



RESEARCH ARTICLE

# A Positive Psychology Perspective on Foreign Language Anxiety and Enjoyment of Vietnamese University Students

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: Nov 15, 2024 Accepted: Jan 18, 2025	Learners' emotions and well-being in language learning seem to receive insufficient exploration. This research, therefore, studied the levels and features of foreign language anxiety and foreign language enjoyment among Vietnamese university students and the factors that influence these two emotions during the learning process. Understanding anxiety and enjoyment could be essential because a positive psychology stand posits that negative emotions should be limited and positive emotions should be facilitated to make learning an enjoyable experience. Participants were 81 non-English-major students from different disciplines and levels of English proficiency. The principal instrument was a questionnaire adapted from Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014). Five students participated in interviews for in-depth information. The results showed that anxiety and enjoyment in learning English were relatively high, with the two emotions getting nearly identical average mean scores, although they were not significantly correlated. Gender was found not to cause differences in enjoyment and anxiety. Qualitative data revealed that teacher-related issues, test anxiety, and communication opportunities inside and outside the classroom are the elements that create fluctuations in emotions. Practical implications are discussed, and recommendations are made for further research on EFL learners' emotions because these are among the key factors influencing students' learning and well-being.
<b>Keywords</b>	
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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Since English is an international language, the demand for people to increase their English proficiency to immerse themselves in the global community made English an essential qualification for everyone, especially the young generation, to adapt to this modern era. In response to the international language requirements, English is taught in most secondary and high schools and universities. Noticeably, English proficiency certificates become a compulsory outcome for every university student regardless of their major. For English-major students, studying English is not considered a harsh challenge; however, it takes much more effort for non-English majors. Although English has become a mandatory course in most schools in Vietnam, and a vast number of English courses have been applied (Huong & Albright, 2018), students' English competence is still fairly below average (Hien & Loan, 2018). This reality may lead to a feeling of demotivation in learning English (Ngo et al., 2017).

The question of whether poor achievement is the cause of demotivation or the other way around is an interesting inquiry. Many studies have been conducted in the interest of motivation, its effects, and relations with various personal factors as well as achievement and learning success. There are diverse aspects that influence a learner's motivation namely the attitude toward language learning, feeling of engagement in the learning process, and willingness to learn (MacIntyre & Mercer, 2014). On the other hand, emotions as overtly transparent and visible manifestations of motivation have not caught much attention from second language acquisition researchers. Until recently, some studies have investigated and explored variables of learners' differences, including foreign language enjoyment, anxiety, stress, resilience, and willingness to communicate. These studies indicated that

the relationship between various emotions and their impact on learning as well as communication is complicated and multifaceted (Dewaele, 2002; Horwitz, 2010; MacIntyre & Mercer, 2014). Several studies specifically focused on the correlation between foreign language enjoyment and foreign language anxiety (Boudreau et al., 2018; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Fang & Tang, 2021; Jiang & Dewaele, 2019). However, studies on learners' emotions, particularly in the context of Vietnamese higher education, are still limited. Also, as Arnold and Brown (1999) point out, one ought to pay attention to the crucial role of cultivating positive emotion while striving to tackle the more quantitatively overwhelming negative emotion. This study was an attempt to respond to the call and provide a general picture of Vietnamese learners' emotions in learning English.

This study aimed to investigate Vietnamese university students' emotions, the ones influencing their learning positively and negatively. Specifically, the authors attempted to understand the degrees, characteristics, and influential factors of enjoyment and anxiety that EFL students experienced in their English classes. The results and implications drawn from this study were expected to be helpful for students, teachers, and other related stakeholders. The overall premise was that better understanding could result in justified initiatives and practical measures to foster a positive approach to English education, creating an engaging and motivating learning environment and making learning an enjoyable experience.

With the aims said, the paper sought to answer the following research questions.

- (1) What are the levels of enjoyment and anxiety experienced by Vietnamese students of English?
- (2) Are there differences in enjoyment and anxiety between males and females?
- (3) What is the relationship between enjoyment and anxiety in English classes?
- (4) What factors influence these students' emotions in learning English?

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### Overview of positive psychology in SLA: The PERMA Model

Positive psychology is a branch of traditional psychology established and advocated by Martin Seligman, former president of the American Psychological Association. While supporting other domains within general psychology (e.g., clinical, social, or health psychology), which mainly deal with mental health and diseases, positive psychology highlights human beings' happiness, well-being, and meaning or purpose in life.

In educational contexts, Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) recommended the PERMA Model, which consists of five key elements that can be seen as determinants of the learner's well-being and the joy of the learning experience. This model has been extensively used in education and SLA studies, in particular. The PERMA Model comprises five components: positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and achievement.

