

## An investigation into the Interrelationship between Foreign Language Enjoyment, Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety, and HUFLIT Students' Performance

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### ABSTRACT

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Language learners experience both enjoyment and anxiety in foreign language classrooms, and these emotions can significantly impact learning outcomes, especially in contexts where international English certificates are required for graduation. This study was conducted to explore students' levels of Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) and Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) when learning English. The study involved 98 students from HUFLIT. A questionnaire in the form of a 5-point Likert scale, including 57 items, was administered to the students. The results revealed that a high level of FLE and an average level of FLCA were experienced during learning. In addition, among the factors of FLE, namely FLE personal, FLE social, FLE teacher appreciation, FLE teacher appreciation was proved to have the strongest impact on learners' FLE. Finally, students' personal actions in struggling with anxiety were shown to be the element that caused the highest level of anxiety. Based on the results, several pedagogical implications were drawn to help maximize students' enjoyment and minimize their anxiety in learning English.

### Introduction

In today's interconnected world, English language proficiency has become an integral component of academic advancement and professional integration. For university students, particularly in non-English-speaking countries, obtaining an international certificate of English is crucial for graduation and for effectively communicating in English in their professional lives within the globalized workforce. In the process of mastering a foreign language, emotions have been proven to be either triggers or inhibitors of meaningful learning and academic achievement (Seli et al., 2016). Among the various emotional experiences reported in the language classroom environment, two affective factors—foreign language enjoyment (FLE) as triggers and foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA) as inhibitors—have been proven to occur most frequently (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014).

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FLE and FLCA are recognized as affective factors experienced by language learners in the context of the classroom environment (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1992, 1993). FLE refers to positive feelings, such as joy, enthusiasm, and interest, aroused in learners when they achieve an accomplishment in English. In contrast, FLCA is composed of negative feelings caused by fear of communication, negative evaluation, and test anxiety, which are specific to the context of classroom language learning (Horwitz et al., 1986). Research has shown a positive correlation between FLE and learning effectiveness, and a negative correlation between FLCA and learning performance, which suggests the role of FLE as a motivator and FLCA as an inhibitor in the language learning process. This highlights the critical importance of these emotional states in helping learners achieve success in foreign language learning (Horwitz et al., 1986; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Dewaele & Alfawzan, 2018; Li et al., 2018).

Additionally, various researchers have suggested that FLE and FLCA do not operate in isolation. Instead, they co-exist and correlate with each other in a complex and dynamic way (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Dewaele & Alfawzan, 2018; Li et al., 2018; Elahi Shirvan & Taherian, 2021). A learner may experience some level of FLE and FLCA at the same time in their language learning process. On the other hand, other researchers argue that FLE and FLCA may be mutually exclusive, meaning that when FLE increases, FLCA will decrease, and vice versa.

In the Vietnamese higher education context, the process of language learning is an emotionally intense learning environment because English is not only a subject of study, but also a foundational skill embedded across multiple academic disciplines (Nguyen, 2022; Tran, 2022). Moreover, in this high-stakes environment, FLE and FLCA are likely to play a central role in shaping students' academic engagement and achievement. Although a few studies on the affective variables of FLE and FLCA have been conducted in Vietnam, such as Le & Nguyen's (2020) research on the coexistence of FLE and FLCA, their influence on learners' performance remains limited. Additionally, it is essential to understand how these emotional states vary across student subgroups, such as gender and academic performance, which informs the development of more inclusive and effective teaching strategies.

## Literature review

### *Foreign language enjoyment*

Over the past few years, increasing attention has been paid to the role of emotions in second language acquisition, particularly with respect to the positive relationship between emotional experiences and learners' engagement and learning outcomes. Among the various emotions which learners experience in their language classrooms, foreign language enjoyment (FLE) is considered one of the most significant factors influencing learners' motivation, participation, and achievement.

Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) were pioneers in studying FLE in the context of the language classroom. They defined FLE as “a complex emotion that is social in nature and arises when a learner feels competent and supported in their learning environment” (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014, p. 242). In this case, FLE is understood as a positive emotion experienced by individual language learners while learning a foreign language. The complex nature is reflected in the diversity of positive feelings, which can include joy, pride, interest, and satisfaction, particularly when learners overcome linguistic challenges or experience meaningful communication, thereby achieving success in language learning. In addition, Li et al. (2018) emphasized the social nature of FLE by stating that “FLE is not only an internal emotional

experience but also shaped by the external classroom factors such as peer interaction and teacher behavior” (p. 25). Therefore, learners with FLE are characterized by their joy of learning, their active participation in learning activities, their willingness to make mistakes, as mistakes are part of the learning process, and their pride in their accomplishments.

Based on empirical studies, particularly on the work of Dewaele and MacIntyre (2016), FLE is conceptualized as consisting of three main components: FLE-Personal, FLE-Social, and FLE-Teacher. Firstly, FLE-Personal refers to learners’ internal feelings of enjoyment derived from language challenge and accomplishment. This component of FLE is characterized by the joy of learning a foreign language such as mastering a new grammar point, vocabulary or pronunciation, their sense of personal growth and satisfaction with their own personal accomplishment when feeling that they have learnt interesting things in the English classes, and the experience of flow and intrinsic motivation, which enhances the learning process and motivates them to achieve success in language learning. Secondly, FLE-Social is considered the enjoyment of learning English within a social classroom setting, with the presence of other people. The social aspect of FLE is reflected in elements such as a friendly, collaborative classroom setting, positive peer relationships, and group cohesion, as well as opportunities for communication and mutual support. Last but not least, FLE-Teacher involves teacher-centred variables such as the teacher’s friendliness and humor, which contribute to learners’ FLE (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2018). This component involves, firstly, positive interaction with instructors, encouragement, humour, and enthusiasm from instructors, and feeling safe, respected, and appreciated in the classroom. In addition, Ozdemir et al. (2019) found that strong predictors of FLE were chiefly teacher-related variables, including teacher friendliness, the teacher’s frequency of using their mother tongue, teacher strictness, and attitudes towards the teacher.

