

How Positive Emotions Affect Foreign Language Learning Enjoyment of University Students in Mainland China

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Abstract: Positive emotions are viewed as a way of achieving psychological development, intellectual progress, and better well-being through time, as well as the ultimate goal of wealth and well-being. Previous research on the acquisition of a second language has failed to produce a consistent positive correlation between positive emotions and the second language learning enjoyment and students' academic performance in their foreign language classroom. However, the experience of many language educators suggests that the positive emotions required for foreign language learning are essential in improving one's language learning experience. This correlational study intends to investigate the association between students studying second or foreign languages at mainland Chinese universities and their positive psychological feelings (hope and happiness). 83 Junior students majoring in Business English were invited to the study, and the data were collected through the Wenjuanxing application. Based on the results of the questionnaires, we found that positive emotions have a positive impact on students' learning enjoyment. This implies that positive psychological factors may be positively associated with students' performance and learning experiences. We expect to integrate relevant elements of positive psychology into the design of instruction to provide a more engaging and inspiring learning environment for students.

Keywords: Positive Psychology (PP), Foreign Learning Enjoyment (FLE), Second Language Acquisition (SLA)

1. Introduction

Emotions, both positive and negative, are tightly related to language learning. Furthermore, emotion not only influences the learning process and enjoyment of a native language, but it also works closely with second or foreign language acquisition (FLA) and second or foreign language learning enjoyment (FLE) [1-3]. FLA is defined as a learning process of acquiring a new language besides learners' native languages. Previous research has been done mainly about the relationship between negative emotions and FLA, such as anxiety [1]. Positive psychology (PP), a recent subfield of general psychology, is concerned with promoting human flourishing and the influence of PP on FLA hasn't been studied exclusively.

Positive psychology (PP) as a field of research with the objective of better comprehending the circumstances and mechanisms behind the thriving or ideal functioning of social organizations and

people [4]. Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi cite positive institutions, strengths and virtues, and positive emotions like happiness and hope as the three main tenets of positive psychology research (e.g., family and school) [5]. Positive emotions are important to PP because they are considered a path to long-term psychological development, intellectual advancement, and enhanced well-being [6]. They are also seen as the ultimate states of thriving and happiness. It implies that they are valuable to cultivate and could be crucial to learning a second or foreign language (FLA), a process that takes time and requires persistence, drive, curiosity, resilience, optimism, and other qualities [7].

WHO (1946/1992) claimed happiness as a state of whole physiological, mental, and social well-being, not only the absence of disease or infirmity. Regarding to Fredrickson's "broaden-and-build" hypothesis, pleasant feelings like pleasure help us develop our thought-action repertoire and psychological resources. Happiness and personal development are related, according to Csikszentmihalyi, and may promote student involvement in the classroom.

There are various definitions and conceptualizations of hope, and many of them place an emphasis on its attributes of being positive, achievable, and tied to wellbeing [8]. Positive emotions like hope are linked to people's growth and prosperity in the future. However, very little study has sought to look at how hope affects how much you like learning.

Students' Learning enjoyment of a foreign language depends on different variables such as positive and negative emotions, learning environment and instructional methodologies, etc. Numerous studies offered the hypothesis that enjoyment was an important facilitator in the foreign language acquisition process, assisting foreign language learners to pay more attention to process, and pick up a new language [9, 10]. The association between pleasant feelings and students' enjoyment of learning foreign languages has, however, been found to be highly general, and the lack of study has limited foreign language teaching and learning.

According to the discussion above, positive emotions are essential for learning a foreign language, and learning enjoyment of a foreign language also contributes to the process. As English has become the most studied foreign or second language worldwide, China has the largest population of people learning English. In addition, there is a huge gap between Chinese traditional culture and western culture. Therefore, it is beneficial to apply PP to English education in China and investigate the relationship between joyful feelings and students' satisfaction with studying English.

This study intends to explore the association between specific positive emotions (happiness and hope) and the learning enjoyment of Mainland Chinese university students in their second or foreign language classrooms, in accordance with previous similar studies and ideas. Furthermore, the study is to investigate the FLE experienced by Chinese university students. Attempts were made to assess their total FLE level and whether their positive emotions altered their FLE level.

