was eliminated from the model. The goodness-of-fit indices of the model indicated a very good fit to our set of data (Table 1), supporting the construct validity of the variables. Hiver and Al-Hoorie (2019) recommend convergent validity if average variance extracted (AVE) and factor loading are above .50 and if composite reliability (CR) is above .70. Factor loadings are all above .50 in our study and CRs were all above .70, except self-defeating variable which was .69. In general, all constructs indicated convergent validity.

Satisfactory discriminant validity was also evident in each construct, as the square root of AVE for each construct was greater than the correlations of that construct with other constructs (see Hiver & Al-Hoorie, 2019). Table 2 also indicates the measured reliability of the scales using Cronbach’s  $\alpha$ .

**Table 1**  
*Goodness of Fit Indices for CFA and SEM models*

Models	$\chi^2$	df	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR
CFA model	568.14	201	.97	.96	.05	.06
FLE → FLB	76.58	23	.95	.92	.06	.05
FLE → Teacher Humor styles → FLB	568.14	201	.97	.96	.05	.06

#### 4.2. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations among Variables

Descriptive statistics including mean and standard deviation as well as latent bivariate correlations among all variables can be seen in Table 3. As evident in Table 3, personal enjoyment ( $r = -.67, p < .001$ ), teacher appreciation ( $r = -.64, p < .001$ ), and social enjoyment ( $r = -.61, p = .003$ ) had significant negative correlations with FLB. Affiliative humor style had significant positive correlations with personal enjoyment ( $r = .45, p < .001$ ), teacher appreciation ( $r = .42, p < .001$ ), and social enjoyment ( $r = .44, p < .001$ ) and a significant negative correlation with FLB ( $r = -.61, p = .023$ ). Self-enhancing humor style had significant positive correlations with personal enjoyment ( $r = .49, p < .001$ ), teacher appreciation ( $r = .41, p < .001$ ), and social enjoyment ( $r = .46, p < .001$ ) and a significant negative correlation with FLB ( $r = -.56, p < .001$ ).

Aggressive as the other subscale of teacher humor style, had just one significant negative correlation with teacher appreciation ( $r = -.39, p < .001$ ). Self-defeating subscale of teacher humor style just had a significant positive correlation with FLB ( $r = -.29, p < .001$ ).

**Table 2**  
*Descriptive Statistics*

	A	CR	AVE	M	SD
Personal enjoyment	.85	.82	.52	3.12	.82
Teacher appreciation	.85	.83	.54	3.23	.90
Social enjoyment	.86	.84	.55	3.61	.92
Student boredom	.78	.75	.53	2.55	.94
Affiliative humor	.71	.70	.51	3.13	1.12
Self-enhancing humor	.74	.71	.50	3.04	1.17
Aggressive humor	.68	.67	.50	2.67	1.44
Self-defeating humor	.69	.69	.52	2.76	1.21

**Table 3**  
*Latent Correlations among Variables*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Personal enjoyment	-							
2. Teacher appreciation	.63***	-						
3. Social enjoyment	.65***	.61***	-					
4. Student boredom	.67***	.64***	.61***	-				
5. Affiliative humor	.45***	.42**	.44***	.61***	-			
6. Self-enhancing humor	.49***	.41**	.46***	.57***	.56***	-		
7. Aggressive humor	.20	.39**	.16	.17	.49***	.44***	-	
8. Self-defeating humor	.18	.20	.12	.29*	.38**	.32**	.48***	-

