

ORIGINAL RESEARCH

# Spanish teachers' perceptions about their positive impact on their students to maintain their interest

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## Abstract

The shortage of foreign language speakers in the United States has reached alarming levels. While Spanish is the most widely spoken and studied foreign language, it has also been experiencing low enrollments and discontinuation after a short term of study, leading to lack of acquisition of communicative competence, which is essential for fluency in the language. To that end, this mixed-method study, which forms part of a large-scale study on foreign language teachers' perceptions, investigated Spanish teachers' perceptions about how they determine if they successfully impact their students to maintain their interest in the language and study it long enough to acquire communicative competence. Findings revealed that the teachers believe that the factors that indicate to them that they have a positive impact on their students to maintain their interest in the language are the students' interest in their classes and the language, their motivation toward the language, the feedback they provide, teacher-student relationships, and the students' engagement in classroom activities and academic success. Recommended follow-up studies include an investigation of students' perceptions to ascertain where the teachers' and the students' perceptions coincide and where they differ in order to ensure the successful maintenance of students' interest in the language.

**Keywords** communicative competence, foreign language learning motivations, foreign language proficiency, maintenance of students' interest in the target language, Spanish teachers' perceptions

## 1. Introduction

Typically, Americans do not study foreign languages long enough to achieve communicative competence (Alonso, 2007; Garfinkel, 1987; Klein-Smith, 2019; Pratt et al., 2020, 2021; Simon, 1980; Speiller, 1988; Wesely, 2010). As stated in the abstract, this issue has existed over a span of many decades. While half of the world is bilingual (Matthews, 2019) and 73% of Europeans speak two or more languages well, only 25% of Americans speak a language other than English (Egnatz, 2017). Eighty-seven percent of the 25% learned the other languages in their childhood home, while only 7% learned them at school. A major cause of the problem is that while 90% of children in Europe, where elementary second language education is required in 20 countries, begin foreign language study at age 6, only 15% of U.S. public elementary schools offer language programs, and even fewer are proficiency-based. Additionally, 42% of Europeans begin learning a third language after age 12, but in the

United States, although 91% of high schools offer world languages, only 44% of the students enroll, and only 50.7% of higher education institutions require foreign language study (Egnatz, 2017). It is also worth noting the critical shortage of qualified teachers (Klein-Smith, 2019). Consequently, only about 20% of the adults in the United States know a language other than English, whereas, in the European Union, about two-thirds of the region's total adult population speaks two or more languages (Hopwood, 2018).

In spite of the plethora of literature on this decades-old issue and the abundance of justifications for the need for Americans to learn more foreign languages, second language acquisition in the United States continues on its downward trend (Egnatz, 2017; Mouradian, 2021). Among the many reasons why Americans need to acquire foreign languages are the growing demand for job candidates to speak one or more languages other than their maternal language, an increase in job postings from U.S. employers looking for bilingual employees, competition against global counterparts, and American companies' loss of over \$2

billion annually on cultural or language misunderstandings (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010, 2019). As the need for more companies to expand globally increases, the demand for a multilingual workforce has become a critical factor (Interpreting, 2020). According to Hopwood (2018), “the declining number of students learning a foreign language increases the breach in proficiency between many countries and the United States” (para. 7). In fact, less than 20% of K–12 students presently study a foreign language while the median in the European Union is 92%, and only 7% of U.S. college students are enrolled in foreign language courses (American Councils for International Education, 2017; Friedman, 2015; Mouradian, 2021; Ryan, 2018), and attrition further exacerbates the problem. In fact, knowing another language expands one’s potential network as well, a situation which has caused many American companies to compensate employees with an additional \$67,000 to \$128,000 over their lifetime for their language (Mouradian, 2021). Commenting on the decline in enrollments, Friedman (2015) stated: “Less than 1 percent of American adults today are proficient in a foreign language that they studied in a U.S. classroom. That’s noteworthy considering that in 2008 almost all high schools in the country—93 percent—offered foreign languages ...” Wesely (2010) summed up the causes as follows: “The four main factors associated with this phenomenon in the literature on both traditional and immersion FL [foreign language] programs have been instruction, academic success, anxiety, and motivation” (p. 10). Regardless of the specific reasons for specific situations, there is no doubt that there is a critical need for foreign language proficiency in the United States that necessitates a solution to the problem.