*Positive emotions* refer to good feelings and motivation that govern most people's actions. In life, people can choose to do whatever makes them feel happy, whether playing sports, practicing meditation, reading, traveling, joining a club, etc. Positive emotions are believed to foster and ensure studying success, work performance, physical health, social relationships, and optimism.

The second component in the model is *engagement* which involves active involvement and concentration. This is also referred to as flow, signifying a person's inclination towards activities, revealed for example, through his or her reaction to the work or task being done. Seligman (2011) explained that when we focus on doing what we enjoy and intend to do, we engage completely with the present moment.

The next component is known as *relationships*. This is specifically the meaningful connections with others around us, such as friends, colleagues, and family. Positive relationships are essential and influential for one's well-being. Therefore, building and maintaining healthy relationships can help provide external interpersonal support and companionship in terms of emotions. As a result of this, one can achieve a sense of belonging and connectedness.

As for *meaning*, it is crucial to seek life goals. This involves an understanding of questions such as why we exist. Recognizing our strengths and limitations is also important. In Seligman's (2011)

words, we are at our best when we dedicate our time to something greater than ourselves. This could be done through social work, joining voluntary groups, etc. This could help align one's actions with one's values, that is giving a reason to explain why one does the things that they are doing.

Finally, the last component of PERMA is *achievement* (also known as accomplishment). This involves setting goals and looking back on our lives with a sense of accomplishment. Goals and achievements, no matter how big or small, are all necessary in one's pursuit of life. Setting goals and reflecting on past encounters contribute to self-esteem and satisfaction.

### **Emotions from a positive psychology perspective**

As the essence of positive psychology is the search for “what makes life most worth living” (Peterson, 2006, p. 4, cited in Gregersen, 2019), aligning positive psychology with research in second language acquisition is beneficial for both researchers and EFL teachers. Since positive psychology was introduced into SLA research, it has been employed as a lens through which various concepts and constructs have been captured, explored, and revisited.

From a positive psychology perspective, the ultimate goal of education is not only achieving success but also promoting learners' well-being in the learning process (Oxford, 2016; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Strzałka, 2016; Szymczak, 2016). The history of motivation studies shows that while negative emotions, such as anxiety, have been widely studied, positive emotions have not gotten sufficient attention (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014).

Also, as noted in the literature, researchers have been shifting focus toward emotion studies, moving from sole attention to negative emotions to a more holistic view by including positive emotions. This expansion of perspectives is believed to be necessary for growing attempts to understand more about learners so that practical measures and actions can be taken in the classroom for the benefit of learning and teaching. This study focuses on the affective factors (emotions), so the successive section presents an introduction and discussion of the two essential emotions based on the author's reading of the relevant literature.

### **Foreign language anxiety**

Since the 1980s foreign language anxiety has become a topic of investigation and exploration. This construct in learner differences is mainly viewed as a harmful factor negatively affecting students' learning. For decades, the well-known definition and measuring scale developed by Horwitz et al. (1986) were employed extensively in most motivation research. Until today, Horwitz's model of foreign language anxiety is still popular, being a backbone that structures how this construct is approached. However, in light of more recent theories, for example, the complex dynamic systems theory, and innovative methods of investigation, the anxiety concept is somehow revisited, and to a large extent, motivation studies are supported with modern tools and instruments including physiological and dynamic measurement.

Among the later definitions rather than that of Horwitz, foreign language classroom anxiety, viewed by MacIntyre (1999), is more inclined to be an emotion, not just a state. FLA is defined as “the worry and negative emotional reaction aroused when learning or using a second language” (MacIntyre, 1999, p. 27).

Apart from the basic and straightforward sources of anxiety that were earlier found by scholars including Horwitz et al. (1986) and outlined as communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation and judgment, thanks to a long tradition of research in the field, several sources for anxiety to learn an L2 are added. FLA is recently believed to be rooted in individual-level characteristics such as language learning attitude and aptitude, proficiency, and achievement... and in external, intrapersonal, and interactional conditions. Teacher's teaching methods and styles, peer interactions, task types, and other classroom factors are supposed to play an important role in each learner's emotions.

