

A Review of Research on Foreign Language Enjoyment in Second Language Learning

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Abstract: Positive psychology (pp) is a branch of human psychology that specialises in the study of methods to evoke positive psychological dispositions in people. It advocates a focus on mental health and emotional experience, and on the well-being of people's lives. Pp was introduced to the field of second language acquisition around 2012. The past decade has seen a surge in research and discussion surrounding the emotions experienced by English language learners. Two of the most prominent emotions are foreign language anxiety and foreign language enjoyment (FLE). This study employs a literature analysis to investigate the influence of FLE on second language acquisition. The findings indicate that the degree of FLE experienced by different research subjects varies and that these emotions are correlated with foreign language anxiety. Finally, this study demonstrates How positive emotions affect the acquisition of foreign language proficiency and performance. The primary focus of the study is the influence of FLE on students' SLA abilities. This is a significant area of research that offers valuable insights for educators seeking to create positive learning environments in the English classroom.

Keywords: Foreign language enjoyment, High school students, College students, English learning, Foreign language achievement

1. Introduction

The field of education was introduced to the principles of pp in 2009. Seligman notes that pp advocates the integration of two key aspects: the transmission of happiness and the teaching of skills. The concept of positive education is reflected in the field of teaching English through the establishment of positive learning methods. Prior to the formal incorporation of pp into the discipline of SLA, scholars had already begun to investigate the main influencing variables in pp, including pleasure, emotional intelligence, and interest. These variables have been the subject of research nationally and internationally [1]. As the inaugural scholar to adopt a pp perspective in the field of SLA, Lake elucidated the intimate interconnection between the bilingual positive self, bilingual self-efficacy, and bilingual proficiency. This represents a prospective empirical study of pp in the field of SLA. It demonstrates the formalisation of the concept of Positive Psychology Second Language Acquisition (PosPsySLA) [2]. The integration of PP and language learning has been the subject of research in both domestic and international contexts. However, the term pp has not yet been used explicitly in this country. In 2007, Mao Haoran proposed that FLE may facilitate vocabulary acquisition in a foreign language [3]. In 2015, Yu Weihua posited that emotional intelligence can

enhance the language confidence of English as a second language (ESL) students, thereby reducing foreign language learning anxiety and improving their performance [4]. In 2020, Sung-Chan Lee proposed the main construct of "foreign language academic achievement-happiness", which contributed to the development of the concept of positive language education and the introduction of pp into the process of foreign language learning. In 2022, Li, Cheng-Chen, and Han Ye conducted a study investigating the role of three emotions, namely pleasure, anxiety, and boredom, in predicting the effectiveness of online foreign language classes. The researchers employed a questionnaire to assess the relationship between these emotions and learning outcomes. Nevertheless, the current body of research on pp in the field of second language learning is relatively underdeveloped, with numerous research gaps remaining. Currently, the majority of research on foreign language emotions in China originates from educational psychology, a field that is less directly related to other disciplines such as psychology, language education and others. Also, it can be observed that the majority of domestic foreign language studies are related to English, with a paucity of research conducted on the learning of other foreign languages. At the same time, In the domestic research field, which mostly focuses on college students and high school students, the age range of foreign language pleasant emotions research is still not rich enough. With regard to the research instrument, it is relatively homogeneous, with the majority of the scales used being translated versions from abroad. This raises the issue of the absence of localised variables. A review of the current state of English language learning among students at this stage reveals a prevalence of excessive anxiety among many learners. It is evident that this anxiety can have a detrimental effect on students' foreign language learning. Further research on FLE is also conducive to further exploring the conditions under which students' emotional strengths can be brought into play. This will help English teachers find applicable methods of teaching foreign languages in the classroom, drive students' motivation to learn, and continually improve the overall level of students' foreign language proficiency. This paper examines the definition of FLE, the connection between pleasant feelings expressed in a foreign language and other emotions, the main factors affecting foreign language pleasurable emotions, and the relationship between foreign language pleasurable emotions and students' academic achievement. The analysis is based on a review of the relevant literature.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Definition of Enjoyment and FLE and Measurement of FLE

For the definition of pleasurable emotions, according to the three-dimensional classification of emotions, pleasure is classified as a positive, activated, activity-centred emotion that is triggered when the activity is controllable and positively valued [5]. The distinction between pleasure and happiness can be elucidated by considering the emotional experience of pleasure. Pleasure can be defined as a positive emotion. This feeling arises when an individual surpasses or breaks through personal limits and achieves higher goals in the face of challenging activities [6]. The definition of foreign language pleasurable emotions was first proposed in 2014 defining it as "a complex emotion that captures the interacting dimensions of challenge and perceptual competence"[7]. Its definition and content were later updated with further explanations: Foreign language enjoyment is a positive emotional state student experience when learning a foreign language. This positive emotional state is conducive to students' foreign language learning and enhances their resilience in the face of foreign language difficulties [7]. In 2017, Teimouri also gave a corresponding definition: a FLE is a positive emotion experienced by a language learner in the process of learning or using the target language, either within the boundaries of a particular classroom setting or in a situation of real life [8].

