Exploring the Link between Foreign Language Enjoyment and Reduced Test Anxiety in EFL Settings

Emre ARTUT[1] **Merve GAZİOĞLU**[2] **Beyzanur GÜNEŞ**[3]

Over the last few decades, there has been growing concern about the emotional aspects of foreign language education. Although traditional research has focused more on cognitive and linguistic facets of language education, current studies have begun to emphasize affective dimensions as a crucial factor in learning a foreign language effectively. Accordingly, positive and negative emotions function collectively to build language learners' experiences. As the central foci of this study, "enjoyment" and "anxiety" are two of these emotions.

On the one hand, Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE), as defined by Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014), is "a complex emotion" characterized by the successful interaction of perceived competence and challenging tasks, reflecting the urge to achieve beyond plain requirements. In other words,

[1]Lect., Abdullah Gül University, School of Foreign Languages, Department of Foreign Languages, E-mail: emre.artut@agu.edu.tr, ORCID: 0000-0003-0642-2784.

[2]Dr., Abdullah Gül University, School of Foreign Languages, Department of Foreign Languages, E-mail: merve.gazioglu@agu.edu.tr, ORCID: 0000-0001-9065-6801.

[3]Lect., Abdullah Gül University, School of Foreign Languages, Department of Foreign Languages, E-mail: beyzanur.gunes@agu.edu.tr, ORCID: 0000-0002-3637-6179.

enjoyment is felt when students sense that they are capable, involved, and supported in the classroom. On the other hand, Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) can be described as a distinctive and complex set of self-perceptions, attitudes, emotions, and actions associated with the process of learning a language in a classroom setting (Horwitz et al., 1986). It is a common case for students to be anxious regarding their academic performance and the possibility of committing errors during in-class practice or exams. While enjoyment can foster motivation and task engagement in students, anxiety may affect their confidence and performance during classroom activities. Moreover, students may experience both feelings concurrently, despite the fact that FLE and FLA are two opposing notions (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). Hence, it is essential to examine the relationship between foreign language enjoyment and foreign language anxiety from the learners' perspective.

With the introduction of Positive Psychology to the field in the late 1990s, Second Language Acquisition (SLA) researchers shifted their attention to positive emotions in relation to the management of negative feelings during language acquisition. Positive Psychology (PP) is an approach that aims to consider the emotions of everyone actively involved in language learning contexts, such as students, teachers, and administrators (Mercer, 2021). In line with this, the emotional well-being of these parties is vital for a more sustainable and effective language education. As a key part of this group, students' resilience and self-regulation skills may lead them to be successful language learners in the long term. In fact, this achievement mostly depends on the students' ability to deal with negative emotions like anxiety and even to transform them into positive ones, namely, enjoyment.

Several studies have been conducted on FLE and FLA in recent years. Some of these focused on the impacts of different factors (e.g., gender, culture, teacher attitudes) on enjoyment. Other studies explored the relationships between enjoyment and various emotions, such as motivation and boredom. Regarding the research on FLA, it is centered on students' perspectives and underlying reasons for anxiety. As in FLE, FLA

studies also examine the relationships between anxiety and other feelings, like motivation. Therefore, there is a need to examine enjoyment and anxiety from the perspective of EFL learners, both quantitatively and qualitatively, to gain deeper insight into them.

It is a fact that FLE and FLA are underexplored concepts in EFL contexts - especially in higher education. Enjoyment is also an underestimated element in Turkish EFL classrooms, as there is a greater emphasis on the product, namely, assessment, rather than on the process, which refers to the language learning experience. Moreover, this lack of enjoyment in Turkish EFL classrooms might be one of the reasons why students lose their motivation while learning the target language. Likewise, students' anxiety might influence them negatively, lowering their willingness to participate in the language learning activities and hindering them from displaying their linguistic competences during assessments. This topic is particularly relevant given the growing emphasis on sustainability in education, which can be further enhanced by incorporating emotional experiences.

The present study aims to investigate the relationship between foreign language enjoyment and test anxiety from the perspectives of EFL learners. Understanding and considering our students' emotions will contribute to the effectiveness of the language programs, as well as the teaching and administrative processes. Thus, we aimed to determine whether positive emotional engagement reduces anxiety in exam-focused classroom settings. To this end, we addressed the following research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of students in the preparatory program in terms of anxiety and language learning enjoyment?
2. Is there a correlation between anxiety and enjoyment?
3. Are there significant differences in anxiety enjoyment across key demographics (gender, age, department, being in the preparatory program, or in faculty)?
4. How do students in the preparatory program describe what

increases or reduces their anxiety and enjoyment in language classes?