Although Spanish is the most predominant language in the United States after English and has the highest enrollments of foreign language students at all levels, constituting 69.21% of K–12 foreign language enrollment with 7,363,125 students and 50.2% of college foreign language enrollment with 712,240 students (Flaherty, 2018), it has undergone huge reductions in enrollment and attrition over the period of study. The reasons for that include dramatic differences between the number of students who begin Spanish classes and the number who remain every year after that, the number of students enrolled in high school Spanish classes and the number of those who go on to study Spanish in college (Pratt, 2010; Speiller, 1988), substantial differences between the enrollments in lower- versus upper-level college Spanish courses (Goldberg et al., 2015; Rhodes & Pufahl, 2010), and general discontinuation among students at all levels (Pratt, 2010, 2012, 2016, 2017; Speiller, 1988). It is therefore imperative that drastic measures are taken to maintain students’ interest in the language in order to keep them in the programs long enough to achieve communicative competence and cognitive academic language proficiency, which are crucial for language acquisition and proficiency.

Focusing on the use of language in a social context, the anthropological linguist Dell Hymes, who proposed the term *communicative competence*, defined it as “a speaker’s knowledge of the total set of rules and conventions governing the skilled use of language in a society” (Matthews, 2007, p. 65). Savignon (1972) defined it as “the ability to function in a truly communicative setting, that is, in a dynamic exchange in which linguistic competence must adapt itself to the total informational input, both linguistic and paralinguistic, of one or more interlocutors” (p. 8). Canale and Swaine (1980) also defined it as a synthesis of an underlying system of knowledge and skills needed for communication. They put more emphasis on ability and proposed four subcategories (Canale, 1983; Canale & Swaine, 1980), namely, grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competences. Grammatical competence encompasses the ability to create grammatically correct utterances; sociolinguistic competence is the ability to produce sociolinguistically appropriate utterances; discourse competence is the ability to produce coherent and cohesive utterances; and strategic competence is the ability to solve communication problems as they arise. These competences require a concerted study process that ensures acquisition, which requires a process lasting much longer than the 2 years that U.S. students typically spend studying languages.

Cummins (1980) also distinguished between two types of language proficiency, namely, basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS), which is for socialization and takes two to three years to acquire, and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) for the acquisition of academic language, which takes 5 to 7 years to achieve. Due to the fact that only a small percentage of Americans currently enroll in foreign language courses and study the language for just a short period, typically up to 2 years, Americans are mostly unable to achieve these competencies and skills (which require long-term commitment) and are not even able to reach the level of socialization, let alone academic skills. It is worth noting that the 2-year period is the foreign language requirement for college entrance as well as the undergraduate foreign language requirement where a requirement still exists (Pratt et al., 2021). According to Pratt et al. (2021), 75% of Americans have no second language, which is alarming considering that half of the world is bilingual (Mitchell, 2017) while America is becoming more and more monolingual (Agudo, 2018; American Councils for International Education, 2017; Flaherty, 2018; Matthews, 2019; Mitchell, 2017).

Of great importance, therefore, is an exploration of how teachers can ascertain when students are still interested in studying the language and when they are losing interest in the language, and what role teachers can play in ensuring a meeting of the minds in order to prevent discontinuation, as recommended by Pratt (2010, 2016), Pratt et al. (2009), and Wesely (2010). In a recent study on foreign language teachers’ perceptions, which included teachers of Arabic,

Chinese, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Latin, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Turkish, and American Sign Language, Pratt et al. (2020) investigated what the teachers believed indicated that they had a positive impact on students to maintain their interest in the languages. According to the findings, the teachers believed that the indicators were the students' interest in the classes and the language, their engagement in class activities and academic success, the motivation they demonstrated, the feedback they provided to the teachers, and their relationships with their teachers.