Considering the importance of FLE in language learning, FLE is seen as a trigger in the process of language acquisition because it contributes to sustained levels of motivation, active participation of learners in learning activities, willingness to communicate, and improved performance in language (Dewaele & Alfawzan, 2018; Li et al., 2018). FLE contributes significantly to learners’ sustained levels of motivation because enjoyment enhances intrinsic motivation, leading learners to engage more actively in language practice for personal satisfaction. Thus, by engaging in meaningful interactions and experiencing a sense of accomplishment, learners are more likely to persist in learning, participate more actively, and embrace challenges (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Li et al., 2018). Secondly, willingness to communicate refers to the likelihood of learners choosing to communicate in the target language when given the opportunity (MacIntyre & Ayers-Glassey, 2021). Researchers have found that FLE is positively correlated with the willingness to communicate, concluding that this willingness can be fostered by a positive learning environment where FLE can flourish (Dewaele, 2019). Additionally, empirical research has found a positive correlation between FLE and language learning success. For instance, Li et al. (2018) concluded that learners with higher levels of enjoyment tend to score better in listening, speaking, and overall language performance. Similarly, Botes et al. (2022) also found a moderate positive correlation between FLE and academic achievement, stating that learners who experienced a higher level of enjoyment in foreign language classes were more likely to achieve higher academic outcomes.

In the current study, FLE is understood as a positive emotional state that learners experience while learning a foreign language. FLE encompasses three core components: personal enjoyment, social enjoyment, and teacher appreciation. Additionally, FLE plays a central role in helping learners to achieve success in foreign language learning due to its capacity to enhance learners’ motivation, willingness to communicate, and academic achievement.

### *Foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA)*

In contrast to FLE, which represents the positive emotional states experienced by learners in the language classroom, FLCA shows the opposite emotional side, which has been proven to negatively affect language acquisition.

Horwitz et al. (1986) were among the first researchers to conceptualize and measure foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA), which is a form of anxiety experienced in language learning settings using the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). They defined FLCA as a “distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings and behaviors related to classroom learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process” (p. 128). FLCA can be seen as a unique form of anxiety stemming primarily from the demands of public speaking, constant evaluation, and the fear of making mistakes in front of others in the classroom context (Horwitz, 2001).

According to Horwitz et al. (1986), Aida (1994), and Cheng et al. (1999), FLCA is composed of four interrelated components: communication apprehension, test anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and general classroom anxiety. Communication apprehension can be understood as a type of shyness when communicating with other people, particularly in a foreign language. This shyness is characterized by fear of speaking in front of peers or feeling uncomfortable in speaking activities. Secondly, test anxiety refers to the fear of failing or performing poorly in language tests. This type of anxiety is reflected in excessive worry about poor grades, making mistakes, or being evaluated in the language classroom. Thirdly, the fear of negative evaluation involves a fear of being judged by others, especially lecturers and peers, in the classroom context. Students with a high level of fear of negative evaluation may avoid participating in class due to a fear of making mistakes or appearing foolish in front of others. Finally, general classroom anxiety refers more broadly to learners' tension or nervousness associated with learning in the language classroom context.

Numerous studies have consistently demonstrated a negative correlation between FLCA and academic achievement (Horwitz, 2001). FLCA is considered a barrier to successful language acquisition because it hinders the language learning process across cognitive, behavioral, and social interaction in the classroom (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994; Eysenck et al., 2007). Considering the cognitive domain, FLCA negatively affects learners' cognitive resources, impairing their ability to process and retain new language input, which leads to working memory overload (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). Moreover, Saito & Samimy (1996) reported that FLCA can also cause difficulty in understanding spoken or written input due to heightened tension. Similarly, Sparks & Ganschow (2007) concluded that FLCA is associated with lower scores in vocabulary recall, grammar accuracy, and listening comprehension, resulting in lower performance on language tests. Regarding the behavioral domain, FLCA discourages learners from participating in communication tasks, leading to avoidance behaviors which cause learners to avoid speaking in class, volunteering, or interacting with peers (Horwitz et al., 1986). In addition, Gregersen & Horwitz (2002) further stated that FLCA led to more pauses, hesitations, and self-corrections in speech, which resulted in reduced fluency during speaking activities. Academic achievement was also affected by certain levels of FLCA. MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) found that students with high anxiety performed worse on standardized language proficiency tests. Similarly, Liu & Jackson (2008) reported that students with a high level of FLCA scored lower in oral exams and final grades. Moreover, learners with lower FLCA and higher FLE tended to have higher self-rated proficiency and classroom engagement (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). Moreover, FLCA affects the learner's social relationships within the classroom since anxious students may withdraw from group work or pair activities.

More seriously, a high-anxiety environment can spread tension and reduce group cohesion and participation. Students with FLCA may interpret teacher feedback more negatively, increasing their sense of inadequacy (Horwitz, 2001). Moreover, one of the challenges that greatly increases students' anxiety is their perception of their own language ability (Tran, T. T. L., 2022). Learners may lack confidence in their language proficiency or feel anxious about making mistakes, which in turn can diminish their motivation to improve their own language proficiency.

Overall, in the current study, FLCA is seen as a multi-dimensional emotional barrier to effective language learning. FLCA encompasses factors of communication apprehension, test anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and general classroom anxiety. FLCA negatively affects foreign language learners' academic achievement because it impairs learners' cognitive function, reduces their willingness to communicate, impacts academic outcomes, and diminishes their enjoyment and motivation.

### *The relationship between FLE and FLCA*

Empirical studies over the past few decades have revealed both the coexistence and mutual exclusion of FLE and FLCA, illustrating the relationship between them.

Concerning the coexistence of FLE and FLCA, Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014, 2016), in a study of 1746 foreign language learners measuring FLE and FLCA levels, emphasized that learners often experience both emotions simultaneously, and they are negatively correlated. They revealed that learners experience both emotions simultaneously. While anxiety in learners arises from challenging learning situations, enjoyment stems from the sense of accomplishment that follows the completion of these challenges. In the same line of research, Elahi Shirvan & Taherian (2021) confirmed this coexistence through their longitudinal study, demonstrating that both emotions are present over time. This conclusion suggests that learning a foreign language in a classroom environment elicits both emotions in learners, and each can influence the other (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Dewaele & Alfawzan, 2018; Li, Jiang, & Dewaele, 2018; Elahi Shirvan & Taherian, 2021).

However, other researchers suggest a mutually exclusive relationship between FLE and FLCA, where the increase in FLE leads to a decrease in FLCA. Dewaele & MacIntyre (2016) concluded that greater FLE in the foreign language classes has been associated with lower FLCA in the sense that learners who enjoy language learning are less likely to experience high levels of anxiety. In the same line of research, Elahi Shirvan and Taherian (2021) confirmed this negative correlation, stating that increased levels of enjoyment may reduce anxiety and that FLE contributes to learner resilience by promoting positive experiences that counteract the effects of anxiety. This result can be explained by the fact that while anxiety represents barriers to language learning, enjoyment can promote resilience in learners and help them learn more effectively, thus when FLE increases, FLCA decreases.