Literature Review

The Role of Emotions in Language Learning

Investigation of emotions in relation to education has led to a widespread increase in interest among EFL researchers. Mercer et al. (2018) emphasize the importance of teachers fostering their students' soft skills, in addition to their linguistic skills, to ensure sustainability in diverse cultural settings. Based on the idea that positivity benefits humans in all cases, Wang et al. (2021) state that emotions must be taken into consideration to increase the quality of language education systems. Previous studies have focused more on negative emotions such as anxiety (e.g., Horwitz, 2001; Wei, 2007). However, MacIntyre and Gregersen (2012) highlight that positive emotions should also be explored because they raise students' awareness and help them understand the linguistic input better. Therefore, studies combining positive and negative emotions can offer a more balanced insight into our students' perspectives.

Studies on Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA)

Several studies have been conducted on foreign language anxiety. Horwitz et al. (1986) categorize anxiety into three groups: (a) communication apprehension, (b) test anxiety, and (c) fear of negative evaluation. They assert that communication apprehension is a common type of anxiety observed in language classrooms, especially during speaking practices, so they suggest that there needs to be more investigation into this issue. Following that, numerous studies have been conducted on FLA from various aspects.

MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) found that anxiety can negatively affect students' speaking ability, vocabulary learning, and willingness to communicate. Likewise, Von Worde (2003) demonstrated that a decrease in anxiety levels can enhance students' motivation and language acquisition. Additionally, Horwitz et al. (2010) stated that all language

programs should help their students overcome foreign language anxiety. Han (2013) reviewed a number of studies on foreign language anxiety, showing several sources of anxiety and their effects on the language learning process. Yet, more recent studies, such as Gregersen (2020), pointed out the dynamic nature of anxiety as a negative emotion. These studies found that anxiety usually stems from three interconnected factors, which are fear of negative evaluation, communication apprehension, and test pressure. For instance, Aydın et al. (2020) examined test anxiety in foreign language learners and its effects on EFL learners, exploring strategies to overcome it. They suggest that teachers of English as a foreign language should raise their awareness of issues that cause anxiety for learners and the effects of such issues on learners. Furthermore, it is indicated that teachers should be aware of strategies that can be employed to decrease anxiety in learners. Finally, some FLA studies that have been conducted after the COVID-19 pandemic focused on the role of online education as a factor affecting learners' anxiety. Resnik et al. (2023) compared the levels of foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA) in face-to-face and online EFL classes through mixed-method research. They found that students feel more anxious in online classes in comparison with traditional classes, due to unexpected technical problems related to technology. Conversely, according to the results of a similar study by Véliz-Campos et al. (2023), students feel less anxious in online classes, possibly because they are anonymous while speaking in the target language. In conclusion, although many studies about FLA were undertaken, it could offer better insights when anxiety is studied with other emotions.

Studies on Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE)

As part of Positive Psychology, the enjoyment of foreign language learning (FLE) has aroused interest among foreign language researchers, and numerous studies on FLE have been conducted in the field. According to the studies by Dewaele et al. (2018), Inada (2022), and Li (2022), students who experience enjoyment develop more positive attitudes

towards the target language and their teacher, and they value the time they spend in the classroom. Li (2022) explored the relationship between foreign language enjoyment and foreign language boredom and found that success depended on the interplay of intrinsic student characteristics and extrinsic instructional elements. Proietti Ergün and Ersöz Demirdağ (2023) aimed to investigate the role of positive language teaching in fostering enjoyment of foreign languages. They found that positive language instruction has the capacity to improve students' well-being, thereby enhancing the level of pleasant feelings experienced in the language classroom. As noted by Zhang et al. (2020), students' levels of proficiency are influenced by their motivation and enjoyment of the foreign language. In a more recent study, Yang et al. (2024) explored the relationships between FLE and teacher support as factors affecting L2 willingness to communicate (WTC) and found some positive correlations among them. As a result, it is clear that variables such as teacher behaviors, peer support, learning atmosphere, and students' perceptions about their own progress can contribute to foreign language enjoyment, thereby mitigating the effects of negative feelings, such as anxiety.