In order to study the issue in different contexts to obtain language-specific results, which will lead to more targeted solutions, this follow-up study investigated the indicators among Spanish teachers. The central questions were (1) What are Spanish teachers' perspectives regarding whether or not they have a positive impact on their students to maintain their interest in the language? and (2) What factors do Spanish teachers believe are indicative of their positive impact on their students to maintain their interest in the language? Given the results of Pratt et al. (2020, 2021) and Pratt and Rodríguez García (2022), the hypothesis was that the teachers would be confident about their positive impact on their students, but the ranking of the factors that indicated their positive impact would be different due to differences in the status of the different languages.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Participants

This study forms part of a large-scale investigation of foreign language teachers' self-efficacy beliefs (Pratt et al., 2021). Participants were recruited through purposive sampling. An online survey, which was developed by the researcher and her colleagues, was administered via e-mail to approximately 250 middle and high school and lower-level college foreign language teachers. The sample was diverse in terms of gender, age, ethnic affiliation, length of teaching experience, and foreign language taught. One hundred and thirty-one teachers volunteered to participate, and 120 of them completed the surveys fully, so 120 surveys were used for the study. Out of the 120 completed surveys, 64 were submitted by Spanish teachers, so those 64 surveys were then extracted and used for this study.

Forty-six of the 64 teachers (71.9%) identified as female and 18 (28.1%) identified as male. They ranged in age from 22 to 62, with a mean age of 40. Forty (62.5%) identified as Hispanic and 22 (34.4%) as Caucasian; none identified as Black or African American, Native American, or Asian or other Pacific Islander. There were 26 high school teachers, 12 middle school teachers, 11 college instructors, and the remainder did not indicate the level they taught. The length of time they had been teaching Spanish ranged from one semester to 37 years, with 25% of them in the 11- to 15-year range. Forty-two were native speakers

and 22 were non-native, but all the participants reported verbal fluency in Spanish. Verbal fluency was used in the general sense of the ability to speak the language effectively for communication. The teachers were simply asked to list the languages they spoke fluently, so they only reported on their verbal fluency. They were not required to provide information about other language skills or specific levels based on any proficiency guidelines. It is possible that verbal fluency could mean different things to them, so that is a limitation of this study. With respect to their training, five indicated that their training programs were very ineffective, six considered their training programs ineffective, 15 reported that they were neither effective nor ineffective, 24 indicated that they were effective, and 11 believed they were very effective. Additionally, 46 (71.9%) had attended workshops or training sessions, and the number of sessions ranged from one to countless.

### 2.2. Instruments

Two instruments were used for the study. The first instrument, the Teacher Academic and Demographic Questionnaire (TAD), was developed by the investigating team and consisted of 20 multiple-choice and open-ended questions. It was used to solicit 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' Sources of Efficacy Scale, was also developed by the investigating team. It corresponded to Question 21, and included 31 sub-questions rated on a scale from 0% to 100%, which was used to indicate the teachers' levels of certainty with regard to their efficacy. See the Appendix. It was adapted from the Sources of Multicultural Efficacy Scale (SMES) previously developed by Zaier (2011), which was based on Tschannen-Moran et al.'s (1998) Teacher Efficacy Scale, in which they described four sources of efficacy stemming from Bandura's (1977) proposal. The SMES was evaluated and validated by ten experts. For this study, the multicultural content was substituted with foreign language content to measure the teachers' levels of efficacy and beliefs in terms of Bandura's four sources of efficacy, namely, performance accomplishment (8 items), vicarious experience (7 items), verbal persuasion (8 items), and emotional arousal (8 items).

### 2.3. Analysis

A mixed-method approach was used to conduct the study. SPSS software was used for the statistical analysis. The reliability coefficient for the 31-item Sources of Efficacy Scale was conducted and the Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient was  $\alpha = .923$ , which demonstrated a high standard of reliability (Henson, 2001). The participants' responses to Question 17 regarding whether or not they believed they had a positive impact on their students to maintain their interest in the language were used to answer

Research Question 1. Descriptive statistics were also performed on the data in the TAD and the Sources of Efficacy Scale to obtain more information to explain further the responses to Research Question 1. To facilitate the analysis, the 100-point scale of the SES was adjusted to a 5-point Likert scale. To answer Research Question 2, 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?”) for the 64 Spanish teachers were extracted and coded to determine the emerging themes. The final themes were then generated and the number of excerpts and their percentages were calculated.

### 3. Findings

#### 3.1. What are Spanish teachers’ perspectives regarding whether or not they have a positive impact on their students to maintain their interest in the language?

