



## Study on the Foreign Language Enjoyment of an English Major Student

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### Abstract

In recent years, research in the field of second language acquisition has seen a growing interest in Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE). While research on FLE has predominantly focused on adolescent learners, learners like graduate students remain underexplored. This case study investigates the FLE level and influencing factors of a Chinese English major graduate student through a questionnaire and semi-structured interview. The study revealed a high overall FLE level, with the level of enjoyment obtained from oneself ranking highest, followed by teacher/peer and classroom environment. Qualitative data further identified four influencing factors of FLE: self-related factors (individual excellence, personality traits, learning interest, learning motivation), peer-related factors (peer support, peer relationship), teacher-related factors (teacher's literacy, characteristics, teaching activities), and cultural-related factors. Based on the research data, some suggestions are proposed to enhance enjoyment in learning English.

**Keywords:** Foreign language enjoyment; EFL learner; Second language acquisition.

### I. Introduction

In recent years, the concept of "positive psychology" has entered the field of second language acquisition, giving rise to a new research perspective known as "positive psychology in second language acquisition research." The role of "positive emotions" in second language acquisition has garnered increasing attention. McIntyre (2017) advocates for a holistic understanding of emotions,

viewing positive emotions not merely as the opposite of negative emotions. Butler (2017) found that positive emotions not only enhance second language learning efficiency but also contribute to individual happiness.

Simultaneously, research on positive emotions in second language teaching can aid in a better understanding of the role of positive emotions in the second language acquisition process (McIntyre and Gregersen, 2012). Studies

on learners' emotions in second language acquisition are still in their early stages, with a predominant focus on negative emotions, particularly emotions like "foreign language anxiety." In recent years, with the explicit introduction of the concept of "foreign language enjoyment" (FLE), positive emotions in second language acquisition, especially FLE, have gained widespread attention from scholars.

While existing studies predominantly examine middle or high school students learning English as a second language (Jin & Zhang, 2018; Dewaele et al., 2020), graduate students majoring in English remain overlooked. Given this situation, this study focuses on an English major graduate student in China, aiming to answer the following questions: (1) What is the current level of the participant's foreign language enjoyment? (2) What are the factors that affect the participant's foreign language enjoyment?

## **II. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Theoretical Basis**

Pekrun (2006) established the Control-Value Theory and posited that personal, task-related, and environmental factors, as well as individual assessments, influence academic emotions. Pekrun (2007) further suggested that the Control-Value Theory provides a systematic framework for understanding the impact of learning resources on academic emotions and the subsequent influence of these emotions on academic performance. According to this theory, positive academic emotions can enhance learners' learning efficiency. A learner's evaluation of the controllability of the learning content and the perceived value of the content directly affect their academic emotions. If learners believe that they can master the learning content, they will evaluate it as highly controllable, which in turn enhances their self-assessment of value. Furthermore, if learners perceive the content as valuable to themselves, it will elicit positive emotions and foster positive learning motivation.

MacIntyre (2012) firstly introduced the Broaden-and-build theory into the area of second language acquisition, emphasizing the coexistence balance of positive and negative emotions as a universal emotional schema for second language learners. They pointed out that positive emotions can enhance second language learning motivation, thereby facilitating language acquisition. Building upon this schema, Dewaele & MacIntyre (2014) introduced the concept of "foreign language enjoyment," suggesting that enjoyment may be a key factor in helping individuals unlock language learning and make progress. The reasons for this include the stimulation of curiosity, creativity, and playfulness by enjoyment, which can expand the behavioral range of second language learners. Additionally, language skills and social relationships of individuals can be expanded and constructed through exploration and play.

### **2.2 Empirical Studies**

In terms of the measurement of Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) in foreign language classrooms, the pioneering study was conducted by Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014). To better compare the effects of enjoyment and anxiety on language learners, they developed the Foreign Language Enjoyment Scale (FLES). This scale utilizes a 5-point Likert scale format and comprises 21 items, which cover three dimensions: individual learning experiences, peers, and teachers. The development of this scale has provided subsequent researchers with a concrete tool to measure and study the levels of enjoyment in foreign language learners, significantly contributing to the advancement of FLE research. Although the FLES was originally developed based on surveys of English foreign language learners, Ekam (2003) pointed out that human emotions of enjoyment are universal. Hence, the scale is likely applicable to Chinese foreign language learners as well. This notion was well-supported by research conducted by Chinese scholars Jin and Zhang (2018). They translated and adapted Dewaele and

MacIntyre's (2014) FLES, incorporating "English classroom" into the scale to better fit the foreign language learning environment of Chinese students. The adapted scale was named the "English Classroom Enjoyment Scale" (ECES).