### **Foreign language enjoyment**

Foreign language enjoyment (FLE) is considered a favored and positive emotion (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008; Csikszentmihalyi, 2014; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2016). Different scholars approach this construct differently, so there exist various but similar definitions of the emotion. As early as 2008,

Csikszentmihalyi provided a seemingly simplistic definition, stating that FLE is “a sense of novelty and accomplishment” (p. 46). FLE was later redefined as “good emotional states coming from breaking through homeostatic limits and stretching beyond oneself to accomplish something new or even unexpected, especially in the face of difficult tasks” (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014, p. 201). Similarly, viewing FLE as a more emotional state rather than a physical behavior, Dewaele and MacIntyre (2016) referred to FLE as “a complex emotion, capturing interacting dimensions of challenge and perceived ability” (p. 216).

Foreign language enjoyment is positively correlated with several facilitative factors for learning. Dewaele et al. (2018), for example, associated FLE with positive attitudes toward L2 learning, particularly, toward the teachers, teacher-student communication, and interactions among peers. Other correlations were found, including FLE and grit (Derakhshan, 2021; Teimouri et al., 2020; Yang, 2021), FLE and well-being and resilience (Ergun & Dewaele, 2021), and FLE and engagement (Zeng, 2021).

As FLE is proven to be an essential emotional state, the shift from a focused concentration on negative affective to attention to positive states of the mind is justified and radical. The recent development and advancement in positive psychology can enlighten motivation research and guide empirical studies toward favorable educational circumstances and settings more conducive to learning.

### Previous research

In a large-scale study by Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014), FLA and FLE and their relationship were researched. The authors hypothesized and tested the interplay of these two emotions. They used vigorous statistical tests that resulted in essential claims about FLE and FLA. The study found that anxiety and enjoyment can be closely related, but belong to two different emotional dimensions. FLE and FLA are not the head and tail of the same coin. These two emotions can co-exist, and demonstrate their dynamics independently. This finding was significant, contesting what one may instinctively believe: the presence of one emotion entails the absence of the other. The authors provided some implications stating that once learners progress, negative emotions may become less while positive emotions become prominent. In their analogy using ancient Greek mythology, FLE and FLA are not the two faces of Janus (god of beginning and transformation) but instead represent the two gods Laetitia (god of joy) and Phobus (god of fear).

In the context of Turkish high schools, Ozer and Altay's (2021) study quantitatively examined the foreign language anxiety and enjoyment of 233 fifth graders. The study found that Turkish school students have fairly high levels of FLE and moderate levels of FLA. There were no significant differences between the two emotions in terms of students' gender and aptitude (revealed by GPA). The relationship between FLE and FLA was found, with anxiety being a predictor of enjoyment.

Various findings were made in studies across different contexts. In China, inconsistent results were found regarding the levels of FLE and FLA (Chen & Kim, 2023; Su, 2022; Fang & Tang, 2021). Interestingly, in these Chinese studies, sources for enjoyment were found to be more attached to teachers' and classroom variables whereas anxiety was found to be caused by individual characteristics and experiences. Similar conclusions about influential factors on learners' emotions were drawn in other contexts, for instance, in Saudi Arabia (Bensalem, 2021), in Japan (Xethakis et al., 2021), and in Iran Nemati et al. (2020). Furthermore, Jiang and Dewaele (2018) noted that Chinese learners of English shared a similar degree of FLE compared to the general world's average, while they had a considerably higher level of FLA.

In Vietnam, Ai (2023) studied the factors that influenced university students' emotions in their learning English. Using a mixed methods approach with a participation of 10 students, the study was among the pioneers in this research area, yielding important results. It was found that emotions are dynamic and change at different points during the learning process. Details of how these shifting emotions impact the students' learning the oral skills were also reported. The table below presents key findings of relevant research, drawing attention to FLE's and FLA's characteristics, their relationship, and factors that cause their fluctuation.

**Table 1: Summary of FLE and FLA research**

Studies	Characteristics	Relation	Influential factors
Ai (2023)	FLE and FLA are dynamic, changing at different times.	(not clear)	Social interaction Past experience Outside practice
Chen & Kim (2023)	Relatively high FLE Low FLA	No correlation	FLE: teacher recognition; peer interaction FLA: listening; teacher's call to speak in public
Su (2022)	Moderate FLE and FLA No difference in gender	(not clear)	Teachers on FLE Individuals on FLA
Bensalem (2021)	No difference in gender	Negative correlation	Classroom activities Instructor skills Personal success/failure Assessment
Fang & Tang (2021)	FLE level is higher than FLA FLE is experienced more frequently than FLA	(not clear)	Teachers and peers on FLE Fear of evaluation and no preparation on FLA
Ozer & Altay (2021)	High FLE, moderate FLA No difference in gender and aptitude	FLA can predict FLE.	(not clear)
Xethakis et al. (2021)	Low proficiency and low motivation experience more FLA than FLE	(not clear)	FLA: lack of knowledge and skills; teacher's related issues FLE: activities, social interaction; learner agency; language exposure; mastered skills
Nemati et al. (2020)	Minimum-to-high FLE Low FLA	(not clear)	FLE: teacher; learning; class activities; class atmosphere FLA: exam phobia; reaction/feedback; personal failure; lack of self-confidence
Jiang & Dewaele (2018)	Chinese students share the same FLE levels, but higher FLA, compared to the world.	(not clear)	Teachers on FLE Individuals on FLA
Dewaele & MacIntyre (2014)	FLE and FLA are dynamic.	Related but independent	Progress increases FLE and reduces FLA.