Moreover, Dewaele & MacIntyre (2014) and Elahi Shirvan & Taherian (2021) suggested another complex dimension in the relationship between FLE and FLCA, stating that FLE can counterbalance FLCA by neutralizing its harmful effects, and thus support learning success. Botes et al. (2022) reinforced the mitigating effect of FLE on FLCA, stating that higher levels of FLE lead to improved academic outcomes, even in the presence of anxiety.

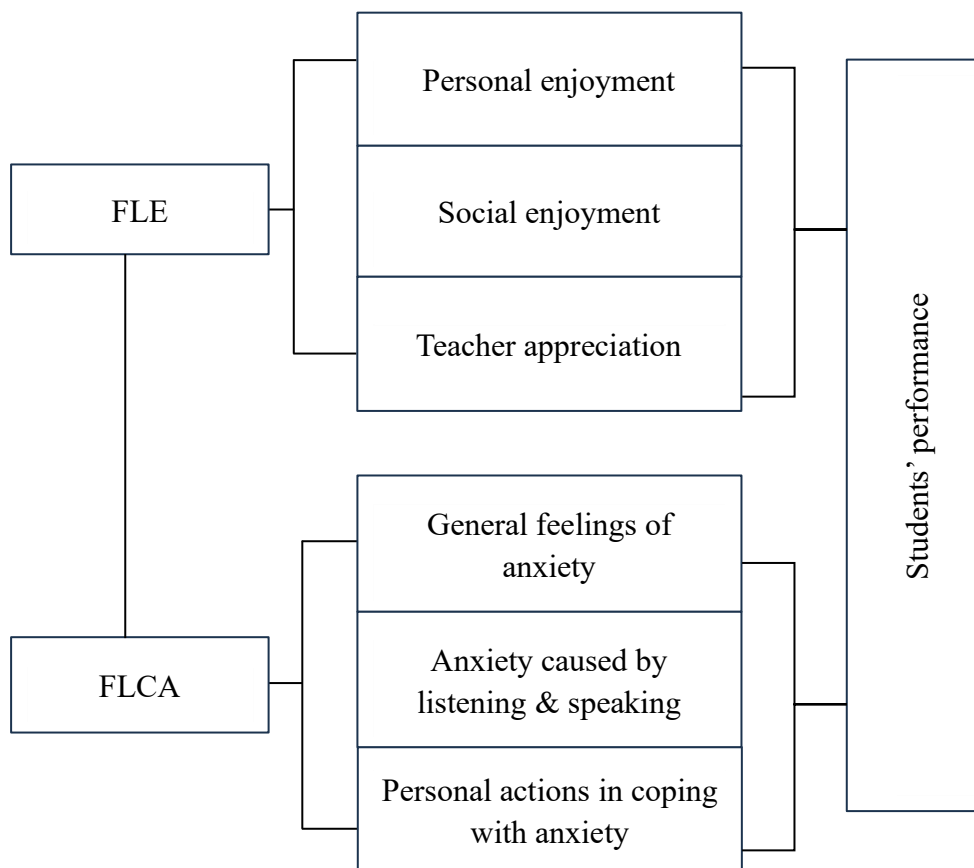
Overall, despite the conflicting effects of FLE and FLCA on learners and learning success, both emotions exist simultaneously and have a complex and dynamic relationship. This fact highlights the importance of examining the precise impact of FLE and FLCA, particularly on learners' performance, as reflected in measurable language outcomes such as scores, which can

provide more valuable information to help instructors adjust their teaching methodologies and support language learning effectively.

### *Theoretical framework*

*Figure 1.*

Theoretical framework of FLE and FLCA (adapted from Horwitz et al., 1986; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Chametzky, 2019)



The current study employed a theoretical framework adapted from Horwitz et al. (1986), Dewaele & MacIntyre (2014), and Chametzky (2019) to conceptualize the emotional experience of FLE and FLCA of the participants. The reason for adopting these frameworks is that, in the context of the current study, students were enrolling in various English-related courses that integrated online learning on Moodle for self-study. This integration transformed the context into blended learning environments, where students participate in both traditional classroom environments and digital learning environments, each with its own unique set of characteristics and challenges. Thus, the current framework integrates both foundational and contemporary perspectives on these emotional traits, while also allowing for the coexistence and interaction of both FLE and FLCA. In addition, this framework provides a basis for understanding how these emotions relate to learners' performance.

In this framework, students' levels of FLE are reflected through three factors of personal enjoyment, social enjoyment, and teacher appreciation. These factors reflect learners' satisfaction with language learning activities; the enjoyment derived from interacting with peers and the positive influence of supportive teachers. This model captures the multifaceted nature of FLE while emphasizing the importance of both internal and interpersonal experiences in fostering positive emotional engagement.



Conversely, the framework of FLCA, adapted from Chametzky's (2019) Online World Language Classroom Anxiety Scale, consists of three categories of overall feelings of anxiety, including comfort, embarrassment, fear, and overwhelming anxiety caused by listening and speaking activities, and students' personal actions in struggling with anxiety. Comfort is characterized by learners' enjoyment, relaxation, and confidence in their learning abilities and in taking tests. Embarrassment, fear, and overwhelming feelings refer to their anxiety about making mistakes, either orally or in writing, and the feeling of anxiety when learning with a foreign teacher or when native speakers are around them. Secondly, anxiety caused by listening and speaking activities refers to the anxiety when doing listening activities, especially with a native speaker's voice, and anxiety caused when speaking in front of other students, caused by linguistic interference from one language to another. Finally, when a certain level of FLCA arises in learners, they automatically seek strategies to handle it. The strategies include asking for help from peers and the teacher, using positive thinking to overcome one's own anxiety.

Additionally, the interplay between FLE, FLCA, and students' performance is also examined in this study. Despite the increasing interest in research on both FLE and FLCA, a lack of research remains that offers insights into how the interplay between FLE and FLCA affects specific learner behaviors, such as test performance. By distinguishing between specific emotional dimensions and behavioural responses, this framework enables an analysis of how learners' emotional experiences manifest in their test-related performances and in-class participation. Moreover, the inclusion of both FLE and FLCA aligns with contemporary approaches in second language acquisition that advocate for a balanced view of learner affect (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2016).