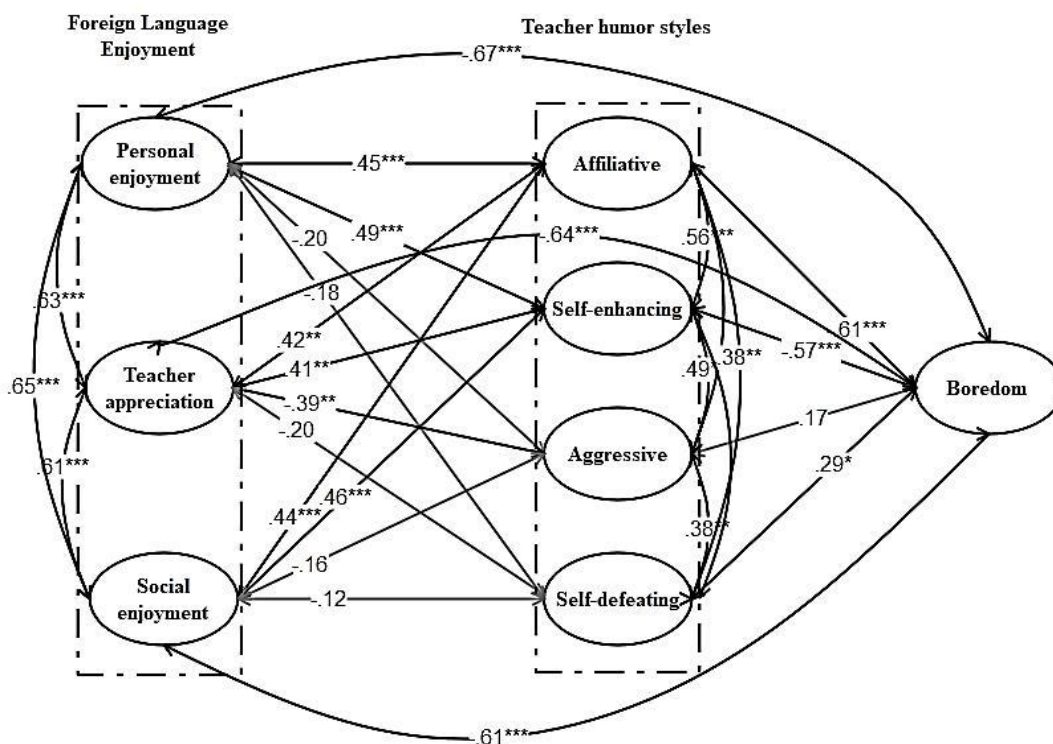
Note: \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

First, we tested a model to see how three components of FLE related to students' FLB (Model 1). Then, we tested another model in which teachers' humor style were entered as mediators of the relationship between FLE and FLB (Model 2). Goodness of fit indices for all models can be seen in Table 1 which showed that our models had good fit. In the first model, enjoyment components were modeled as negative predictors of students' FLB. The model accounted for 4.7% of the variance in FLB (Cohen's  $f^2 = .05$ , small effect).

In the second model, we added teacher humor style components as mediators between FLE and FLB (Model 2). The model accounted for 30.3% of the variance in affiliative humor style (Cohen's  $f^2 = .28$ , medium effect), 29.4% of the variance in self-enhancing humor styles (Cohen's  $f^2 = .27$ , medium effect), 12.3% of the variance in aggressive humor styles (Cohen's  $f^2 = .17$ , small effect), 17.6% of the variance in self-defeating humor styles (Cohen's  $f^2 = .19$ , small effect), 35.7% of the variance in personal enjoyment (Cohen's  $f^2 = .44$ , large effect), 32.5% of the variance in teacher appreciation (Cohen's  $f^2 = .42$ , large effect), and 28.5% of the variance in social enjoyment (Cohen's  $f^2 = .30$ , medium effect).

Personal enjoyment ( $\beta = -.67$ ,  $SE = .08$ ,  $p < .001$ ), teacher appreciation ( $\beta = -.64$ ,  $SE = .09$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and social enjoyment ( $\beta = -.61$ ,  $SE = .12$ ,  $p < .001$ ) could negatively predict FLB. Then, we checked how four components of teacher humor style might mediate the relationship between FLE and FLB. Results of mediation analysis indicated two significant mediation relationships which was significantly related to FLB through affiliative humor style ( $\beta = -.19$ ,  $SE = .11$ ,  $p = .013$ ) and self-enhancing humor style, ( $\beta = -.20$ ,  $SE = .07$ ,  $p = .012$ ).

**Figure 1**  
The Corrected Model with Standardized Estimates



Note. Grey lines show non-significant paths.