A review of the literature, in short, indicates that enjoyment and anxiety are two important emotional constructs in L2 learning. They manifest differently and vary dynamically; thus, they must be studied and approached according to particular contexts. Understanding FLE and FLA in terms of their socio-cultural circumstances is arguably an attempt worth further effort.

### The study's framework

The current study, while to a large extent, was a duplication of the previous studies reviewed in the above section, practical modifications were made to fit in the context of Vietnamese education in the southwestern part of the country. This study was argued to be significant and could yield important insights into emotions experienced by the students learning English at a Mekong Delta university, whose characteristics are certainly different from those of other socio-cultural contexts. Some variables, for example, GPA in Ozer and Altay (2021), or learners' perception of effects in Ai (2023), were excluded. The scope and focus of the current study were also practically restricted, particularly regarding fewer and more homogeneous participants than those in Dewaele and MacIntyre's (2014) study.

To be specific, the study centered on examining the two constructs of anxiety and enjoyment. These two affections are the most prominent and influential in the emotion dimension of the PERMA model

to the learner's well-being of positive psychology discussed in the previous part. Figure 1 provides a visual illustration of the study's research framework.

With the proposed framework presented above, the foci of this study were language learning anxiety and enjoyment. Physical behaviors and factors belonging to concrete non-emotional dimensions of the PERMA were beyond the scope of this study.

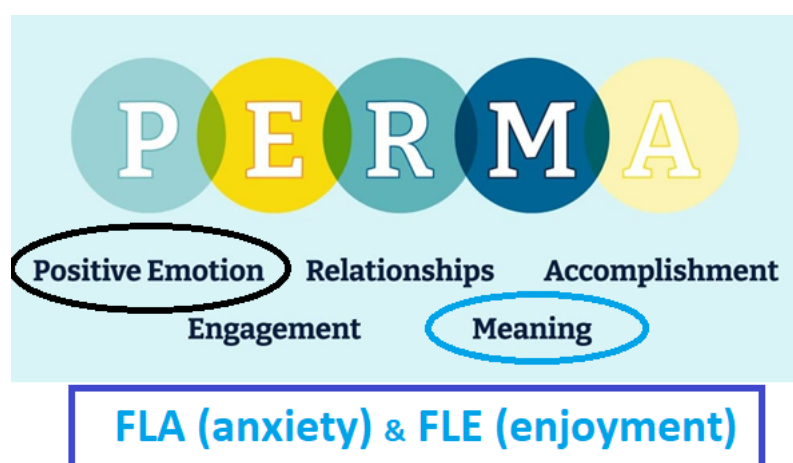


Figure 1: A framework for FLE & FLA exploration using the lens of positive psychology

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### Research design

This study followed a descriptive approach, where quantitative and qualitative methods were utilized to collect the data. For the questionnaire, the FLE and FLA scales by Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) were employed to probe the levels of FLE & FLA of non-English major students in their learning of English and the factors that influence their emotions. Interviews were also conducted with five students, with each student responding to two self-designed open-ended questions. After the questions were sent out, the participants had time to reflect on themselves and express their thoughts without any guidance or interruption from the researchers. The content of the interviews was audio-recorded. Data were collected in the academic year 2023-2024. Quantitative data was analyzed by SPSS, and the interview content was analyzed for key themes and elements related to the student's emotional experiences.

#### Participants

The participants in this study were 81 non-English majors at the studied university (42 males and 39 females), and they were selected conveniently from a large population of tens of thousands of students at this institution. The study included students from various academic backgrounds and majors, including Business Management, Land Management, Law, Biotechnology, Teacher Education, Agricultural Economics, Food Technology, etc. Upon entering the university, these students must undergo a placement examination, so they were assumed to have an English level of approximately pre-intermediate and above. Five students were selected to take part in the interviews for further understanding of their motivational and emotional experiences during English classes. The ages of the participants ranged from 18 to 22.