Considering the critical importance of the emotional states of FLE and FLCA in helping learners achieve success in learning English, and the gap in recent study trends, the current study was conducted for the purpose of answering the two research questions below:

1. To what extent are FLE and FLCA experienced by students when they learn English?
2. What is the relationship between FLE, FLCA, and the students' performance?

## Methods

### *Pedagogical setting & Participants*

The study was conducted at the Faculty of Foreign Languages, Ho Chi Minh City University of Foreign Languages and Information Technology (HUFLIT), a private university that offers both English-major and non-English major programs. A convenience sampling method was employed to recruit 98 undergraduate students from six classes. At the time of the study, these students were participating in various English courses during their first and second years. The participants included two main groups: non-English majors and English majors. The non-English major students were in their second year, taking the course General English 3, which focuses on developing integrated skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking, aligned with CEFR B1 proficiency. These students had already completed General English 1 and 2 during their first year. The English-majored students were in their first year of the English Language Studies program. They were enrolled in skill-based courses, including Listening-Speaking Skills and Reading Comprehension 1, which are part of the foundational language training curriculum. The proficiency level of these students varied between A2 and B1, reflecting their diverse English backgrounds prior to university. Across both groups, instruction was delivered in English, in accordance with the university's policy that mandates a foreign language medium

of instruction level 2, meaning that at least 50% of classroom interactions, explanations, and materials must be conducted in English.

In the instructional context of this study, students' academic performance is evaluated through a comprehensive assessment system that combines both in-class participation and self-study. Students are expected to self-study by completing assignments on the SPARK online learning platform from National Geographic Learning and on Moodle, which will contribute to their progress scores. Self-study accounts for 20% of their progress scores. The overall progress score includes three components: their full attendance in class time (10%), their participation in class activities (10%), their self-study scores, which are their scores for SPARK and Moodle assignments (20%), and their three progress tests throughout the course (60%). For the purpose of this study, the students' progress scores, which account for 50% of the final scores, are collected by the teacher, then divided into categories including Excellent ( $\geq 8.5$ ), Good (from 7.0-8.4), Fair (from 5.5-6.9), and Poor ( $< 5.4$ ). These categories allow for quantitative comparison across participants with varying levels of FLE and FLCA. By incorporating the progress scores, the study was able to investigate how affective factors of FLE and FLCA correlate with measurable indicators of language proficiency and academic engagement.

### *Design of the Study*

This research adopted a quantitative design, utilizing questionnaires to measure students' levels of enjoyment and anxiety in learning English. The questionnaire consisted of 46 items, divided into three sections. The first section is designed to collect students' demographic information, including gender, academic major, and year at university. The second and third parts focus on evaluating different features of the students' FLE and FLCA. The FLE items in the questionnaire ( $n = 14$ ) were adapted from the Foreign Language Enjoyment Scale developed by Dewaele & MacIntyre (2014) and further validated by et al. (2018). The items of FLCA ( $n = 29$ ) were adapted from the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale developed by Horwitz et al. (1986) and additional items adapted from Chametzky's (2019) Online World Languages Anxiety Scale, to reflect anxiety experiences in both traditional and technology-mediated learning environments. Reliability scale analysis using Cronbach's alpha was conducted to ensure the internal consistency of the questionnaire. The overall reliability coefficient of the full scale was  $\alpha = .961$ , which demonstrates the high reliability of the questionnaire. Specifically, the FLE subscale yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .924, while the FLCA subscale had an alpha of .953, both of which exceed the generally accepted threshold of .70 for high reliability (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

### *Data collections & analysis*

Data collection was conducted over a two-week period during the second semester of the 2023-2024 academic year. The students were informed about the study's purpose, the nature of the study, and its voluntary nature. The questionnaire was hosted and administered via the Moodle system of HUFLIT. To collect data, a questionnaire was developed on the LMS Moodle system of HUFLIT. Participants access the questionnaire through their individual Moodle accounts, which were created by the University. The questionnaire remained available for 14 days, during which the students were reminded in class and via Moodle announcements to complete the survey. Once the data collection period ended, responses were exported from Moodle into Microsoft Excel and then imported into SPSS version 26 for statistical analysis. Statistical tests, including descriptive, t-tests, ANOVA, and Pearson correlation, were employed to address the study's research questions. Descriptive statistics of mean, SD, and frequencies were used to summarize students' levels of FLE and FLCA. Independent samples t-tests were conducted to determine whether significant differences in FLE and FLCA existed based on gender. One-way



ANOVA was used to explore differences in FLE and FLCA across academic majors and academic performance groups. In addition, Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to assess the strength and direction of the relationships between FLE, FLCA, and students' progress scores.

## Results and discussion

### *Foreign language enjoyment*

Table 1.

Foreign language enjoyment (n = 98)

Statements	Mean	SD
<b>FLE – Personal enjoyment</b>	<b>3.89</b>	<b>0.80</b>
Be creative	3.87	0.938
Don't get bored	3.79	1.221
Enjoy learning	4.20	0.973
Be like a different person	3.46	1.317
Express myself better	3.79	1.058
Be a worthy member	3.59	1.191
Learnt interesting things	4.38	0.947
Feel proud of my accomplishments	3.61	1.207
Laugh at mistakes	3.72	1.182
It's interesting to learn English	4.27	0.948
Mistakes are part of learning	4.20	1.055
<b>FLE – Social enjoyment</b>	<b>4.13</b>	<b>0.87</b>
Nice peers	4.04	1.093
Tight group	3.92	1.090
Common "legends", such as running jokes	3.89	1.234
Laugh a lot	4.27	1.061
Positive learning environment	4.40	0.928
<b>FLE – Teacher appreciation</b>	<b>4.46</b>	<b>0.91</b>
Encouraging teacher	4.46	0.932
Friendly teacher	4.47	0.965
Supportive teacher	4.48	0.955
<b>Foreign language enjoyment</b>	<b>4.16</b>	<b>0.79</b>

As shown in Table 1, the participants' FLE is at a high level, with a mean score of 4.16. Specifically, the highest mean score belongs to teacher appreciation ( $M = 4.46$ , indicating a very high level), followed by social enjoyment ( $M = 4.13$ , indicating a high level), and personal enjoyment ( $M = 3.89$ , indicating a high level).