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

## 5. Discussion

The purpose of the study was two-fold: Firstly, we investigated the relationship between students' FLB and FLE as well as the mediating role of perceived teacher humor styles. Results indicated that all three indices of FLE (i.e., personal enjoyment, teacher appreciation, and social enjoyment) had significant negative correlations with FLB. The results also exhibited that FLE could negatively predict FLB and vice versa. This finding implies that university students with higher levels of FLE feel lower levels of FLB in class or the other way round. As expected, the self-aspect of both humor and enjoyment are tightly associated. The self-aspect of enjoyment is reflected in learners' personal enjoyment of learning. This means that learners' perception of their teachers' self-enhancing humor is highly susceptible to their personal enjoyment. That is, when learners themselves experience enjoyment in their process of language learning, this self-enjoyment acts as an affordance that

enables their teachers to express funny things about themselves while fostering their relations with students in a self-accepting manner. Also, the findings imply that language learners' self-oriented enjoyment of learning could pave the way for their perception of their teachers' application of affiliative humor. This indicates that the learners' moments of enjoyment can be reflected in their teachers' narration of humorous points and telling jokes to build a positive teacher-student bond. On the other hand, quite consistent with the literature, the findings indicated that teacher-supported FLE as a learner-external factor accounts for learners' perception of their teachers' both affiliative and self-enhancing humor styles. In other words, language teachers' support for their learners' experience of FLE can be reflected in their expression of funny things about themselves or telling jokes. In addition, as expected based on the literature, learners' enjoyment in all its types negatively influenced their perception of their teachers' aggressive and self-defeating humor styles. This means that neither aggressive nor self-defeating humor can be regarded as teacher-led affordances for the development of language learners' FLE.

The role of emotional teacher support (Skinner & Belmont, 1993) during the students' learning process has been found to play a big role in classroom enjoyment. FLE has also been identified to positively relate to teacher support (Lei et al., 2018). In the present study, teacher appreciation was negatively correlated with aggressive humor. This highlights the significance of the perceived value of teacher appreciation and how it may influence EFL learners' perception regarding teacher humor styles. The findings also indicated that self-defeating humor had a significant positive correlation with FLB. Student's boredom susceptibility to teacher's humor is echoed in Bieg et al.'s (2022) study, which indicated that there is a correlation between student's boredom experiences and perceived teacher humor. They also found that perceived teacher humor positively affects enjoyment within lectures.

Many empirical studies have also revealed that students with higher teacher support and appreciation exhibit higher levels of positive academic emotions including enjoyment (e.g., Aldridge et al., 2012; Birgani et al., 2015). In alignment with the findings of the present study, teachers' benign humor in the class can create an encouraging learning environment for L2 learners and thereby lead to lower levels of FLB experiences. More specifically, as a learner-external factor that can secure student FLE in class (Dewaele & Dewaele, 2017; Fang & Tang, 2021; Hopkins, 2008), the enjoyment-boosting role of L2 teacher in the classroom can create a positive emotional atmosphere which can eventually help learners



experience higher levels of FLE. On the contrary, when students perceive that they need to play an active role in their own emotional management in the class, they report lower levels of FLE, which can consequently lead to students' FLB in class. Aligned with the findings, Deweale, Botes, et al.'s (2022) study showed that there is the correlation between FLE and teacher humor. In their study, in classes where teachers joked very infrequently, there was a drop in FLE among students. In addition, Putwain et al.'s (2018) study revealed that greater levels of enjoyment and lower levels of boredom can predict bigger future accomplishments. In turn, greater educational accomplishment can predict higher enjoyment and lower boredom. Li and Wei (2022) similarly indicated that FLE was the strongest and most enduring predictor of L2 achievement. Apparently, given FLE is susceptible to teacher behavior (Deweale, Botes, et al., 2022), it can have a significant influence in learning outcomes (Li & Han, 2022).