In the context of comparing Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) and Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) in the foreign language classroom, Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) conducted a comparative study on FLE and FLA. Their research demonstrated that both enjoyment and anxiety simultaneously occur in foreign language classroom settings. However, the level of enjoyment experienced by learners is significantly higher than the level of anxiety they feel in the classroom. Moreover, there is a moderate negative correlation between these two emotions. Additional research has indicated that enjoyment and anxiety are independent emotions rather than two ends of the same dimension (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2016; Dewaele & Witney, 2018; Tsung, 2020).

Regarding the factors influencing Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) in the classroom, Dewaele and MacIntyre (2017) identified three key elements: social, personal, and peer-related factors. Boudreau and MacIntyre (2018) pointed out that a positive and supportive classroom atmosphere enhances students' FLE. For personal factors, Dewaele et al. (2017) found that among the influencing factors of FLE, gender has a significant impact, with female learners experiencing higher levels of enjoyment in foreign language learning compared to their male counterparts. Research by Witney, Saito, and Dewaele et al. (2018) revealed that learners' age, gender, foreign language proficiency, learning attitudes, and the amount of time spent on foreign language learning all affect their FLE in classroom settings. In China, some scholars found a few learner variables, such as language learning strategies, other positive emotions, and critical thinking abilities, are significantly correlated to FLE (Jin, 2021; Ma, Li & Liu, 2023). Besides, peer interaction and teacher behavior significantly impact FLE. Dewaele and

MacIntyre (2017) noted that positive interactions with peers can significantly enhance learners' FLE. Teacher support and positive feedback also play a crucial role, as indicated by Witney et al. (2018) and Zhang & The participant (2023), who demonstrated that supportive teacher behavior and positive classroom atmosphere contribute to increased student enjoyment.

In terms of the impact of foreign language enjoyment in foreign language classrooms, Pekrun (2007; 2014) explicitly pointed out that learners' enjoyment has a significant influence on their academic achievement. Dewaele and Alfawzan (2018) demonstrated that these emotions positively predict learners' foreign language proficiency. Further, research by Dewaele et al. (2020) indicated that foreign language enjoyment in classrooms has a significant positive impact on learners' academic achievement, learning engagement, and motivation. Additionally, Chinese scholar Mao (2007) conducted a study involving 40 university students, which confirmed that the enjoyment experienced in English classrooms significantly enhances learners' memory of English vocabulary. Yang & Li (2013) conducted a study on the impact of enjoyment on prospective memory with 68 university students from a certain university, and the results showed that foreign language enjoyment in English classrooms significantly improves the effectiveness of prospective memory. The study by Jin and Zhang (2018) found that foreign language enjoyment in high school English classrooms has a significant influence on students' English learning performance. These studies collectively highlight the importance of paying attention to learners' foreign language enjoyment in foreign language classrooms.

Moreover, many scholars have delved into the triangular relationship between FLE, foreign language proficiency, and various learner variables, such as willingness to communicate (WTC), language engagement, self-efficacy, critical thinking skills, and

motivation (Dewaele & Meftah, 2024; Khajavy, MacIntyre, & Barabadi, 2018; Wu & Tan, 2025). For instance, Fathi et al. (2023) explored the connections between FLE, language proficiency, WTC, and intercultural communicative competence (ICC). Their findings indicated that the ideal L2 self, ICC, and FLE are direct predictors of L2 WTC, and that ICC and ILE mediate the relationship between the ideal L2 self and L2 WTC. Additionally, FLE has a direct influence on ICC and its relationship with FLE and language achievement (Cui & Meng, 2023;). Research by Dewaele and Meftah (2024) revealed a strong correlation between FLE dimensions and motivation scales at higher skill levels, indicating that FLE and motivation enhance each other as language proficiency increases. Furthermore, Ma (2023) found that students with a high propensity for critical thinking tend to experience the highest levels of foreign language enjoyment and performance, whereas those with a low propensity for critical thinking score the lowest in these areas.