Firstly, concerning students' personal enjoyment, the highest mean score belongs to the idea of being able to learn interesting things in English classes ( $M = 4.38$ , very high level). The participants also find it interesting to learn English at a very high level ( $M = 4.27$ , very high level). Specifically, 91.8% of the students agreed and strongly agreed that they learnt interesting things in English classes. Accordingly, 84.7% of them also agreed and strongly agreed that it's interesting to join English classes as compared to other subjects. In addition, most of the participants agree that mistakes are part of the learning process ( $M = 4.20$ , high level) and stated that they enjoyed learning the English subject ( $M = 4.20$ , high level). Other items including

being able to be creative ( $M = 3.87$ ), not feeling bored ( $M = 3.79$ ), being like a different person ( $M = 3.46$ ), express oneself better ( $3.79$ ), being a worthy member ( $3.59$ ), feeling proud of one's achievement ( $M = 3.61$ ), feel fun to learn via different platforms, in this case is the blended learning system of Moodle ( $M = 4.14$ ), and laughing at one's own mistakes in English classes ( $M = 3.72$ ) all got a high level of agreement from the participants.

For social enjoyment, a positive learning environment, and laughing a lot in English classes, the participants reported the highest agreement level with mean scores of 4.40 and 4.27 (very high levels). Specifically, 86.8% of the students agreed and strongly agreed with the idea that the learning environment in the English classes they joined is positive, which makes they feel more comfortable learning English. Furthermore, 83.7% of them also reported that they laughed a lot in their English classes. In addition, all the other items, including having nice peers in class ( $M = 4.04$ , high level), forming a tight group as a class ( $M = 3.92$ , high level), and having common legends in English classes ( $M = 3.89$ , high level) also received a high level of agreement from the participants.

In addition, the highest mean score across the three categories in students' enjoyment belongs to teacher appreciation ( $M = 4.46$ , indicating a very high level). The results indicate that the majority of students expected their English teacher to be encouraging ( $M = 4.46$ , very high level), friendly ( $M = 4.47$ , very high level), and supportive ( $M = 4.48$ , very high level) in order to increase their enjoyment of learning English in class.

In summary, teacher appreciation is considered the most important factor in enhancing students' enjoyment of learning English. Social factors such as peers and classroom atmosphere ranked second, while personal enjoyment ranked lowest. This result reveals that teachers' qualities of being friendly, supportive, and encouraging significantly contribute to students' enjoyment of learning English. Additionally, the classroom atmosphere and peers play a crucial role in making English learning enjoyable for students. Moreover, although the other factors easily influence personal enjoyment in FLE, it makes a significant contribution to keeping learning enjoyable for students.

### *Foreign language classroom anxiety*

*Table 2.*

Students' foreign language classroom anxiety ( $n = 98$ )

Statements	Mean	SD
<b>Overall feeling of anxiety</b>	<b>3.25</b>	<b>0.87</b>
<b><i>Comfort</i></b>	<b>3.38</b>	<b>0.930</b>
Enjoy taking more English classes	3.76	1.149
Be relaxed during oral tests	3.22	1.231
Be relaxed during written tests	3.10	1.264
Feel confident in speaking abilities	3.13	1.273
Feel confident in writing abilities	2.97	1.272
<b><i>Embarrassment</i></b>	<b>3.39</b>	<b>1.20</b>
Be anxious about making oral mistakes	3.40	1.345
Be anxious about making written mistakes	3.56	1.324

Feel anxious if I am around native speakers	3.23	1.413
<b><i>Concern/ Fear/ Overwhelming</i></b>	<b>2.97</b>	<b>1.208</b>
Concern about the consequences of failing	3.66	1.323
Forget things I studied because I get nervous	2.96	1.457
Be anxious about falling behind	2.84	1.412
Feel more tense and nervous in English classes than in other classes	2.84	1.390
Feel overwhelmed by grammar rules	2.82	1.424
Become more confused when studying for a test due to anxiety	2.99	1.388
<b>Anxiety caused by listening and speaking activities</b>	<b>3.15</b>	<b>0.94</b>
<b><i>Linguistic interference</i></b>	<b>2.91</b>	<b>1.199</b>
Studied one or more foreign languages	2.81	1.390
Words from other foreign languages “pop up” when trying to use English	2.97	1.388
Be anxious when words from other foreign languages “pop up”	2.96	1.315
<b><i>Listening</i></b>	<b>2.80</b>	<b>1.324</b>
Get anxious when having to do listening exercises	2.80	1.324
<b><i>Oral production</i></b>	<b>3.31</b>	<b>1.001</b>
Be anxious when needing to speak in front of other students	3.07	1.357
Have sufficient time and opportunities to prepare before I give an oral response	3.56	1.167
<b><i>The need to practice</i></b>	<b>3.60</b>	<b>1.298</b>
Write down my answers	3.55	1.393
Practice saying my answers several times	3.66	1.347
<b>Personal actions in struggling with anxiety</b>	<b>3.62</b>	<b>0.825</b>
<b><i>Asking for help</i></b>	<b>3.67</b>	<b>0.980</b>
Ask for help from the instructor publicly	3.61	1.172
Ask for help from the instructor privately	3.56	1.210
Ask for help from other students	3.86	1.121
<b><i>Positive thinking</i></b>	<b>3.50</b>	<b>1.237</b>
Positive thinking helps to reduce my anxiety and stress	3.50	1.237
<b><i>Putting oneself down</i></b>	<b>3.45</b>	<b>1.219</b>
Other students are doing better than I am	3.45	1.219
<b>Foreign language classroom anxiety</b>	<b>3.26</b>	<b>.853</b>

Table 2 describes students' level of foreign language anxiety in English classes. As can be seen from this table, the participant reported an average level of anxiety with  $M = 3.26$ . Specifically, their feelings of comfort, embarrassment, and fear in the English classes were at an average level ( $M = 3.25$ ), a little higher than their anxiety related to listening and speaking skills ( $M = 3.15$ , average level), but lower than their personal actions in struggling with their anxiety, which were at a high level ( $M = 3.62$ , high level).

### *Overall feelings of anxiety*

The participants' overall feelings of anxiety in the English classes were at an average level, with  $M = 3.25$ . Specifically, their comfort in English classes had a mean score of 3.38 (average level), their embarrassment had a slightly higher mean score of 3.39 (average level), and their concern, fear, and overwhelming feelings about English and the English classes had a lower mean score of 2.97 (average level).