Out of the 64 participants, 56 (87.5%) responded in the affirmative, six (9.4%) responded in the negative, and two did not respond. Therefore, the results revealed that the Spanish teachers overwhelmingly indicated that they believed they had a positive impact on their students to maintain their interest in the language. Further review of the participants who responded in the affirmative revealed the following: 40 out of the 56 (71.4%) identified as female, 37 (66.1%) were native speakers of Spanish, 54 (96.4%) spoke Spanish fluently, and the length of time they had taught Spanish ranged from one semester to 32 years, with a mode of 11 to 15 years. With regard to their teacher training, 6.25% indicated that it was very ineffective, 6.25% considered it ineffective, 21.9% indicated that it was neither effective nor ineffective, 35.9% believed it was effective, and 17.2% reported that it was very effective. The rest did not respond. Additionally, 73% had attended workshops or training sessions, and the number of sessions ranged from one to “countless.”

With regard to the participants who responded in the negative, two-thirds of them identified as female, two-thirds were native speakers, and all of them were fluent speakers of Spanish. With respect to their teacher training programs, the percentages were 50% effective, 33.3% ineffective, and 16.7% very ineffective. Eighty-three percent of them had attended workshops or training sessions, and the number of sessions ranged from two semesters to “too many.” Their length of teaching ranged from one semester to 30 years.

Overall, the results of the Spanish teachers’ sources of efficacy scale demonstrated that they felt confident teaching Spanish. The individual scores ranged from 78.6 to 150.93 out of 155 with an overall mean of 125.48, which indicates a moderately high sense of self-efficacy. The demographics did not reveal any significant difference between the group that answered yes and the group that answered no to the question regarding whether or not they believed they

had a positive impact on their students to maintain their interest in the language. The analysis demonstrated that the associations between a positive or negative response and the other variables, namely, gender, age, grade level taught, ethnicity, native speaker status, verbal fluency, effectiveness of their teacher education program, years of experience, workshop or training experience, and self-efficacy score were non-significant. There was also no significant difference between those who answered yes and those who answered no to the question regarding whether or not they believed they had a positive impact on their students to maintain their interest in the language. In terms of inter-variable associations, workshop or training experience correlated positively with verbal fluency ( $r = .40, p < .01$ ), which means the more workshop or training experience they had, the more likely the teachers were to speak Spanish fluently. Additionally, verbal fluency was significantly associated with self-efficacy ( $r = .43, p < .001$ ), which means the more verbally fluent they were in Spanish, the higher their self-efficacy beliefs (see Table 1). There were no other significant associations.

**Table 1.** Relationships between workshop or training experience, self-efficacy, and verbal fluency

		workshop or training experience	self-efficacy	verbal fluency
workshop or training experience	correlation	1	.256	.396**
	significance		.097	.009
	N	43	43	43
self-efficacy	correlation	.256	1	.428**
	significance	.097		.000
	N	43	64	64
verbal fluency	correlation	.396**	.428**	1
	significance	.009	.000	
	N	43	64	64

#### 3.2. What factors do Spanish teachers believe are indicative of their positive impact on their students to maintain their interest in the language?

Given that survey Question 18 solicited a direct answer to the research question and the requested information was not hidden, descriptive coding was used (Saldaña, 2018). Interpretive coding was used occasionally when the information was not obvious. Microsoft Excel Review was used for the coding and sorting. Some of the themes were then combined and a total of six themes emerged. They were engagement and academic success, positive feedback, motivation, student interest, teacher–student relationships, and no impact. In order to confirm that the sorting had been done correctly, all the codes were reassigned to the six themes and the numbers were double-checked. After that, the frequencies were assigned (see Table 2).

*Engagement and academic success* referred to how engaged students were in class and the improvements they made in terms of acquisition of the language. *Positive feedback* included the feedback that

was received from students. *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 language. *Student interest* referred to the various ways in which the students demonstrated their interest (and continued interest) and what they did beyond meeting language requirements, such as participating in study abroad and majoring in Spanish. *Teacher–student relationship* involved 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* included all the demonstrations of uncertainty and self-doubt by the teachers and the student behaviors that demonstrated lack of interest. The results are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Themes

Themes	No. of Excerpts	Percentage of Excerpts Indicating Impact
Student Interest	43	36.1
Motivation	19	16
Positive Feedback	17	14.3
Teacher–Student Relationship	17	14.3
Engagement and Academic Achievement	12	10.1
No Impact	11	9.2

All the excerpts that carried meaning were counted, so a single response could generate a number of excerpts. There were 119 excerpts. The factor that mostly demonstrated to the teachers that they had a positive impact on the students to keep them interested in the language was student interest, with 43 excerpts (36.1%). Motivation emerged second with 19 excerpts or 16%. Positive feedback and teacher–student relationship tied in third place with 17 excerpts or 14.3%, and engagement and academic achievement was fourth with 12 excerpts or 10.1%. Finally, 11 excerpts (9.2%) corresponded to no impact.