Learners' Perspectives and Emerging Research Gaps

Few studies in the body of research combine the two emotions, enjoyment and anxiety, with a specific focus on foreign language education. Dewaele et al. (2016) found that female students report more enjoyment in classes, although they experience more anxiety about making mistakes, compared to their male classmates. Ozer and Altay (2021) studied the impact of positive and negative feelings on secondary-level foreign language education and found that enjoyment was a more common emotion among students, regardless of gender. In another study, Dewaele et al. (2022) investigated the levels and predictors of Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) and Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) among Turkish learners in Kazakhstan. They revealed that there was a surprisingly weak positive link between FLE and FLCA while the average levels were similar to those in other contexts. Finally, Yeşilçınar and Erdemir (2023)

claimed that anxiety and enjoyment are affected by culture, showing that students may experience a higher level of anxiety but a lower level of enjoyment in teacher-centred contexts.

Yet, some of the studies integrating foreign language anxiety and enjoyment are quantitative and may lack an in-depth understanding of students' perspectives on the related topics. Moreover, they should be investigated in diverse contexts from different aspects. Therefore, the role of enjoyment and anxiety in foreign language education remains an underexplored topic in higher education contexts, which warrants exploration in Turkish EFL contexts. Therefore, this study aims to explore the issue from the perspectives of Turkish EFL students in an institution that adopts innovative and sustainable education policies, employing a mixed-methods research design to illustrate how enjoyment and anxiety interact in fostering sustainable emotional engagement in the context of foreign language learning.

Methodology

Research Model

This study aims to investigate the relationship between anxiety and enjoyment in the language learning process, as well as participants' perceptions of these concepts. To address these aims, a mixed-methods explanatory sequential design was employed, where the quantitative phase (descriptive, group comparisons, and correlation) was followed by qualitative interviews and thematic analysis to deepen the interpretation. The integration of these two approaches provides a more comprehensive understanding of a research problem than either approach could offer alone. Accordingly, descriptive, inferential, and correlational analyses were conducted to meet the study's objectives for the quantitative part. For the qualitative part, thematic analysis was conducted to identify themes from the interviews.

Setting and Participants

The study was conducted among preparatory students and faculty students

attending the state university in Kayseri, Türkiye, during the Summer School of 2024-2025. It consisted of 160 students who were all enrolled in a program designed to help them master the necessary English skills relevant to their department.

Data Collection

The participants were required to provide their demographic information, which included their gender, age, type of student (preparatory or faculty), and department affiliation. The questionnaires were then followed, with each consisting of 5 points on the Likert scale. Two questionnaires were used in the study to collect data. The first one, with the name Cognitive Test Anxiety Scale – 2nd Edition (CTAS), was created by Thomas et al. (2017) with 24 items without subscales. The tool was completed by the participants with the help of a 5-point Likert scale, with an Alpha Cronbach standard value of .80, confirming that the tool is reliable. The second tool, known as the Foreign Language Learning Enjoyment Scale (FLES), was created by researchers Aydın et al. in 2024, with 12 items without subtitles. The tool was completed by the study participants with the help of a 5-point Likert scale, with an Alpha Cronbach standard of .74, confirming that the tool is reliable. After collecting quantitative data, semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather the opinions of the 10 participants regarding the process of language learning, including aspects such as enjoyment levels and language exam performance.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS Version 27.0 software, employing descriptive, inferential, and correlation statistics. The descriptive analysis was done to establish the perceptions of the participants with regard to their feelings of anxiety and enjoyment. The inferential analysis was conducted to determine if there are any differences between the variables of gender, age, whether the participant is from the preparatory or faculty level, the department, or the levels of anxiety and language. The final analysis involved a correlation analysis to establish if there is any correlation between the levels of anxiety and enjoyment. The

second study employed thematic analysis to identify themes from the interview study.

Results

The results are presented in two parts. First, quantitative findings from the questionnaires are reported, including descriptive statistics for enjoyment and anxiety, group comparisons across demographic variables (gender, age, student status, and department), and the correlation between enjoyment and anxiety. These analyses examine the variation in learners' enjoyment and anxiety levels across groups and the strength of the relationship between the two constructs. Second, qualitative findings from the semi-structured interviews are summarised in terms of four overarching themes: (a) enjoyment as a positive emotional driver, (b) anxiety as a negative but complex force, (c) the interaction between enjoyment and anxiety, and (d) positive learning climate as a mediating factor. The qualitative themes are used to deepen and contextualise the quantitative results by illustrating how learners experience and interpret enjoyment and anxiety in the language learning process.