Firstly, the participants reported enjoying taking more English classes ( $M = 3.76$ , at a high level). For test anxiety, less than 34% of the participants reported feeling anxious in oral and written tests. In contrast, approximately 38 to 40% agreed or strongly agreed that they felt comfortable, while about 26.5 to 27% of participants were undecided. Moreover, the students' confidence in speaking and writing abilities also received varied responses from the participants ( $M = 3.13$  and 2.97, respectively).

Secondly, the participants' level of embarrassment in learning English was also at an average level, with a mean score of 3.39. The only item within this category with a high level was the feeling of anxiety about making written mistakes ( $M = 3.56$ ). The feeling of anxiety when around native speakers and the feeling of anxiety about making oral mistakes were both at an average level ( $M = 3.23$  and 3.40, respectively). Moreover, the participants' embarrassment was slightly higher than comfort, suggesting that they occasionally felt self-conscious and embarrassed in the English classes.

Moreover, the students' feelings of concern, fear, and overwhelming in the English classes were also at an average level ( $M = 2.97$ ). The only item that received the highest level of agreement was concern about the consequences of failing the subject ( $M = 3.66$ , indicating a high level). The other items, including feeling more tense and nervous in English classes compared to other classes, feeling overwhelmed by grammar rules, feeling more confused when revising for tests due to test anxiety, received varied responses from the participants and are at an average level. The level of concern, fear, and overwhelm was lower than that of the other emotions, indicating that these feelings were less prevalent but still present at a moderate level.

In short, the participants' overall feelings of anxiety in the English classes suggest that they had a moderate emotional response, neither strongly positive nor strongly negative. Data analysis suggests that the participants experienced a range of emotions in English classes, with no single emotion dominating significantly. Comfort and embarrassment were slightly more prominent than fear, concern, and overwhelm.

### *Anxiety caused by listening and speaking activities*

*Figure 2.*

Students' anxiety caused by productive listening and speaking activities

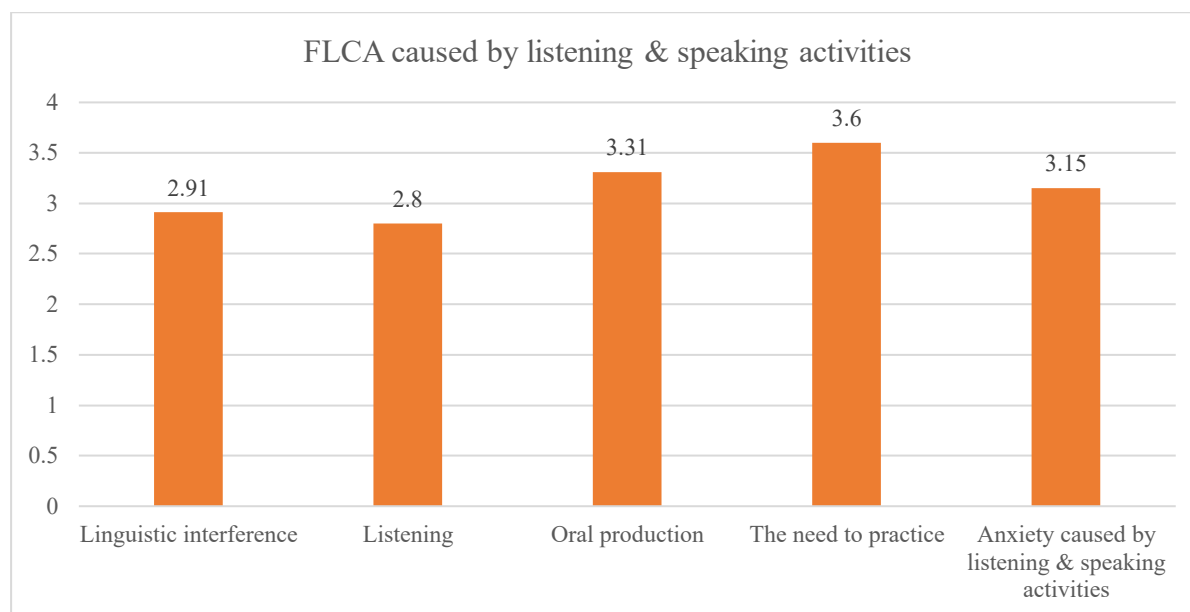


Figure 2 reveals that FLCA caused by listening and speaking activities is also at an average level ( $M = 3.15$ ). Specifically, the students reported that linguistic interference caused by studying one or more foreign languages, as well as the fact that words from other foreign languages popped into their heads when they spoke, did not affect their production of English or their anxiety ( $M = 2.81$ ,  $2.97$ , and  $2.96$ , respectively). The fact that the mean score for linguistic interference was at an average level suggests that the impact of learning multiple foreign languages or the intrusion of words from other languages into English had a minimal effect on anxiety or language production.

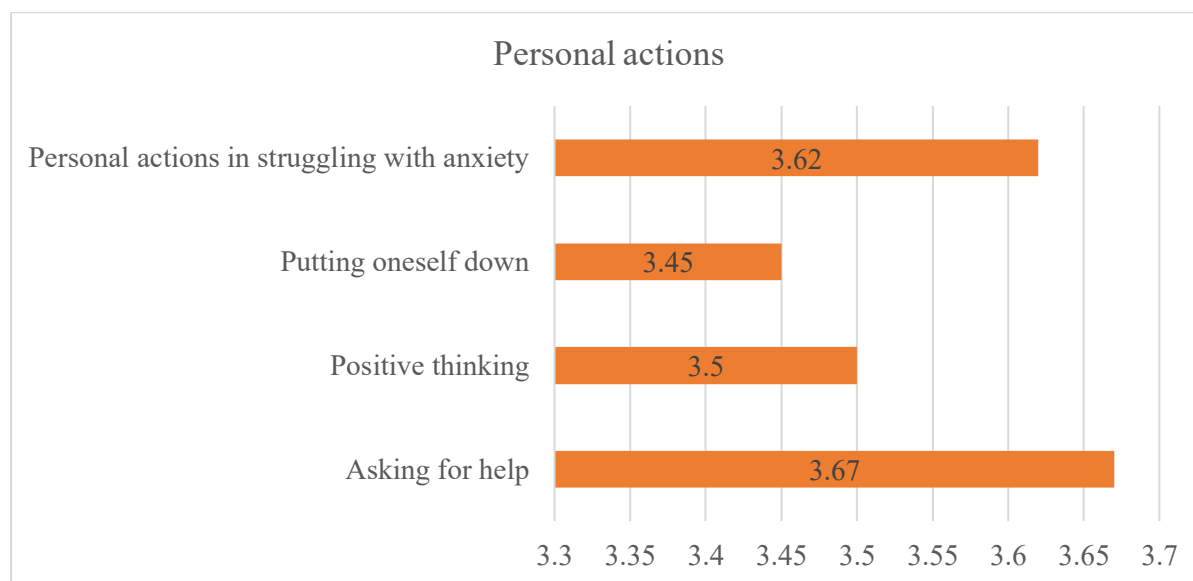
Concerning anxiety caused by listening activities and oral production in the English classes, it was also at an average level ( $M = 2.80$  and  $3.31$ , respectively). This indicates that listening and oral production activities generated a moderate level of anxiety among the participants. What should be taken into consideration here is that most participants (57.2%) agreed or strongly agreed that they have sufficient preparation time before giving an oral response in class, which also contributed to their average level of FLCA. Thus, preparation time is proven to help reduce their anxiety levels, as they feel more confident and ready to participate.