2. Method

2.1.1. Participants

A prominent public university in the east north of China provided us with data from 12 male and 71 female participants, with a mean age of 21.3. We posted posters and announcements about the campus recruitment information and collaborated with their English teachers. All of the participants are junior students majoring in Business English, and they have been learning English systematically as a foreign or second language for years.

2.1.2. Measures

The current study used both questionnaire surveys and an interview with their professor to merge quantitative and qualitative research approaches, drawing inspiration from previous studies' mixed method research designs [11-13].

2.1.3. The Indicator of Hope

Hope indicators were measured using the Adult Hope Scale [14]. The 12-item AHS questionnaire measures self-feelings of hope (such as "I can think of many ways to get out of a jam") and the hopelessness of certain occurrences (e.g., "I worry about my health"). Using an 8-point Likert-type scale, respondents are asked to score the claims on the frequency with which they have experienced these sentiments, with 1 being the most untrue and 8 being the most frequently true (definitely true). Items 2, 9, 10, and 12 make up the agency subscale score, whereas items 1, 4, 6, and 8 make up the route subscale score. High scores reflect higher hope among respondents, and the overall AHS score is calculated by adding the four agency and the four route components.

2.1.4. The Indicator of Happiness

We used The Subjective Happiness Scale [15] to assess happiness. The SHS is a four-item scale measuring overall subjective enjoyment. Two questions encourage participants to describe themselves in terms of absolute evaluations, such as "In general, I consider myself not a very cheerful person." Ratings with peers are also available (e.g., "Compared to most of my peers, I consider myself less happy"). Contrarily, the other two items ask respondents to rate how much each brief categorization of happy and unhappy people applies to them.

2.1.5. The indicator of Foreign Language Learning Enjoyment

The questionnaire's initial section inquired about the participant's age and gender. The 10-item FLE scale, which was modified from the original FLE scale developed by Dewaele and MacIntyre, was then presented. On a 5-point Likert scale, participants were asked to score how much they agreed or disagreed with the 10 questions concerning their Chinese learning, with 1 being the highest disagreement and 5 being the strongest agreement. To make it more plain and brief, "FL" in the original questionnaire was changed to "Chinese Language." We created two open-ended questions after the scale: "How do you feel about the positive feelings like happiness and/or optimism in language learning?" and "What is your average GPA?"

3. Results and Discussion

We got permission from each student and the professor before administering the surveys and conducting the interview. In September 2022, participants were requested to complete surveys using the Chinese internet survey website wenjuanxing. In August, the author contacted them through email or WeChat, a well-liked social networking site in China, and requested their consent to participate in the study. They were then instructed to complete the surveys. 83 students in total completed the surveys during the data gathering procedure on time. The author then performed a follow-up interview to get the professor's input to assess the student's performance and satisfaction with their learning.

All of the quantitative data collected for this study were examined using SPSS. To create a broad profile of the amount of pleasure, hope, and learning enjoyment among ESL learners, descriptive and frequency statistics were undertaken. The relationships between the variables were then investigated using Pearson correlation analysis. To produce a profile of the ESL learners' scores on the measures of positive emotions (happiness and hope), descriptive analysis was used to gather the data. **Tables 1, 2, and 3** in that sequence present the results for the parameters of a mean score, minimum, maximum, mode, median, and standard deviation from the three scales.

Table 1: Descriptive data for each happiness item.

Name	Sample Size	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Median
1	83	2.000	7.000	5.470	1.193	6.000
2	83	2.000	7.000	5.229	1.346	5.000
3	83	1.000	7.000	4.795	1.480	5.000
5	83	1.000	7.000	3.578	1.875	3.000

Table 2: Descriptive data for each item of hope.

Name	Sample size	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Median
1	83	2.000	8.000	5.590	1.631	6.000
2	83	3.000	8.000	5.771	1.459	6.000
3	83	1.000	8.000	4.108	2.066	4.000
4	83	1.000	8.000	5.843	1.604	6.000
5	83	1.000	8.000	4.012	1.871	4.000
6	83	2.000	8.000	5.759	1.543	6.000
7	83	1.000	8.000	5.036	2.200	5.000
8	83	2.000	8.000	5.398	1.561	5.000
9	83	1.000	8.000	5.337	1.783	5.000
10	83	1.000	8.000	4.265	1.683	4.000
11	83	1.000	8.000	5.289	1.743	5.000
12	83	1.000	8.000	4.229	1.790	4.000

Table 3: Descriptive data for each item of FLE.