Table 1

Inferential Results of Enjoyment and Dependent Variables

Dependent Variable		***M***	***sd***	***t / F****	***p-value***
Gender	Female	3.62	0.57	0.22	.820
	Male	3.60	0.59		
Age	18-20	3.62	0.58	0.11	.905
	21+	3.61	0.58		
Student Status	Faculty	3.55	0.56	0.86	.388
	Prep	3.64	0.63		
Department	Computer Engineering	3.55	0.63	1.13	.337
	Bioengineering	3.65	0.60		
	Economy	3.71	0.63		

	Electrical and Electronics Engineering	3.69	0.58
	Industrial Engineering	3.71	0.52
	Civil Engineering	3.54	0.62
	Business Administration	3.87	0.54
	Mechanical Engineering	3.45	0.57
	Architecture	3.49	0.39
	Molecular Biology and Genetics	3.55	0.95
	Psychology	3.60	0.45
	Political Science and International Relations	3.94	0.55
	Nanotechnology	4.16	0.58

*t value is for independent t-tests, F value is for ANOVA.

Table 1 presents the analysis of demographic variables in relation to enjoyment in the language learning process. No significant difference was observed between male (M = 3.62, SD = 0.57) and female participants (M = 3.60, SD = 0.59), t = 0.22, p = .820. Similarly, age groups 18–20 (M = 3.62, SD = 0.58) and 21+ (M = 3.61, SD = 0.58) did not differ significantly, t = 0.11, p = .905. Being a prep or faculty student also showed no significant differences, t = 0.86, p = .388. Finally, no significant variance was found across departments, F = 1.13, p = .337. Overall, these results suggest that demographic variables, including gender, age, faculty or prep student status, and department, do not have a statistically significant impact on enjoyment in this study.

Table 2

Inferential Results of Anxiety and Dependent Variables

Dependent Variable		***M***	***Sd***	***t / F****	***p-value***
Gender	Female	2.58	0.70	4.55	.000
	Male	2.06	0.71		

Age	18-20	2.32	0.72	-0.91	.363
	21+	2.43	0.78		
Student Status	Faculty	2.29	0.75	0.63	.252
	Prep	2.38	0.76		
Department	Computer Engineering	2.22	0.97	1.33	.207
	Bioengineering	2.36	0.73		
	Economy	2.31	0.98		
	Electrical and Electronics Engineering	1.95	0.67		
	Industrial Engineering	2.58	0.79		
	Civil Engineering	2.57	0.65		
	Business Administration	2.56	0.73		
	Mechanical Engineering	2.22	0.65		
	Architecture	2.72	0.74		
	Molecular Biology and Genetics	2.11	0.78		
	Psychology	2.29	0.47		
	Political Science and International Relations	2.25	0.72		
	Nanotechnology	1.51	0.24		

*t value is for independent t-tests, F value is for ANOVA.

Table 2 presents the analysis of demographic variables in relation to anxiety during the language learning process. Age groups 18–20 (M = 2.32, SD = 0.72) and 21+ (M = 2.43, SD = 0.78) did not differ significantly, t = -0.91, p = .363. Being a prep or faculty student also showed no significant differences, t = 0.63, p =.252 Moreover, no significant variance was found across departments, F = 1.01, p = .438. However, a significant difference was found between gender and anxiety. According to the results, female participants showed higher anxiety (M=2.58, SD=0.70, p = .000), compared to male participants (M=2.06, SD = 0.71). Overall, these results indicate that demographic variables,

excluding gender, do not have a statistically significant effect on anxiety in this sample.

Table 3

Correlation Results of Enjoyment and Anxiety

		Enjoyment	***Anxiety***
Enjoyment	Pearson Correlation	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
Anxiety	Pearson Correlation	-.408	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	

**p= 0.01*

Table 3 illustrates the correlation between enjoyment and anxiety. In order to analyze the significance of correlation, Cohen's (1992) correlation coefficient was utilized, indicating that the strength of correlation can be classified into different levels: small correlation ($.10 \leq r < .30$), medium correlation ($.30 \leq r < .50$), and strong correlation ($.50 \leq r < 1.00$). According to Table 3, there is a moderate negative correlation between enjoyment and anxiety ($r = -408$), $p < .001$). Results suggest that an increase in enjoyment in the language learning process leads to a decrease in anxiety.