In 2014, Dewaele and McIntyre were the first two scholars to investigate learners' FLE and created the Foreign Language Enjoyment Scale (FLES), which includes 21 items with ratings on a Likert

scale concerning learners' enjoyment of teacher support, learners' enjoyment of the learning experience and learners' enjoyment of student support. Based on the three-factor model, Li, Jiang, and Dewaele further modified the Foreign Language Enjoyment Scale (FLE) into an 11-item Chinese version and tested it on participants in a Chinese EFL context. The instrument demonstrates high levels of validity and reliability. In the subsequent studies, the researchers employed this scale as a research instrument to assess the proficiency of domestic foreign language learners. The field of SLA research in the context of PP is concerned with the psychological variables that influence language learning. The tools employed in this field are similar to those used in applied linguistics and educational psychology. Dewaele and Li summarise the tools used in emotion research, with the main quantitative tool being the self-report [9]. The most common qualitative tools include in-depth interviews, observations, written materials (such as diaries and other documents), audio-visual materials, etc. Former foreign language pleasure studies are predominantly quantitative, with the majority comprising questionnaires. Qualitative studies, in the form of interviews, constitute a smaller proportion, while mixed studies represent a further minority.

2.2. Relationship between FLE and other Emotions

For those learning a foreign language, the emotions experienced during the learning process are predominantly positive and negative. The majority of positive emotions are reflected in foreign language learning (FLE), while negative emotions are mainly reflected in foreign language anxiety. Over the last few years, there has been a growing number of research investigating a correlation between foreign language anxiety and foreign language enjoyment emotions, both at home and abroad. In 2014, Dewaele and McIntyre developed the Foreign Language Pleasure Scale (FLPS), a 21-item instrument designed to assess positive emotions associated with language learning. The FLPS incorporates eight items from the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCA) and reflects a learner's affective response to the learning experience, peers, and teachers. They found a moderate correlation between anxiety and pleasure [10]. In the field of domestic research, studies have been conducted in recent years that investigate the correlation between FLA and FLE. In 2018, Li Cheng Chen conducted the first survey and study on the level of FLE among Chinese students [9]. Jiang and Dewaele, in 2019, proposed a significant negative correlation between FLCA and FLE. The FLCA is primarily predicted by intra-learner variables, whereas the FLE is primarily predicted by teacher-related variables, consistent with existing research from abroad [11]. In a correlational study with high school students as the subject of the study, Zhenyan Gao conducted Pearson's correlation analysis on variables related to foreign language enjoyment and foreign language anxiety. The study showed an overall significant negative correlation between foreign language pleasure and anxiety among Chinese high school students, with a negative correlation value of ($r = .575$, $p = .000$, $r^2 = .33$), and the study showed that the shared variance of foreign language pleasure and anxiety was 33%. A significant negative correlation was also observed between foreign language pleasure and anxiety in different grades. This indicates that the higher the foreign language enjoyment level of high school students, the lower the corresponding foreign language anxiety level [12].

2.3. The Influencing Variable of FLE

As for the factors influencing pleasant emotions in foreign languages, domestic and foreign countries have studied the variables affecting the generation and persistence levels of pleasant emotions in different groups from different perspectives. In 2014, Dewaele designed a scale to assess the level of pleasure in a foreign language with respect to variables such as educational level, age, gender, and global and regional groups. One study on the pleasant emotions experienced by Asian learners observed that North Americans exhibited the highest levels of pleasantness and the lowest levels of

anxiety, while Asians exhibited the lowest levels of pleasantness and the highest levels of anxiety [9]. Principal component analysis was used in a follow-up study by Dewaele and McIntyre on the same dataset, and two dimensions of FLE and social and private dimensions were identified. The aspect is socially reflected in classroom laughter and friendly relationships with teachers and classmates. The private aspect of enjoyment is reflected in inner feelings such as pride, having a good time and a sense of self-achievement [13]. In 2021, Jin Yinxing and Zhang Jun collected information in the form of a questionnaire using the FLES scale as a measurement tool, and 320 students in the first year of secondary school in Shandong Province, China, were the subjects of the study. The study showed that the enjoyment of English learning, enjoyment of student support and enjoyment of teacher support all have varying degrees of impact on students' English pleasure levels. The multidimensional nature of the study's factors suggests that many of the learners' internal and external variables affect their level of FLE. Among the activities and outcomes of English language learning, students in the classroom showed the most obvious results, and interesting classroom activities increased the level of pleasant emotions [14]. 2019 Yan Jiang, Jean-Marc Dewaele A study on the uniqueness of classroom enjoyment among Chinese foreign language learners with Chinese university students. The multiple regression analyses showed that FLE was best predicted (43.2%) by three variables related to the teacher (attitudes towards the teacher, jokes about the teacher and friendliness of the teacher) and less by three learner-related variables (English proficiency, peer standing and attitudes towards English) [15]. Fang and Tang found that English majors had much higher levels of FLE than FLCA, and they experienced FLE more likely to occur than FLCA. It was also found that participants' FLE was more associated with external variables [16].