Considering the need to practice before engaging in productive activities of speaking and writing, it received a high level of agreement from the participants ( $M = 3.60$ , indicating a high level). The majority of participants reported that they needed to write down their answers first ( $M = 3.55$ , high level) and then practice them several times before speaking in front of the class ( $M = 3.66$ , high level). This result indicates that participants highly valued practicing before engaging in speaking or writing activities, as it may help build confidence and reduce anxiety during productive tasks. Rehearsal before speaking was also important, reflecting their desire for fluency and confidence.

### *Personal actions in struggling with anxiety*

*Figure 3.*

Students' personal actions in struggling with anxiety



As shown in Figure 3, the students' personal actions in struggling with FLCA had a mean score of 3.62 (indicating a high level), indicating that the students attempted their best to overcome their anxiety in English language classrooms through various strategies. This result indicates that the students were highly engaged in addressing and overcoming anxiety in English classes. It also suggests a positive and resilient attitude among students toward managing their emotional challenges. In addition, when they encountered problems in their learning, they preferred to ask for help from their peers ( $M = 3.86$ ), but they also sought support from teachers, both publicly ( $M = 3.61$ , high level) and privately ( $M = 3.56$ , high level). This suggests that the students relied quite heavily on peer support, reflecting the importance of collaborative learning and a sense of community in the English classes. The fact that students sought teacher support both publicly and privately at a high level indicates that they were comfortable addressing their struggles openly with teachers, demonstrating their trust in the teacher-student rapport. However, this result also highlights the value of one-on-one interactions with teachers, where students may feel more secure discussing their anxiety.

Moreover, the participants also reported a high level of positive thinking ( $M = 3.50$ ) and a slightly lower level of insecurity in thinking that other students were doing better than they did ( $M = 3.45$ ). This result indicates that the students generally maintained an optimistic outlook in their English language learning, and despite experiencing FLCA, they employed a positive attitude to cope with challenges. However, there was some degree of insecurity when the students felt that others might be performing better than they were, which may have influenced their confidence and classroom participation.



*Differences in FLE and FLCA between students of different backgrounds*

Table 3.

Differences in FLE and FLCA

Variables	Test	N	FLE		FLCA	
<b>Gender</b>	Independent Sample T-Test		T	Sig.	T	Sig.
	Male	45	.638	.516	-1.646	.099
	Female	53				
<b>Scores</b>	One-way ANOVA (F)		F	Sig.	F	Sig.
	Excellent	48	2.773	.046	1.816	.150
	Good	13				
	Fair	18				
	Poor	19				

Table 3 reveals differences in FLE and FLCA mean scores of the participants' responses. As can be seen from this table, there is no statistically significant difference in the level of FLE and FLCA between male and female students, with a p-value of Sig. = .099 ( $>0.05$ ). It shows that male and female students exhibited similar levels of FLE and FLCA. Concerning scores, ANOVA test results show that there is a statistical difference in the level of FLE (Sig. = .046,  $<0.05$ ) but no statistical difference in the level of FLCA (Sig. = .150,  $>0.05$ ). This result indicates that students with varying scores exhibited significantly different levels of FLE. Further analysis reveals that the groups of students with good and excellent scores differed significantly in mean scores, as supported by a p-value of .044. With a mean score of 4.54, students with good scores had a significantly higher level of FLE than students with an excellent score ( $M = 3.86$ ). This result shows that scores significantly impacted FLE, with students achieving a good score enjoying foreign language learning more than those with an excellent score. In addition, scores did not significantly affect FLCA, indicating that anxiety levels in foreign language learning were consistent across groups with varying scores.

*The interplay between FLE and FLCA*

Table 4.

Correlation among factors of FLE and FLCA

Variables	FLE-Personal enjoyment	FLE-Social enjoyment	FLE-Teacher appreciation
<b>FLE-Personal enjoyment</b>	1	.778	.711
<b>FLE-Social enjoyment</b>	.778	1	.789
<b>FLE Teacher appreciation</b>	.711	.789	1
	FLCA-Overall anxiety	FLCA-Productive activities	FLCA-Personal actions
<b>FLCA-Overall anxiety</b>	1	.882	.818
<b>FLCA-Productive activities</b>	.882	1	.731
<b>FLCA-Personal actions</b>	.818	.731	1

A Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship among factors of FLE and FLCA. The results revealed a strong positive relationship between teacher appreciation and personal enjoyment ( $r = 0.711$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), between teacher appreciation and

social enjoyment ( $r = 0.789$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and between personal enjoyment and social enjoyment ( $r = 0.778$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). These findings suggest that teacher appreciation was closely related to both personal and social aspects of enjoyment, and that personal and social enjoyment were also strongly interconnected.

In addition, there was a very strong positive correlation between FLCA overall feelings of anxiety and FLCA personal actions ( $r = .818$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and between FLCA emotions and FLCA productive activities ( $r = .882$ ,  $p < .001$ ), as well as a strong correlation between FLCA personal actions and productive activities ( $r = .731$ ,  $p < .001$ ). These results reveal the significance of FLCA emotions of comfort, embarrassment, fear, concern, and overwhelming as central components influencing personal actions in struggling with anxiety and becoming more confident in speaking and writing activities.