### **III. Methods**

#### **3.1. Participant**

The subject of this study is a 24-year-old female graduate student, majoring in English. She pursued her undergraduate studies in English as well. The participant excelled in the Test for English Majors Band 8 (TEM-8) examination, scoring 91 points, which is considered an excellent level. To a certain extent, she can be regarded as an outstanding second language learner. The role of foreign language enjoyment has been instrumental in her process of second language acquisition. The reason for selecting a high-scoring student here is that the data is more representative and may reveal the key factors for successful second language learning.

#### **3.2. Data collection and analysis**

Research data were collected from questionnaire and interview. First, the participant was asked to rate her own English

language level and her general attitudes towards her English language learning. The 17-item FLE scale adapted from the original FLE scale developed by Dewaele and Macintyre's (2014) was presented. Participant was asked to indicate to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the 17 Items describing their English learning on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 point indicates "completely disagree," 2 points indicate "disagree," 3 points indicate "neutral," 4 points indicate "agree," and 5 points indicate "completely agree." To make it clear and straightforward, "FL" in the original questionnaire was rephrased into "English Language".

Then, to supplement the findings from the questionnaire, an interview was designed to analyze the factors affecting the participant's enjoyment in her English learning. Focusing on her personal experiences during the English learning process, the interviewer tried to go deep into her enjoyment episodes and explore the underlying reasons leading to her enjoyment. Before the formal interview, the author first developed an interview outline for studying these influencing factors as follows:

- How do you think of your English level?
- Please talk about your feeling in the process of learning English.
- What factors do you think affect your performance and emotions in English learning? - Do you think teachers influence your emotions in the classroom and play an important role in generating language enjoyment?
- Are there any other influencing factors?
- Please talk about the most enjoyable experience you've ever had.

The analysis of the data was conducted in two stages. Initially, the questionnaire result was analyzed, including calculating the maximum value, minimum value, and average value. Ultimately, the current level of the participant's enjoyment of language in English learning



would be obtained. Secondly, the recording material of the interview was transcribed into written text. The whole recording time is nearly 40 minutes and the transcript is nearly 3000 words, excluding the greeting and concluding remarks. Then the transcript was categorized into different dimensions of the influencing factors of FLE.

#### **IV. Results and Discussion**

##### **4.1. The level of English Learning Enjoyment**

The scale can be divided into three dimensions: enjoyment from oneself, enjoyment from teacher/peer, and enjoyment from the classroom environment. After organizing the collected questionnaire data, the specific analysis results of the participant's enjoyment in learning English are as follows:

Items	Minimum	Maximum	Average value
Personal	4	5	4.22
Teachers / peers	4	4	4
Classroom environment	3	4	3.67
Overall	3	5	3.96

According to Jin and Zhang (2018), an average value of less than or equal to 2.5 indicates a low level; a mean value between 2.5 and 3.5 indicates a medium level; and a mean value greater than or equal to 3.5 indicates a high level. The table shows that the average score of foreign language enjoyment of the participant is 3.96, which places it at a high level.

Additionally, the participant shows the highest level of enjoyment from herself, with average score of 4.22, with the "teacher / peer" ranking second (4) and the "classroom environment" ranking third (3.67). This indicates that in comparison to the enjoyment from teacher/peer and classroom environment, self-related variables are the most significant

predictors of the participant's foreign language enjoyment.

Compared to previous studies, the mean value of overall enjoyment in this study (3.96) is higher than that of study by Dewaele and Macintyre (2014), which was 3.82, and higher than the enjoyment level of Chinese college students studied by Jiang and Dewaele (2019), which was 3.94.

This result differs slightly from previous studies which also indicates that different participant may lead to distinct factor structures in Foreign Language Enjoyment. One of the reasons for that may be related to the participant's personality, she is more "individual" and casual, does not care much about other people's behavior or opinions. She is less affected by the external environment than others, and is more focused on herself; Second, it is related to the participant's learning style, in her interview, she has mentioned more than once that she prefers to study alone after class, not disturbed, and likes to practice by herself; Third, as an adult, The participant's self-control is higher and her self-learning ability is stronger, so compared with junior high school students and high school students, the demand for teachers' guidance is lower. Therefore, the enjoyment from oneself in learning English cannot be ignored.

##### **4.2. The Influencing Factors of Foreign Language Enjoyment**

The study found that the elements influencing the enjoyment of the participant can be grouped into four main categories: self-related factors, peer-related factors, teacher-related factors, and cultural-related factors.