#### Instruments

##### Questionnaire

The questionnaire in this study was an adaptation of the enjoyment and anxiety scale by Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014). All the items in the questionnaires were translated into Vietnamese for the participants to understand completely. Before administration, the questionnaire was checked with two teachers - experts in the field at our school - for content validity and language clarity. Some items were slightly modified. In particular, words such as "foreign language" were altered to "English" to suit the context studied because the most popular foreign language in Vietnam is English. As a result, all items in this study's questionnaire focused on FLE and FLA. (See Table 2 and Appendix A). The official 18-item questionnaire was administered to 81 students and generated a Cronbach's Alpha

reliability of 0.81 (FLE  $\alpha = 0.86$ ; FLA  $\alpha = 0.69$ ). This indicated that the modified questionnaire had consistent reliability to be adequately adopted for the study.

**Table 2: Summary of questionnaire items**

Factors	Items
Part I: Foreign Language Enjoyment	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10
Part II: Foreign Language Anxiety	11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18

## Interviews

The interview questions were to probe additional information regarding participants' FLE and FLA in their English classrooms (See Appendix B). For express convenience, the interviews were conducted in Vietnamese. This was meant to ensure that the respondents understood the questions and were willing to share their experiences precisely. In the interviews, the 5 respondents were given 2 open-ended questions in which they were asked to describe one positive and one negative learning experience they had in their English classes. They could reply in English if they wished. The researchers did not suggest anything to the participants during the interviews. Each interview lasted approximately 25-30 minutes.

## 4. RESULTS

### Emotions: Overall levels

#### Positive emotion

**Table 3: Foreign Language Enjoyment**

Foreign Language Enjoyment	Mean	SD
Q1 I do not get bored when learning English.	3.333	1.129
Q2 I enjoy learning English.	3.617	1.157
Q3 I am a worthy member of the English class.	3.000	1.107
Q4 In class, I feel proud of my accomplishments.	3.099	1.102
Q5 It is a positive environment.	3.877	0.900
Q6 It is cool to know English.	4.247	0.845
Q7 It is fun when learning English.	3.827	1.058
Q8 Our peers are nice.	3.741	0.959
Q9 There is a good atmosphere.	3.914	0.990
Q10 We laugh a lot.	3.864	0.905
Total	3.652	1.015

As seen from Table 3, the students have a relatively high average mean score for FLE with a total value of  $M = 3.652$ , indicating that they are quite engaged in English learning. In detail, we can see that the highest mean score comes with Item 6 ( $M = 4.247$ ), indicating that students perceive knowing another language as important, followed by Item 9 "*There is a good atmosphere*" ( $M = 3.914$ ). Ranking third place is Item 5 ( $M = 3.877$ ), revealing their positive attitude toward learning surroundings. Items 10 and 7 have a slightly lower mean value than the third one, with a mean score of  $M = 3.827$  and  $M = 3.864$  respectively. Following these, Items 8, 2, and 1 have mean scores ranging roughly from 3.3 to 3.7.

In contrast, Item 3 has a lower value ( $M = 3.000$ ), showing that the participants conceive themselves as valuable students in English class. Item 4, related to the student's satisfaction with their performance, is fairly higher than the lowest one, with an  $M = 3.099$ .

Overall, Table 2 indicates that learners enjoy learning English relatively highly. This enjoyment mostly comes from the desire to know another language, a fun classroom atmosphere, and a positive learning environment that increases excitement. The above factors help them enjoy their English classes.

## Negative emotion

**Table 4: Foreign language anxiety**

Foreign Language Anxiety	Mean	SD
Q11 Even if I am well prepared for my English class, I feel anxious about it.	3.827	1.160
Q12 I always feel the other students speak English better than I do.	4.062	0.953
Q13 I can feel my heart pounding when I am called on in my class.	3.963	0.955
Q14 I do not worry about making mistakes in my English class.	3.272	1.225
Q15 I feel confident when I speak in my English class.	3.111	1.275
Q16 I get nervous and confused when speaking in my English class.	3.926	0.946
Q17 I often start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in class.	3.815	1.085
Q18 It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my English class.	3.272	1.225
Total	3.656	1.103

As seen in Table 4, the data shows that Item 12 ( $M = 4.062$ ) “I always feel that the other students speak the foreign language better than I do”, has the highest mean score. Items 13 and 16 have mean statistics above 3.9 and rank the second-highest mean score. Following them, Item 11 ( $M = 3.827$ ) reveals that “Even if I am well prepared for my foreign language class, I feel anxious about it”, and another faintly lower score is Item 17 with a mean score of  $M = 3.815$ . Two other items indicate a similar figure, Item 14 ( $M = 3.272$ ) and Item 18 ( $M = 3.272$ ), related to not worrying about making mistakes and embarrassment when answering a question in English. The lowest mean score comes with Item 15 ( $M = 3.111$ ), which denotes that the students speak confidently in English classes.