In the present study, the mediation analysis also indicated two significant mediation relationships which were significantly related to FLB through affiliative and self-enhancing humor styles. Results exhibited that enjoyment and boredom as achievement-related emotions are susceptible to L2 learners' perceptions of teachers' teaching practices in the class. The significant influence of L2 teachers' self-enhancing and affiliative humor on the reduction of L2 learners' FLB should be explained in terms of the main underpinning theories of boredom. For instance, under-stimulation theory (Larson & Richards, 1991) indicates that language learners' boredom emerges due to their lack of interest in the subject matter or the environment of the classroom. Based on the findings of the study, it can be explained that teachers' humor can provide an adequate level of stimulation and interest for learners to go on their process of L2 learning with lower levels of boredom. Regarding the control-value theory of emotions (Pekrun, 2006), it can be conjectured that L2 teachers' affiliative and self-enhancing humor can help language learners take control of their classroom activities and maintain quite positive values for them. More specifically, L2 teachers' humor styles, particularly benign humor, can influence the controllability level of L2 learners with respect to learning practices, and specifically it can create a positive value toward the tasks and the activities that the students perform in the classroom.

Results also indicated that affiliative and self-enhancing humor styles were significantly positively correlated with FLE while negatively related to students' FLB. In alignment with Pekrun's (2006) control-value theory (CVT) perspective,

the effect of L2 teachers' benign humor on fostering positive academic emotions such as FLE can result in learning satisfaction and can adversely influence negative deactivating emotions such as FLB. In fact, the findings highlight the teacher-centeredness of students' FLE.

In this study, aggressive and self-defeating humors were also found to be negatively correlated with teacher appreciation and positively correlated with students FLB, respectively. Undoubtedly, teacher's psychological status and positive mindset can influence their preference for humor styles. In Dewaele et al.'s (2019) study, teacher's friendliness was reported to be the strongest positive predictor of L2 enjoyment. In students' perception, teachers' detrimental humor can result in lower levels of enjoyment and higher amounts of boredom. The devastating outcomes of detrimental humor would negatively influence learners' classroom enjoyment (see Jin & Zhang, 2019) and it can adversely influence students' perception of teacher appreciation. Given students' FLB is also susceptible to teacher's detrimental humor, aggressive and self-defeating humors can result in higher levels of boredom in L2 classes.

## 6. Limitations and Suggestions for Future Studies

The results have to be considered with the shortcomings of the present study. L2 teachers' humor styles are perceived through students' viewpoints and thereby they might infer their teachers' feelings based on their own emotions. Hence, there might be discrepancies between the perceived and actual teachers' humor styles. Thus, investigating both perceived and actual teachers' humor styles from the standpoints of both L2 learners and teachers would be more illuminating in understanding the associations between learners' FLB and FLE. Secondly, the sample of the study consists of university EFL students. Retesting the model of the study with a cohort of K-12 students would be enlightening since FLB is one of the most prevalent negative emotional states in schools, and thereby investigating the facilitative role of teacher humor in the continuum of FLB to FLE would be a fruitful avenue for future research endeavors. In this study, we also scrutinized the FLB levels of the learners, asking them to consider their general boredom level, viz., trait boredom, in all the courses. Future studies can specifically focus on students' state boredom, which is the definite experience of boredom at the moment. In addition, conducting an experience sampling study on the impact of perceived teachers' humor styles on FLB and FLE will provide a rich avenue for future inquiry.

## 6. Conclusion

The present study set out to explore the association between FLE and FLB as well as the mediating role of student-perceived teacher humor styles in a cross-sectional study. The results of SEM modeling indicated a negative correlation between FLE and FLB. In addition, FLE could negatively predict FLB. While teacher's benign humor (i.e., affiliative & self-enhancing) had a positive correlation with FLE, they indicated a negative association with FLB. Aggressive humor exhibited just one significant negative correlation with teacher appreciation dimension of FLE, whereas self-defeating humor had a significant positive correlation with FLB. Results also indicated two significant mediation relationships which were significantly related to FLB through affiliative and self-enhancing humor. The conclusion that we can draw from the findings is that because L2 students' perceived teacher humor significantly influences their FLB and FLE within and between lectures, L2 teachers can use benign humor in an enjoyable way so as to promote L2 students' FLE experiences in the classes.

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