###### **4.2.1 Self-related Factors**

The internal factors influencing students' enjoyment primarily stem from the participant herself. These factors can be categorized into four main dimensions: individual excellence, personality traits, learning interest and learning motivation.

Previous research has identified a notable positive relationship between enjoyment of foreign languages and foreign language achievement (Dewaele & Alfawzan, 2018; Jiang & Dewaele, 2019), indicating that increased enjoyment is associated with improved academic performance, and conversely, better performance is linked to higher levels of enjoyment.

"I find learning English quite enjoyable because it doesn't feel too strenuous, and the more I learn, the better I feel. Progress is very noticeable, and I feel that as long as you put in effort, there is a rewarding return. The achievement makes me happy."

It can be found that individual progress and excellence bring a sense of achievement and satisfaction, leading to enjoyment in the learning process.

The personal characteristics of students also influence their enjoyment in English classes.

"Because I'm confident, I always actively interact with the teacher in class. My teacher often gives me positive feedback, and I always feel happy."

Extroverted students tend to engage actively with teachers during lessons, and when faced with challenges, they seek solutions, which boosts their self-confidence and sense of accomplishment, ultimately leading to greater enjoyment in the classroom.

Gardner and MacIntyre (1993) pointed out that interest in learning is one of the key affective variables influencing students' experiences in second language learning. Students with a strong interest in learning often feel more relaxed and confident when facing language learning tasks, thereby reducing the anxiety and stress associated with learning. This reduction in anxiety further enhances the enjoyment experience.

"In college, through various English courses, I found that I particularly enjoy speaking English. For example, when I do interpretation for exercise, I experience a sense of enjoyment during practice because I feel that the more I speak, the better my oral skills become. This makes me happy and satisfied."

Oral skills are a significant aspect where the participant derives the most enjoyment. Engaging in conversations and improving communication skills through using English with others in the learning process can bring her a sense of enjoyment. Thus, interest in learning becomes a crucial factor in increasing the enjoyment of second language learning. These positive emotional experiences not only improve learning outcomes but also increase students' sustained engagement and enthusiasm for language learning.

When learners possess a high degree of motivation in learning a foreign language, the emotional barriers they experience will be significantly diminished. This reduction facilitates quicker absorption, internalization, and acquisition of the language, thereby enhancing language output and the overall development of their foreign language ability (Krashen, 1982).

I have always wanted to become an excellent interpreter, which is why I chose to major in English. Every time I study, I feel like I'm getting one step closer to my dream, so I thoroughly enjoy the process of learning English.

The participant has a high internal learning motivation, she has always wanted to be an excellent interpreter, the initiative to learn English is on herself, the enthusiasm for learning will not fade, and she can maintain long-term positive and stable learning.

#### 4.2.2 Peer-related Factors

Peers also influence students' enjoyment in class. The support from peers and

the relationships among them contribute to a harmonious atmosphere, thereby fostering positive emotions.

"During my tenure as the president of the Chinese and foreign students' association, I met many good peers, including some Chinese students who love English and some international students. Everyone was friendly, and the relationships were good with mutual help. Every exchange event was successful, and I also developed my English communication skills and organizational skills. In the end, the association won an award, and I felt a sense of achievement.

Therefore, harmonious peer relations are also significant during the learning process. Cooperative and mutually supportive relations can help establish a good learning atmosphere, which can greatly promote learners' feeling of enjoyment."

#### 4.2.3. Teacher-related Factors

Teachers, as one of the main figures in the classroom, play a crucial role. The teacher's literacy, characteristics, and teaching activities contribute to improved learning outcomes, knowledge satisfaction, and a sense of enjoyment in English learning.

A teacher's professionalism fosters a sense of respect and attention towards the students, which helps them accept the teacher psychologically and makes them more inclined to participate in teaching activities. The participant mentions that a teacher's professionalism gives her a sense of enjoyment.

"If the teacher has a lot of professional knowledge and teaches well, after a class, I feel fulfilled and gain a lot. I feel that coming to class was worthwhile, and I really like attending his/her class."

Thus, a teacher's literacy plays a crucial role in enhancing English teaching and fostering student engagement. When teachers possess high comprehensive literacy, students are more

likely to trust them, view them as role models, and collaborate more effectively with their teaching. Hence, it is essential to focus on developing teachers' literacy and promoting the improvement of their comprehensive literacy.