2.4. The Relationship between the FLE and the Student's Achievement

Is there a correlation between foreign language pleasurable emotions and language achievement and the language performance achieved by students in second language learning? Whether such positive emotions facilitate second language learners' learning has become a hot research topic in the field of language and education in recent years. Attention has gradually shifted from studying the SLA aspect to focusing on the FLE and the impact of this positive emotion on students' second language acquisition. At present, relevant studies in this field have confirmed to varying degrees the existence of a certain link between FLE and foreign language learning achievement. At home and abroad, the main research subjects are mainly secondary school students and college students. Research has shown that foreign language pleasure is highly and significantly negatively correlated with foreign language boredom ($r=-.692^{**}$). That is, anxiety increases as boredom rises, and pleasure decreases as anxiety and boredom increase. This result also illustrates that students with higher levels of pleasure will have lower anxiety and boredom and will be more likely to achieve higher grades in English. In addition to this, there is a significant correlation between the emotions involved in learning a foreign language and performance in English. FLE was significantly and highly positively correlated with English achievement ($r=.433^{**}$), indicating that the higher the level of foreign language anxiety, the lower the level of foreign language pleasure, or the higher the level of foreign language boredom, the lower the English achievement [17]. Dewaele and Alfawzan investigated the impact of FLE and FLCA on the performance of FL learners, consisting of 189 UK secondary school students and 252 Saudi university learners. They found a significant positive correlation between FLE and FL academic performance and claimed that FLE proved to be better at predicting performance than FLCA [18]. Li, in 2020, presented a significant relationship between three academic moods and English performance, showing that students with higher levels of enjoyment were less likely to feel anxious or burnt out, more confident in their English proficiency and more likely to perform well in exams. The "triangular" relationship between pleasure, anxiety and English achievement supports previous research, and this study further highlights the impact of emotions on academic achievement

[19]. Qualitative analysis of the interviews indicated that FLE has had a positive impact on the learning outcomes of English language learners, particularly in terms of the impact of FLE on English learning outcomes, particularly on CET-4 scores, with half of the twelve students interviewed stating that their FLE was related to English learning outcomes. Some students also reflected that FLE can help them to focus on the important contents in English learning, absorb more English knowledge, improve their English input ability, and remember the knowledge deeply and clearly, forming a long-term memory, which is conducive to improving the examination results or improving the output application ability, etc. FLE also enhances students' motivation and interest in learning English. From the interview responses, FLE was associated with improved cognitive processes, including higher levels of attention and better English learning efficiency. Thus, the qualitative findings suggest that FLE positively affects English learning outcomes, which supports the quantitative findings that FLE is a significant predictor of actual English learning outcomes. In addition, the study also mentioned the comparison between the two emotions, FLE and FLCB, between the prediction of English performance, FLE predicted all the actual English academic performance stronger than FLCB; therefore, FLE had a greater impact on English academic performance, which empirically supports that the positive emotion effect outweighs the negative emotion effect on FL academic performance [20].

3. Conclusion

Through the study of this paper, it was found that the entry of pp into the field of SLA has changed the previous research situation in which second language acquisition research was only concerned with negative emotions and has opened up a research perspective on second language acquisition that focuses on positive emotions. Researchers have made many contributions to positive psychology research theory, research methodology, and research topics in the field of SLA, such as the influence of positive single emotion variables such as happiness and flow on second language learning. However, this paper finds that relevant domestic research needs to be in-depth, the richness of measurement tools and types of research is not yet high enough, and the scope of research subjects is still not deep enough and shallow in scope. This suggests future research directions for pleasurable emotions in foreign language learning. Scholars still mainly combine pleasurable and anxious emotions in foreign languages in their research, and there is a lack of research that focuses on pleasurable emotions separately and individually. Research has confirmed the positive effects of foreign language enjoyment on student performance, classroom activity motivation and language learning confidence. However, there is less research on the design and measurement of specific classroom activities and on the achievement of the English language through different activities that stimulate learners' pleasurable emotions. The paper also shows that, in contrast to foreign language anxiety, teachers play a strong role in producing pleasurable emotions in students. Therefore, the study of pleasant emotions in foreign languages has guiding significance for future foreign language classrooms, teachers, and learners. The research should be further executed in the teaching activities of foreign language classrooms to improve the ability to create pleasant emotions in foreign language classrooms and to further improve the overall level of foreign language proficiency and learning ability of Chinese students.

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