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusions

The goals of this study were twofold. First, it sought to ascertain what Spanish teachers’ perceptions are regarding whether or not they have a positive impact on their students to maintain their interest in the language. The results indicated that the teachers overwhelmingly believe that they have a positive impact on their students to maintain their interest, with 87.5% of them responding in the affirmative. The results of their sources of efficacy survey also demonstrated that they have a moderately high sense of efficacy and feel confident teaching Spanish. Demographically, there was no significant difference

between the group that responded yes and the group that responded no. The statistical analyses did not reveal any significant difference between the groups to explain their choice, and associations between a positive or negative response and the other variables were non-significant. In terms of associations between the variables, workshop or training experience positively correlated with verbal fluency, meaning that the more workshop or training experiences the teachers had, the more likely they were to speak Spanish fluently. Also, verbal fluency was significantly associated with self-efficacy, meaning that the more verbally fluent they were in Spanish, the higher their self-efficacy beliefs. No other significant associations were discovered.

These results were similar to the findings of Pratt et al. (2020), which investigated the perceptions of foreign language teachers and found that they overwhelmingly (91.67%) believed that they had a positive impact on their students to maintain their interest in the languages. Additionally, the variability of the teachers’ perceived impact on their students could not be explained by any of the variables either. The only difference is that while this study discovered positive correlations between workshop or training experiences and verbal fluency, and between verbal fluency and self-efficacy, Pratt et al. (2020) discovered a positive correlation between age and teaching experience, meaning that the older a teacher was, the longer their teaching experience. Therefore, whether or not the teachers actually have a positive impact on their students to maintain their interest in the language cannot be explained from the data, but they are confident that they have a positive impact.

The study also investigated the perceptions of teachers regarding what they believe is indicative of their positive impact on their students to maintain their interest in the language. The findings revealed that those factors are student interest, motivation, positive feedback, teacher–student relationships, and engagement and student success, in that order. The first factor, student interest, referred to the various ways in which the students demonstrated their interest (and continued interest) and what they did beyond meeting language requirements, such as participating in study abroad and majoring in Spanish. This ranking coincided with Pratt et al. (2020), which had a comparable percentage (37.2%), confirming that not only Spanish teachers but foreign language teachers in general consider student interest the most prominent factor that is indicative of their positive impact on their students to maintain their interest in the language, with a high level of conviction.

Some of the specific examples provided by the teachers were the following: “interest shown in continuing to study the language”; “interest level in continuing to Spanish III and IV”; “they want to learn more”; “they show their interest in the language and the culture”; “many students have expressed that they didn’t use to like Spanish, but now they find it enjoyable”; “their excitement in my class”; “they are

excited about continuing beyond our grade level”; “students are willing to use the language being taught and have conversations in the native language”; “they feel happy in class”; “at one time I taught Spanish on campus to kids after school who were interested in learning to speak, read, and write the language; it was very popular with the students and their parents who were very happy to allow their children to stay after school and attend the sessions twice a week”; “because they manifest their interest in continuing with a minor in Spanish at school”; “my students are well behaved in class, we have fun, and they learn”; “my Spanish IV classes have increased in numbers”; “they are interested in learning more”; “by students’ reaction”; “their attitudes towards the class”; “students’ interest in trying what they have learned outside the classroom”; “their excitement or lack thereof”; “they are enthusiastic”; “others have expressed a desire to minor in it or study abroad”; “many of my students have told me that they will minor in the language after taking my course”; “when they ask me how to get a minor in Spanish”; “when they ask me if I would be teaching upper levels in Spanish”; “I have many students taking dual credit and credit by accreditation test”; “I have had at least 15 students major or minor in Spanish in college”; “they move on to the upper levels even though they don’t have to or are not necessarily the best at it”; “they want to continue it in college either as a minor or major”; “going abroad to a country where the language is spoken”; “they continue to request the language on their choice sheets”; “they ask me about which could be the best place for study abroad”; and “they enroll in upper-level classes and tests.”