Besides, teachers' personality traits like humor, patience, responsibility, and friendliness can reduce student anxiety during class and alleviate tension, which enhances students' enjoyment of learning English. Lin and Wang (2018) asserted that a teacher's personality traits reflect their personal characteristics and are closely linked to students' classroom experiences, significantly influencing their willingness to participate in classroom communication.

"I feel that my listening teacher is very nice, down-to-earth, and chats with us about everything. I really enjoy her class."

Positive characteristics of teachers can narrow the distance with students and relieve their language learning anxiety, so that they are more willing to participate in English learning activities.

Moreover, classroom activities play a crucial role in classroom teaching and in presenting the teaching content. This study's result aligns with Jiang Yan's (2020) findings, which indicate that the way teachers organize teaching activities significantly impacts students' enjoyment in the classroom.

Colorful classroom activities can effectively stimulate students' initiative and foster a joyful classroom environment. And they offer students opportunities to practice oral expression, daily communication, and other skills, enabling them to comprehend and master the knowledge they have gained more deeply.

"My oral class is always interesting, and I feel the atmosphere in oral class is particularly good. The teacher assigns tasks like creating song lyrics or self-directing and acting in a play. Although it's challenging in preparation, it feels

very rewarding during the presentation. Some of the plays we perform are hilarious, and we often laugh together. The teacher also brings homemade snacks in western for us. In summary, I find this class relaxing and enjoyable, and it's quite fun.

In conclusion, designing inventive, and challenging classroom activities can effectively enhance students' enjoyment in class. Consequently, teachers should invest time and effort in planning high-quality teaching activities.

#### 4.2.4 Cultural-related factors

Cultural factors are also essential in enhancing learners' enjoyment. The unique characteristics and diversity of different cultures can inherently draw learners' attention. The diversity of vocabulary in the target language enables learners to feel the richness of expression, thereby increasing the enjoyment of learning.

The participant expresses how learning English has influenced her thinking and values.

"I feel that learning English gives me a different perspective of thinking because expressions in Chinese, especially classical Chinese, tend to be more complex. But when you look at English, it's the simplest expression, as the saying goes 'poverty is best.' It's the most concise expression, yet it's the most beautiful. I aspire to this kind of value, this simplicity, and these broad strokes of values can influence how I do things, my way of doing things."

Appreciation for western culture or values can attract learners and stimulate their interest during the learning process. The participant's admiration for the simplicity and values in English expressions has influenced her learning style and enhanced her enjoyment of the language.

#### V. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study employs a questionnaire and semi-structured interview to investigate the levels and influencing factors of Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) in a Chinese English major graduate student. The findings reveal that the participant exhibits a high level of English learning enjoyment (3.96), with the source of herself being the most significant (4.22), followed by "teacher/peer"(4) and "classroom environment"(3.67). Besides, there are four influencing factors of FLE: self-related factors, peer-related factors, teacher-related factors and culture-related factors. Specifically, self-related factors such as individual excellence, personality traits, learning interest, and motivation play a crucial role in enhancing the participant's FLE. Peer relationships and support also significantly contribute to FLE. There are three main types of teacher-related factors, including professionalism, personality traits, and classroom activities. Moreover, cultural appreciation and the influence of Western values further enhance the enjoyment of learning English.

Based on the above conclusions, this study attempts to make the following recommendations for enhancing second language enjoyment: First, students should set clear learning goals, cultivate self-motivation and independent learning habits, and enhance learning enjoyment through progress. Secondly, peer-related factors such as support and positive interactions among classmates can create a harmonious learning atmosphere and increase learning enjoyment. Students should actively participate in peer interactions and group activities. Thirdly, teachers should design diverse classroom activities and provide positive feedback to reduce students' anxiety. At the same time, teachers should continuously learn and improve their professional abilities. Lastly, appreciation and understanding of the target language culture can enhance learning enjoyment. Teachers can introduce various cultural elements to help students appreciate the



charm and practicality of the language. By effectively leveraging these factors, students' English learning experience and outcomes can be significantly improved. Future research could further expand the sample size of the study subjects, increase quantitative data, and explore the foreign language enjoyment and its influencing factors of English major graduate students from multiple dimensions.

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