Generally, Table 3 shows that the students have slightly long-lasting anxiety in their English class. These anxiety feelings often come from comparing themselves with others, worrying when being called, and being afraid of speaking in class.

### Comparison: Males vs females

Independent samples t-tests were run to compare the mean scores for enjoyment and anxiety experienced by the two gender groups. Results are presented in Table 5.

**Table 5: Comparison of enjoyment and anxiety in males and females**

	Gender	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean	t	p
Foreign Language Enjoyment	Male	42	3.49	0.61	0.94	.66	0.511
	Female	39	3.40	0.61	0.97		
Foreign Language Anxiety	Male	42	3.69	0.66	0.10	.53	0.595
	Female	39	3.61	0.65	0.10		

There is not a significant difference between the two groups in terms of foreign language enjoyment, with males' FLE ( $M = 3.49$ ;  $SD = 0.61$ ) and females' FLE ( $M = 3.40$ ;  $SD = 0.61$ );  $t = .66$ ;  $p = 0.511$ .

Similarly, for anxiety, there is no significant difference between male students ( $M = 3.69$ ;  $SD = 0.66$ ) and female students ( $M = 3.61$ ;  $SD = 0.65$ );  $t = .53$ ,  $p = 0.59$ .

### FLE – FLA relationship

		FLE score	FLA score
FLE score	Pearson Correlation	1	.022
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.844
	N	81	81
FLA score	Pearson Correlation	.022	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.844	
	N	81	81

**Figure 2: The result of the correlation test**



A correlation test was performed, and the result is shown in Figure 2. Pearson's  $r$  is .022, while the sig. (2-tailed) value is .844. This suggests that no correlation was found between the learners' foreign language enjoyment and anxiety.

### **Influencing factors on positive emotions**

The results from the learning experience interviews indicated that most participants have gone through both positive and negative moments. Enjoyable memories are found to be related to teachers' compliments and creative classroom activities. Also, exposure to English inside and outside the classroom frequently increases foreign language learners' engagement.

#### **Teacher-related factors**

Receiving a teacher's compliment can create a positive feeling, encouraging students to learn English. This emphasizes the role of the teacher in affecting students' emotions in the process of learning English. Interviewee 1, for instance, acknowledged that receiving compliments from a teacher made her feel joyful and passionate.

*"When I entered university, my teacher said she loved my voice when speaking English, so she usually complimented me when I made a presentation in class. [...] Thanks to those compliments I felt very excited every time I learned English."* (Interviewee 1)

Opportunities to study English with foreign teachers also inspire students' learning enjoyment. This was confessed by a student saying, *"The most enjoyable experience that I had [...] studying speaking skills with a foreign teacher"* (Interviewee 3). The preference for working with native speakers was shared, evidently in another interviewee's words, *"I had much fun interacting with foreign teachers."* (Interviewee 2)

#### **Motivating collaborative activities**

Using English in group and pair work is believed to help enhance speaking skills but at the same time provide a wide range of knowledge. The interviewed students report that they have delightful experiences when they can use English in class to communicate with friends and gain knowledge from each other. One interviewed student said,

*"I had a chance to talk freely with my friends and interact with them to get to know more information about their knowledge, experiences, and opinions."* (Interviewee 2)

Besides, collaborative work in practical activities develops learners' language skills as well as enlarges their view of the world by looking at an issue from different perspectives. Another student showed her enjoyment and motivation in doing group discussion, stating:

*"[...] when the teacher gave a topic and asked us to discuss it. Through such activity, we would explain personal opinions, and defend viewpoints. This helps strengthen each person's speaking skills and confidence. I feel excited and confident when participating because I could improve my communication skills and gain a multi-dimensional perspective."* (Interviewee 5)

#### **Authentic exposure to English outside**

The students indicated enjoyment when they had real-life practice beyond the classroom confinement. They acknowledged that opportunities to speak English outside provided them with a comfortable feeling to absorb language and develop communication skills. In authentic situations, the students acquire English more effectively, rather than only focusing on grammar, vocabulary, or linguistic knowledge. A student described how his foreign teacher surprised him and other friends by asking them to hang out after class. This made him more enthusiastic to learn English that semester and shortened the teacher-student distance.