The second factor that the teachers reported as indicative of their positive impact on their students to maintain their interest in the language was motivation. Based on the criteria used for the coding, this factor included the behaviors exhibited by the students that were indicative of their instrumental, integrative, intrinsic, and extrinsic motivations, as well as the efforts they made to learn and their awareness of the importance of the language. The specific examples provided by the teachers included the following: “the efforts they make in class”; “their desire to try when it seems difficult”; “when they speak with me in Spanish after class”; “when they speak Spanish outside of the classroom”; “they inform me about how they see the target language in their lives”; “I have a student who is now a Spanish instructor”; “they are proud to speak two languages”; “they realize the importance of being able to communicate in more than one language”; “when they use and apply the language”; “they are not shy to use their Spanish around non Spanish-speaking students”; “they use it in all areas”; “the students are proud when speaking their language”; “they see how important it is to be bilingual”; “they feel motivated”; “students enjoy hearing me use their native language”; “they are eager to interact with me in Spanish”; “the effort they make”; “many tell me stories of how they try to use the language when the opportunity presents itself”; “they even learn something outside the

textbook”; “some are interested enough to travel to a country where the language is spoken.”

Pratt et al. (2020) also discovered that foreign language teachers believed that motivation was an indicator of their positive impact on their students to maintain their interest. However, in their study, motivation was ranked third after student interest and engagement and academic success, and constituted 16.4% of the total number of excerpts. The difference in ranking could be explained by the fact that teachers probably perceive motivation among students of Spanish more than among foreign language students in general. This could be explained by the current status of Spanish in the United States. Presently, Spanish is the most dominant foreign language. With over 41 million Spanish speakers, the United States is second to only Mexico in its number of Spanish speakers. There are more Spanish speakers in the United States than even Spain (due to Spain’s smaller size). Additionally, Spanish is one of the fastest growing languages in the United States, increasing by 233% between 1980 and 2013. Hispanic culture is also very predominant in the country. The Census Bureau reported in 2017 that there were 58.9 million Hispanics living in the United States, and that by 2030, that number would reach more than 72 million (Propio Language Services, 2021). According to the Census Bureau, the number of Spanish speakers has quadrupled over the past few decades and is predicted to reach 138 million speakers by 2050, which would make the United States the largest Spanish-speaking nation in the world (Propio Language Services, 2021). For these reasons, it would not be surprising if Spanish students exhibited more motivation than other foreign language students.

A closer look at the teachers’ responses revealed that the students’ motivations can be categorized into integrative, instrumental, intrinsic, and extrinsic motivations. Grounded in a social psychological framework, the socio-educational theory of motivation formulated by Gardner and Lambert (1959) consists of two types of motivation: integrative, where the aim in language study is to learn more about the language group; and instrumental, where the reasons reflect the more utilitarian value of linguistic achievement. According to the self-determination theory of Deci and Ryan (1985), intrinsic and extrinsic motivations lie along a continuum of self-determination. While intrinsic motivation is based on the learner’s internal interest in the activity itself and stems from the innate needs of the learner for competence and self-determination, extrinsic motivation is based on rewards that are extrinsic to the activity, such as monetary gain (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Deci et al., 1991). The plethora of literature on these learning motivations confirms that they result in the achievement of more competence and thus contribute to foreign language learning, and also differ depending on the language; from which milieu a person comes; the context; and individual differences such as gender, ability level, and year of study (Bateman & de Almeida Oliveira, 2014; Gardner, 2001; Pratt, 2010). Additionally, as asserted by Pratt et al.

(2020), the literature also demonstrates that continuing students are characterized more by integrative and intrinsic motivations, which lead to more long-term language study (Goldberg & Noels, 2006; Noels, 2001; Wesely, 2010). What the literature does not assert or confirm is whether or not this results from the influence of the teachers or it emanates entirely from the students. It is therefore imperative that students' perceptions are investigated in order to understand the actual impact or lack thereof of the teachers.