*Table 5.*

Correlation between FLE and FLCA

Variables	Correlation (r)	p-value
FLE & FLCA	.438	.000

In addition, a Pearson correlation was conducted to examine the relationship between FLE and FLCA. Table 5 presents the results of the correlation between FLE and FLCA, which revealed a moderate positive correlation,  $r = .438$ ,  $p < .001$ , suggesting that students who enjoy learning English also tend to experience some extent of anxiety. This finding highlights the complex relationship between positive and negative emotions in language learning, indicating that enjoyment and anxiety are not mutually exclusive. Instead, they may coexist as part of a dynamic emotional equilibrium, where a certain degree of anxiety could enhance focus, motivation, or engagement.

## Discussion

The purpose of the current study is to examine the level of FLE and FLCA that the students experience in their English classes, as well as the relationship between FLE and FLCA, and the differences in levels of FLE and FLCA across groups based on gender and GPA scores. Three main findings were revealed through data analysis as follows.

Firstly, the participants in the current study experienced significant enjoyment in learning English. Teacher appreciation was considered a key contributor to supporting and encouraging students' positive experiences. FLCA was present but not overwhelming for most of the participants. The feelings of comfort, embarrassment and fear, and their anxiety related to listening and speaking skills were both reported to be at an average level, suggesting a mixed emotional responses in the classroom, whereas their personal actions against these feelings were at a high level, which revealed the students' proactivity in managing their anxiety, using strategies such as seeking peer and teacher support, writing down responses, and rehearsing before speaking. The same results are also reported by Botes et al. (2022) and Zhang et al. (2025), which highlight teacher support as the strongest predictor of enjoyment in the language classroom. This result is also consistent with the idea that teaching practices significantly influence the emotional balance in classrooms, as posited by Wang and Guan (2020). In addition, the finding that most students experienced a moderate level of FLCA aligns with research by MacIntyre & Gregersen (2012), which argued that moderate anxiety levels can be productive and stimulate engagement. This alignment emphasizes the need to maintain a

balance between support and moderate challenges to engage learners in learning activities and improve their performance. Therefore, teachers can help students overcome negative emotions, such as anxiety, while they are studying by fostering confidence and encouragement in their students (Nguyen, T.H., 2022).

Secondly, a statistically significant difference was found in FLE levels among students with different score ranges, whereas no difference was observed between genders. Specifically, the difference was found in students with scores of Good and Excellent. Students with Good scores experienced a significantly higher level of enjoyment than students with Excellent scores. No differences were found among groups of students with Fair and Poor scores. This result aligns with the results from Dewaele and MacIntyre (2016), in which students with higher academic performance were reported to experience a lower level of enjoyment as compared to students with moderate academic performance. Moreover, the results from Botes et al.'s (2022) study also showed a similar trend in which mid-achieving students reported a higher level of enjoyment and engagement. The fact that students in different groups scored differently led to varying levels of FLE. The results of the current study differ from those of Li et al. (2019), in which higher achievers exhibited a higher level of FLE than other students. The fact that students in different groups with varying scores experienced different levels of FLE, especially those with Good and Excellent scores, may originate from the components of their mid-term scores. As mentioned above, the students' midterm scores include participation, self-study, and progress tests that occur during the course, which reflect the students' efforts and motivation in achieving high scores, thus indicating high levels of enjoyment when succeeding.

Thirdly, no statistical differences in FLCA were found among male and female students, and among students with different score ranges. This result is inconsistent with the result of the study of Shao et al. (2013), who concluded that female students experienced a significantly higher level of both FLE and FLCA. However, Dewaele et al. (2018) highlighted that both male and female students were equally likely to experience the emotional states of enjoyment and anxiety in language learning, depending on the classroom environment. Additionally, no differences were observed in the level of FLCA between groups of students with higher and lower scores.

Finally, the moderate positive correlation between FLE and FLCA suggested that these emotional states co-existed, rather than being mutually exclusive. In addition, strong to very strong correlations among the different components of each construct revealed the interconnected nature of each component within its respective construct. This result aligns with the study by Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014), which found that enjoyment co-existed with anxiety in language learning. These findings highlight the interconnected nature of both enjoyment and anxiety-related factors in foreign language learning. Notably, the role of teacher appreciation appears central to fostering personal and social enjoyment, while FLCA emotions strongly influence personal actions and productive activities.

## Conclusions and recommendations

The aim of the current study is to investigate the emotional factors of FLE and FLCA that students experience while learning English. Based on the results, the following implications for teaching and learning are drawn.

Firstly, the strong association between teacher appreciation and FLE emphasizes the importance of teacher behaviors in fostering enjoyment. Thus, teachers should focus on creating a supportive and encouraging classroom environment by providing constructive feedback,

being approachable, and celebrating small successes. Additionally, engaging and collaborative activities may help sustain and even increase the level of enjoyment among students. As a result, integrating interactive teaching methods, such as group work, games, and project-based learning, can contribute to a positive learning experience.

Secondly, the finding that most of the students experience a moderate level of FLCA suggests the need for targeted strategies to reduce anxiety without compromising the productive tension that can drive learning. Teachers can encourage students to use coping mechanisms, such as peer support, preparation, and rehearsal, in the classroom. In addition, the observation that students with higher scores report slightly lower FLE suggests that high achievers may face unique challenges, such as heightened pressure of self-expectations. Thus, teachers might need to tailor activities to sustain motivation for these students by offering advanced-level tasks, individualized challenges, or opportunities for creative language use. Moreover, the lack of significant differences in FLE and FLCA across genders suggests that interventions designed to enhance FLE and FLCA do not necessarily need to be gender-specific.

Finally, the correlation between FLE and FLCA suggests a dynamic emotional balance in language learning, where a certain degree of anxiety may complement and even enhance enjoyment. Therefore, teachers should strike a balance between fostering enjoyment and setting productive challenges that engage students without overwhelming them. This approach ensures a supportive yet stimulating learning environment that allows students to thrive both emotionally and academically.

Some limitations of the current study include the fact that students' self-evaluated responses to the questionnaire questions may not be consistent. Thus, future research should rely more on in-depth interviews to get a deeper understanding of their choices. Secondly, the results reveal a lower level of FLE in students with excellent scores compared to those with good scores. This result raises important questions about the underlying reasons for students' emotional experiences in language classrooms, which are not fully addressed in the context of the current study. Thus, future research may dedicate more effort to developing better methods of data analysis to shed further light on this problem, allowing for implications to be drawn that can enhance learners' emotional experiences even more.

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## Biodata

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