*"After class, he invited us to the night market at Ninh Kieu Wharf for dining. I did not expect that he was that neighborly. [...] so I enjoyed studying every day in his class."* (Interviewee 3)

For others, a trip overseas is a great source of motivation and enjoyment. This creates a delightful experience, exposing learners to real-life English and abundant culture. A student talked of such enjoyment as follows.

*"My school's English club organized a trip to Singapore. It was an exciting trip for me. I learned a lot about cultures and lifestyles in other countries."* (Interviewee 4)

### **Influencing factors on negative emotions**

#### **Speaking anxiety**

The students' negative experiences, however, are associated with their being unconfident when speaking English and worrying about low proficiency. For instance, the students reported that they were nervous and shy when speaking to unfamiliar people, feeling afraid that their communication in English was not good enough for others to understand.

*"I recall the first time I entered the class. I did not know anyone, which made me nervous and shy when I spoke in front of the entire class and with the presence of an American teacher."* (Interviewee 2)

Nevertheless, this sense of anxiety can be resolved by the friendliness of foreigners in international encounters. To exemplify this, interviewee 4 perceived the kind support of foreigners in creating a memorable trip when she traveled abroad for school activities.

*"[...] the native people traveling with me were very good at English, so at that time I also felt a bit worried about my English, afraid that when communicating with foreign people they could not understand what I was saying. However, I was surprised they were very friendly and made it a delightful trip."* (Interviewee 4)

#### **English test anxiety**

An English test significantly affects students' emotions in their English learning process. The students had negative experiences with unexpected exam scores. Interviewee 1 said that she once felt extremely disappointed about getting a bad score on the exam.

*"[...] But once, when I took an exam, my score was so low, and it shocked me. I had to review for the exam again and tried to study more and more. I could have a better score but I will never forget that memory and that score."* (Interviewee 1)

Furthermore, facing difficult questions in a test can pressure students and cause doubt about their abilities. For example, interviewee 5 felt tension when he had to tackle hard questions in the test. Despite experiencing those negative emotions, he conceived them as a trying force to re-examine his abilities.

*"[...] when taking an important test, I always felt stressed about difficult questions and worried about my ability to understand them and answer accurately. Exams made me feel much pressure, but that could be an opportunity to evaluate one's competence and make efforts to improve."* (Interviewee 5)

#### **Teacher's evaluation**

In addition, an aspect that can generate negative emotions is the fear of being judged when speaking English, especially in front of a native teacher. For some students, such situations are more embarrassing than normal when speaking to their group mates. Student 4, for example, expressed the following.

*"What made me feel most worried was the moment before a new foreign teacher came in. He made me feel super worried because I did not know anything about him like what he looked like, his attitude towards me, etc. Normally, I felt just a bit shy; but when speaking in front of a foreigner, I felt ten times more shy."* (Interviewee 4)

## **5. DISCUSSION**

The results of this research show that students' enjoyment and anxiety about learning foreign languages are relatively high, and they have slightly the same mean scores. Students believe they enjoy learning foreign languages because knowing another language can boost their self-confidence. Besides, positive emotions are created from the friendliness of peers and teachers. A delightful classroom atmosphere is also believed to help them increase their motivation to learn a foreign language.

Long-term anxiety in the foreign language classroom is perceived to be caused by learners' characteristics and experiences as well as teacher-related variables. Negative emotions, for example, arise when learners compare themselves to their classmates and believe that other people typically perform better than they can. Furthermore, students' negative feelings are provoked by events such as when teachers suddenly call a random student's name in the classroom, causing learners to feel fatigued, frightened, and confused in the English classroom and unable to answer questions flawlessly. Even when Vietnamese learners are well prepared to speak in class, they still feel nervous. This can be explained by the fact that Vietnamese learners of English normally have very limited opportunities to practice speaking English outside the classroom, coupled with heavily exam-oriented curricula. Students often instrumentally aim to achieve good grades, and this frequently causes anxious thoughts. In Vietnamese English education, it can be seen that despite the nation's goal of establishing communicative language teaching methodologies in schools, teachers and students still have very little interaction in oral communication (Ai, 2023).

This lack of authentic use and practice with English could explain the enjoyment students experience when studying with foreigners. They would feel happier and more positive when communicating with native English speakers. Besides increasing learning motivation, hands-on exposure to another culture helps improve learners' knowledge and broaden their horizons. Other students achieve enjoyment when they can engage in speaking English in class and talking comfortably with peers. Participating in group work and discussing specific topics, in the students' opinions, could help them enhance their enjoyment and confidence. Regarding teacher-related factors, regularly receiving praise from teachers also affects learners' positive emotions, which can eventually help them feel more interested in learning a foreign language. Teachers' facial features, inspiring behaviors, tolerance of students' mistakes, and acceptance of their ideas can create a sense of value and belonging, leading to increased involvement in university-based English circumstances (Ai, 2023).