Name	Sample Size	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Mean
1	83	1.000	5.000	3.542	1.119	3.000
2	83	1.000	5.000	3.373	1.145	3.000
3	83	1.000	5.000	3.446	0.978	3.000
4	83	1.000	5.000	3.434	1.026	3.000
5	83	1.000	5.000	3.602	1.081	4.000
6	83	1.000	5.000	4.398	0.855	5.000
7	83	1.000	5.000	3.807	1.076	4.000
8	83	2.000	5.000	4.108	0.924	4.000
9	83	2.000	5.000	3.819	0.857	4.000
10	83	1.000	5.000	3.759	0.932	4.000

Investigating the connection between pleasant emotions and FLE and seeing if they may increase learners' pleasure in language learning is important from a pedagogical standpoint. The psychological traits of ESL students and how much they enjoyed learning a foreign language were examined in this study using Pearson correlation analysis. According to the findings, the association between happiness and the FLE was examined using correlation analysis, and its strength was determined by the Pearson correlation coefficient. According to the particular study, there is a substantial positive connection between Happiness and FLE, with a correlation coefficient between the two of 0.572 and significance at the 0.01 level.

The correlation analysis was also used to investigate the relationship between Hope and the FLE, and the Pearson correlation coefficient was utilized to determine how strong the correlation was. According to the particular study, Hope and FLE had a substantial positive association that had a correlation coefficient value of 0.562 and was significant at the 0.01 level.

Table 4: Model summary of linear regression (n=83).

	Non-standardized coefficient		Standardized coefficient	t	p	VIF	R 2	Adjusted R 2	F
	B	Error of Stimate	Beta						
Constant	1.716	0.346	-	4.9580.000**	-	-	0.327	0.319	F (1,81)=39.362,p=0.000
Happiness	0.447	0.071	0.572	6.2740.000**	1.000	1.000			

Dependent Variable: FLE

D-W Value: 2.005

* p<0.05 ** p<0.01

The following table shows the results of a linear regression analysis using happiness as the independent variable and FLE as the dependent variable. As can be shown, Happiness can explain 32.7% of the variance in the cause of FLE, according to the model's R-squared value of 0.327.

Table 5: Model summary of linear regression (n=83).

	Non- standardized coefficient		Standardized coefficient	t	p	VIF	R 2	Adjusted R 2	F
	B	Error of Stimate	Beta						
Constant	1.755	0.349	-	5.033	0.000**	-	0.316	0.307	F (1,81)=37.336,p=0.000
Hope	0.416	0.068	0.562	6.110	0.000**	1.000			

DV: FLE

D-W value: 1.655

* p<0.05 ** p<0.01

For the linear regression analysis, Hope was used as the independent variable and FLE as the dependent variable, as shown in the table above. The formula of this model is $FLE = 1.755 + 0.416 * Hope$, and its R-squared value is 0.316, which indicates that Hope can account for 31.6% of

the change in FLE's cause. Hope's regression coefficient value is 0.416 ($t=6.110$, $p=0.0000.01$) in the final particular analysis, indicating that Hope has a strong positive effect connection on FLE. When the model was run on it, it passed the F-test ($F=37.336$, $p=0.0000.05$), showing that Hope must have an influential association with the FLE. The analysis may be summarized by stating that Hope will have a significant positive influence on FLE.