The third most prominent factor for the teachers was positive feedback, which included the feedback the teachers received from students. Some of the specific responses were "they come back years later and tell me they enjoyed the class and remember some Spanish"; "at the end of the school year, I have the students use survey monkey to answer questions about my teaching methodologies"; "they can make comments on what needs to be improved upon or what they would like me to do"; "because they have said it to me"; "students tell me that Spanish is their favorite class"; "they tell me positive stories about their experiences using the language"; "they talk with me"; "I had students who would come to me and tell me how much they had learned in my Spanish classes"; "some of them came to see me when they were in college"; "from time to time I get positive feedback"; "I sometimes run into parents of previous students that make comments"; "previous students come back to visit and they say they are going to become foreign language teachers"; "from their feedback"; "through conversations with the students, especially with students who are applying to study abroad and may need a letter of recommendation"; "two students told me that they are seeking a teaching certificate in Spanish and are in college"; "positive comments from students and teachers on a daily basis"; "my students tell me that I have a positive impact." An examination of the responses revealed that the feedback was almost entirely informal. The lack of formal targeted student feedback deprives the teachers of controlled, constructive, specific, and appropriately structured information specifically about their impact that could clearly provide an answer to this research question, so a follow-up structured investigation of students' perceptions is required.

Teacher-student relationships was the fourth indicator according to the teachers. This 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 confirmed their ability to establish the relationships and help the students. Specific responses included the following: "my relationship with the students"; "I am able to relate with students and I always make sure they know the benefits of learning a second language, especially how important it is for them to learn Spanish"; "I love to teach and I love the language, so I can make a good impact on my students"; "I try my hardest to make it as interesting as possible"; "I talk about my personal experiences with my students"; "I tell them how it has

helped me and my education"; "I at least make the classes lively and therefore hope to maintain a positive attitude towards language study"; "I tell them every day that they are as valuable as two people since they know two languages"; "I constantly encourage them to use the language in the classroom"; "they seem to relate to me very well"; "they know that I also use Spanish to speak with their parents and siblings and other family members whenever possible"; "they feel very comfortable speaking it in the classroom with me"; "Outstanding Teacher Award"; "College of Arts and Sciences Award"; "Freshman Seminar Award for outstanding teacher"; "nominated Outstanding Teacher"; "they can identify with the teacher."

According to the literature, the teacher-student relationship constitutes a crucial factor that ranks very high among useful resources for student success, and its positive implementation is highly recommended due to the fact that it is crucial for the development of student confidence and sense of security and provides guidance and support for the student (Pratt, 2010; Pratt et al., 2020; Sparks, 2019). Nonetheless, the literature also affirms that it is underutilized, and recommends that preservice programs must pay attention to it in order to prepare teachers sufficiently to ensure that they develop good relationships with their students. Given that student success leads to continuance as affirmed by the literature (Pratt, 2010; Pratt et al., 2020; Wesely, 2010), there is a possibility that the teachers' perceptions are valid. However, students' perceptions must also be investigated for confirmation.

The fifth factor for the teachers was engagement and academic achievement, which constituted the engagement of students in classroom activities as well as evidence of academic success with regard to the language. Some of the specific responses the teachers gave were the following: "they get engaged in activities"; "their engagement in class"; "their grade improvement"; "generally, many students get excited in class, at least with some of the activities we do"; "I can tell by how much they participate in class"; "they continue to do well"; "I can see their academic language development as well as their academic progress in all content areas"; "their level of participation"; "they are engaged in the course"; "asking questions and trying to improve"; "when they are able to use the language."

While student engagement can result from intrinsic motivation, in which case it is exclusively personal, it can also result extrinsically from classroom activities and management, which could emanate from the teacher's performance (Bonney et al., 2008; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Dörnyei, 1998; Marszalek et al., 2022; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Both of these are accounted for among the specific responses provided by the teachers. However, they may not all account for the teacher's positive impact due to the personal nature of the result of intrinsic motivation. With regard to academic success, the literature reports a positive correlation with continuance, so students are more likely to continue studying the language if they are successful (Deci et al.,



1991; Pratt et al., 2020; Speiller, 1988; Wesely, 2010). While this points to the curriculum as well, which may not fall within the purview of the teachers, teachers do play an important role as their instructional practices contribute to academic achievement. Therefore, the teachers could be playing an important role in this regard. However, actually ensuring that there is an impact on the students to maintain their interest will require consistent validation of effort (Andress et al., 2002; Pratt, 2010).