This study found no significant differences in genders in FLE and FLA. This reality, on the one hand, indicates that Vietnamese learners of English are aware of gender equality and their role as learners regardless of what sex they belong to. On the other hand, this reflects a non-discriminating education, particularly societal egalitarianism in Vietnam. Furthermore, it was found that there is no correlation between FLE and FLA, a finding that empirically confirms previous studies (e.g. Chen & Kim, 2023; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). Therefore, Enjoyment and anxiety are not two extremes on an emotional continuum; they are distinct affectives that change dynamically and can co-exist, co-increase, or co-decrease simultaneously.

Generally, students' enjoyment and anxiety depend on various elements connected to the learners themselves, their teachers' instructions, and classroom activities. This study's findings suggest some pedagogical implications, which are presented in the following section.

## **IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS**

The study revealed that at the studied time, students had nearly the same degrees of classroom anxiety and enjoyment, which were relatively high. Sources for these emotions depend on teacher-related, test-based evaluation and fear when speaking in class. It is suggested that instructional methods that enhance learners' interest in absorbing English, especially speaking skills, be applied instead of following rigorous grammar-focused tradition. Although test-based evaluation is a suitable method to examine students' progress, it is not conducive to long-term acquisition. By contrast, this could generate students' long-lasting negative impressions and prejudices about learning to encompass merely scores and tests. Therefore, it is important to focus on students' emotions to enhance their enjoyment and willingness to learn English instead of forcing students to participate in obligatory activities targeting exams and achievements.

In the long run, educators should set up settings, for example, task-based language learning, where students can consistently practice speaking English with a comfortable attitude. Teachers can additionally create group projects that allow students to spend sufficient time learning through discussions and debates, which will help them get used to speaking the language. Furthermore, teachers' friendly attitude and gentle feedback to students when they make mistakes in speaking are encouraged.

As for learners, this research intended to help them raise awareness of when and where their negative and positive emotions emerge. Students, therefore, need to adjust their habits in English learning by being more active in classroom activities, focusing more on their competencies, and reducing their self-doubt when comparing self-ability with others. Furthermore, being more accepting and tolerant of making mistakes in English class is recommended. This can benefit students by reducing feelings of anxiety and fear when communicating.

In short, the current study could contribute to the limited literature focusing on learners' positive and negative emotions. To some extent, emotions are the physical realization of attitudes and motivations, so they deserve sufficient attention. It is argued that without an in-depth understanding of students' emotions, motivation studies in SLA cannot be holistic or efficient for the learners and the teachers. In addition, by looking at both the debilitating and beneficial sides of learners' emotions, specific actions can be taken in any effort to facilitate learning and improve education quality. By adopting a balanced approach using a positive psychology lens, students' affective factors can be more appropriately researched, which is believed to provide fresher and more insightful explanations for this variable among students. Finally, approaching students' motivation this way helps to overcome the existing overemphasis on negative affective while ignoring or slighting the positives.

However, methodologically, this cross-sectional research was undertaken only at a certain time at a Mekong Delta university. Still, emotions can fluctuate and change over time depending on many factors. Longitudinal designs and different time scales to capture the dynamicity of these two affective states are suggested for future research in this area.

### Authorship contribution statement

Author 1: Conceptualization, design, analysis, data interpretation, writing. Author 2: Editing/reviewing, supervision, administration. Author 3: Literature review, data analysis, statistical conduction, drafting the manuscript. Author 4: Critical manuscript revision, securing funding, technical and material support.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A - Questionnaire

<b>Foreign Language Enjoyment</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
1) I do not get bored when learning English.					
2) I enjoy learning English.					
3) I am a worthy member of the English class.					
4) In class, I feel proud of my accomplishments.					
5) It is a positive environment.					
6) It is cool to know English.					
7) Learning English is fun.					
8) Our peers are nice.					
9) There is a good atmosphere.					
10) We laugh a lot.					
<b>Foreign Language Anxiety</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
11) Even if I am well prepared for my English class, I feel anxious about it.					
12) I always feel that the other students speak English better than I do.					
13) I can feel my heart pounding when I am called in English class.					
14) I do not worry about making mistakes in English class.*					
15) I feel confident when I speak in the English class.*					
16) I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my English class.					
17) I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in English class.					
18) It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my English class.					

\*Reverse value items.

### Appendix B - Interview Questions

- 1/ Describe an enjoyable experience in your learning English.
- 2/ Describe an anxious learning experience. Say how you felt about it.