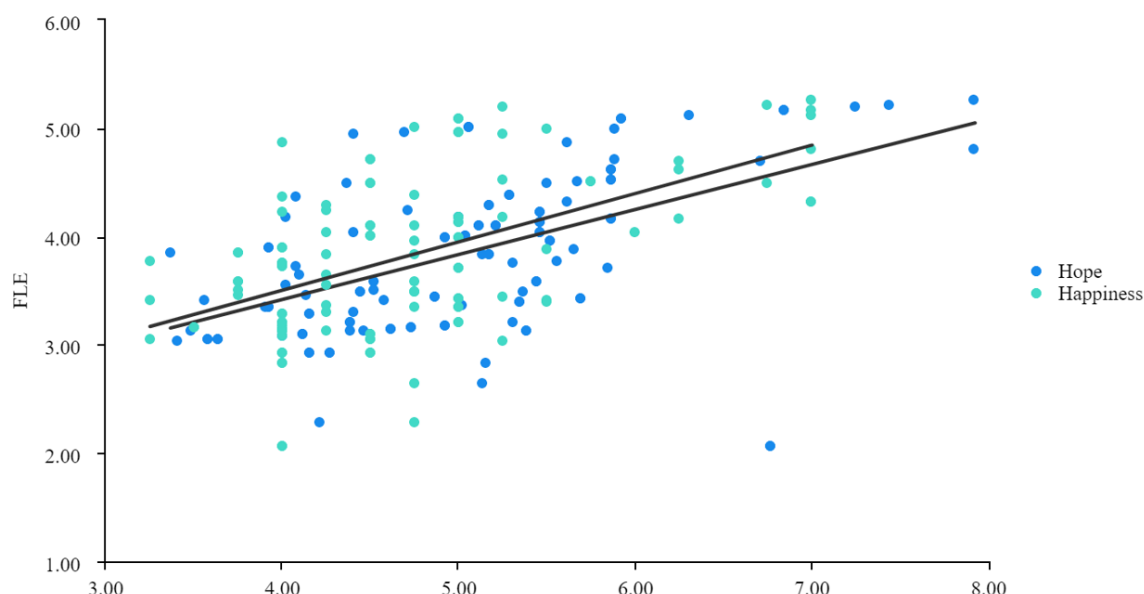


Figure 1: Positive emotions are closely related to the fun of Chinese college students learning foreign languages.

Scatter plots and linear trends, as shown in this figure, revealed that positive emotions (happiness and hope) are strongly connected with Chinese university ESL students' enjoyment of foreign language study.

The current study looked at the overall degree and structure of pleasant sentiments and satisfaction associated with learning a foreign language among 83 Chinese university students studying English as a second or foreign language. The first study topic examined the degree of positive feelings (happiness and hope) among English majors' students. In former study, FLE levels were higher among participants ($M=3.847$) than among Chinese high school students ($M = 3.12$). This shows that Chinese university students majoring in English experienced greater FLE than Chinese high school students and that FLE levels may vary with age.

The second research question discussed the relationship between positive emotions and FLE level. Through the Pearson Correlation and linear regression analysis, positive emotions were revealed to be strongly associated to their satisfaction in this study. Happiness and hope as positive psychological factors were verified that they have positive influences on students' learning enjoyment. In line with prior research [16–17], the current study found that individual factors impacted people's FLE.

According to the open questions, 82 students concurred that the learning process of a foreign language is significantly influenced by positive feelings. The interview with the professor also mentioned that students are more active when positive instructional strategies are applied to real-teaching settings. In addition, more positive students tend to have better class performance.

4. Conclusion

To further investigate the link between positive emotions and levels of foreign language appreciation, this study focused on the influence that positive emotions (happiness and hope) bring to the foreign language learning experience. In this correlational study, we examined how happiness and hope affect Chinese university students' English learning enjoyment via a mixed research method. Data was collected using qualitative and quantitative research methodologies, and the results were analyzed using SPSS. Participants received questionnaires that were combined with authoritative scales, the professor was interviewed with open-ended questions. The Correlation coefficient value and regression coefficient value of the study were in line with the expectations of the research.

Recording to the research, positive emotions is positively associated with university students' FLE in Mainland China. Based on the outcome, Chinese English instructors could integrate positive psychological elements into the English teaching process to better assist their teaching. Moreover, the combination of positive psychological factors and appropriate teaching pedagogies might help improve students' academic performance and foster their motivation and self-efficacy. Future related studies could also be conducted based on the current study.

The limitations of the study are 1. There were only 12 male students out of 83 students who participated in this research, and the rest of the participants considered themselves female. Gender may play an important role in this study since emotions might have different influences on males and females separately, and their foreign language learning enjoyment may differ as well. 2. This study collects the participants only from one university in the northeast part of China. Students in other areas or schools may under different circumstances, for instance, their proficiency levels and learning strategies may vary on the environment. The data of this research may lack representation due to limited resources.

Overall, this research confirmed the positive relationship between FLE in Chinese university students and their positive emotions. As the foundation of future studies, more research related to positive psychology and second language acquisition (SLA) will be conducted for further development, and the results could be powerful protocols to make great progress in language teaching and learning.

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