The study revealed that overall, the Spanish teachers believed that they had a positive impact on their students to maintain their interest. While the themes that emerged were the same as those of Pratt et al. (2020), who researched the same perceptions among 120 foreign language teachers teaching Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Latin, Russian, Portuguese, Spanish, Turkish, and American Sign Language, and both studies ranked student interest first, the rest of the rankings were different. While the present study ranked motivation, engagement and academic success, positive feedback, and teacher–student relationships in that order, the order for Pratt et al. (2020) was engagement and academic success, motivation, feedback, and teacher–student relationships. It appears, therefore, that the teachers’ perceptions depend to some extent on the language they teach, and the languages should be researched separately to find out how the findings differ.

## 5. Limitations of the Study

While the study provided important information regarding the perceptions of Spanish teachers that can help resolve some of the problems related to the discontinuance of the study of Spanish, the teachers were recruited from middle and high schools and the first 2 years of college, and the recommendations cannot be generalized to all levels of Spanish. Another limitation is the fact that the teachers’ verbal fluency was based on what they reported in terms of the general meaning of whether or not they had the ability to speak Spanish effectively, and they were not required to specify any levels based on a specific proficiency scale, which means there is a possibility that they interpreted verbal fluency in different ways. Additionally, the teachers’ perceptions cannot be assessed as they are self-reported, so this renders necessary further investigation based on students’ perceptions to confirm if what the teachers perceive is what the students intend, in order to ensure that the appropriate action is taken to help the students achieve long-term study of the language.

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## Appendix

Foreign language Teachers' Sources of Efficacy Scale	Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank Order
<b>Performance Accomplishment</b>			
1. I have had successful experiences teaching foreign languages.	4.35	0.80	6
2. I have not done poorly in teaching foreign languages.	3.94	1.37	21
3. I have not made mistakes when teaching foreign languages.	2.69	1.64	31
4. I have successfully helped students learn foreign languages.	4.41	0.85	4
5. My teacher education program prepared me effectively to teach foreign languages.	3.55	1.23	27
6. I have been trained to deal with many of the learning difficulties students encounter when learning foreign languages.	3.41	1.34	29
7. My foreign language teaching skills have been honed by working with students.	4.23	0.85	8
8. I have learned how to effectively interact with foreign language students.	4.41	0.61	4
<b>Vicarious Experience</b>			
9. I have had opportunities to observe other teachers teaching foreign languages.	3.56	1.49	26
10. I have observed effective strategies other teachers use to teach foreign languages.	3.59	1.44	24
11. I see myself applying the same strategies used by other foreign language teachers to effectively teach foreign languages.	3.9	1.19	22
12. I see myself avoiding mistakes other teachers made while teaching foreign languages.	4.01	1.19	20
13. I have learned how to teach foreign languages by watching other skillful teachers.	3.56	1.51	26
14. My classroom observations of teachers of foreign languages are valuable to me.	4.12	1.34	15
15. I am able to improve my instruction of foreign languages by applying successful strategies I have observed experienced teachers use.	4.03	1.25	18
<b>Verbal Persuasion</b>			
16. My teachers often told me that I was good at teaching foreign languages.	4.14	1.10	13
17. I have often been praised for my ability to teach foreign languages.	4.14	0.97	13
18. My family members have told me that I have a talent for teaching foreign languages.	4.2	0.99	10
19. My colleagues have told me that I am good at teaching foreign languages.	4.18	1.04	11
20. My colleagues have often praised my ability to effectively teach foreign languages.	4.10	1.07	17
21. My colleagues believe I am a successful foreign language teacher.	4.20	0.89	10
22. My college classmates told me I will be an effective foreign language teacher.	4.10	1.12	17
23. My colleagues tell me they learn a lot when they observe me teaching foreign languages.	3.81	1.18	23
24. I am passionate about teaching foreign languages.	4.65	0.69	2
<b>Emotional Arousal</b>			
25. Teaching foreign languages is not often frustrating.	2.98	1.49	30
26. I do not feel discouraged when I think about teaching foreign languages.	4.12	1.28	15
27. The idea of teaching foreign languages does not make me feel nervous.	4.27	1.24	7
28. I feel comfortable helping students learn foreign languages.	4.63	0.61	3
29. I feel happy when I teach well.	4.90	0.24	1
30. I am never worried about understanding the learning needs of foreign language learners.	3.47	1.62	28
31. I do not feel stressed when I think about teaching foreign languages.	4.01	1.31	20