Table 4

Descriptive Results of Enjoyment and Anxiety

	M	**SD**
Enjoyment	3.61	0.58
Anxiety	2.36	0.75

Table 4 illustrates the descriptive statistics for overall enjoyment and anxiety. The mean score for enjoyment was 3.61 (SD = 0.58), indicating a moderate to high level of enjoyment in the language learning process. The mean score for anxiety was 2.36 (SD = 0.75), suggesting that

participants demonstrated a moderate to low stress anxiety in the language learning process.

Qualitative Results

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather participants' perceptions of enjoyment and anxiety in the language learning process. Thematic analysis was employed to identify and categorize themes and subthemes. The first theme is "Enjoyment as a Positive Emotional Driver". According to the participants, the language learning process is an exciting and enriching experience that fuels curiosity and personal growth. This theme is emphasized by three subthemes: intrinsic motivation, enjoyable learning activities, and the teacher's role in fostering enjoyment. Some participants stated that enjoyment arose from discovering new cultures and new words, whereas others found enjoyment in games, songs, and group tasks. It can be said that enjoyment can be fostered through multiple activities. Additionally, participants reported that a relaxed and friendly classroom atmosphere promoted enjoyment, and speaking and listening tasks, in particular, were especially effective in promoting engagement.

The second theme is "Anxiety as a Negative but Complex Force". According to the findings, while anxiety mainly acts as a barrier to learning, some students perceive it as a motivating pressure to improve. Results showed that participants' anxiety sources include: fear of making mistakes, grammar difficulties & exam pressure, irregular study habits, and lack of preparation. Additionally, participants reported that when they experience time pressure and panic during exams, they tend to interpret these reactions as motivational signals to work harder in the future. It can be said that these stress related issues do not affect students negatively at all. Finally, some participants explained that in their classrooms, strict or impatient teachers increase tension, while supportive feedback from teachers can help eliminate fear and encourage risk-taking.

The third theme is "The Interaction Between Enjoyment and Anxiety". Participants stated that enjoyment and anxiety are inversely related; when

one rises, the other falls. Results indicate that students who have an enjoyable classroom experience tend to have lower anxiety, and they can build confidence compared to their peers. Also, some students experience more anxiety than their peers due to the fact that they fear poor grades or poor judgment from their teachers. As a result, they tend to focus more on performance, which can lead to reduced learning and intrinsic motivation. Finally, increased anxiety tends to reduce overall enjoyment and learning efficiency.

The final theme is "Positive Learning Climate as a Mediating Factor". According to the qualitative results, a warm, supportive classroom environment and empathetic teacher behavior simultaneously increase enjoyment and reduce anxiety. The participants emphasized that encouragement and humor make students feel more comfortable expressing themselves, and constructive feedback helps reduce the fear of failure. Additionally, the results indicate that group activities tend to lower stress, and students feel less isolated and more confident during exams.

Discussion

The current study aims to gain further insight into the above-mentioned emotional processes by linking quantitative and qualitative research results. In terms of quantitative data analysis, it was found that there was moderate to high enjoyment ($M = 3.61$) and moderate to low anxiety ($M = 2.36$), with a moderate negative correlation between the two ($r = -.408$; $p < .001$). The above results correlate with existing research that has shown that enjoyment was found to be higher than anxiety in many FLL environments and that there was evidence that the constructs are negatively but not perfectly correlated (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). The above results indicate that there are two distinct concepts that are linked to each other but still overlap in that higher levels of one are linked with lower levels of the other.

The finding that the levels of enjoyment were comparatively high is consistent with the positive psychology in the SLA movement, as it

highlights the role of positive feelings, such as enjoyment, interest, and curiosity, in expanding learners' thought-action repertoires and creating permanent personal resources (MacIntyre et al., 2016). In current research, the issue of enjoyment is often illustrated through participation in interactive class activities (such as games, songs, and group work), learning about new cultures, and feeling comfortable in class. These findings are consistent with other evidence suggesting that FLE is strongly related to supportive teacher behavior, significant tasks, and a sense of progress in the target language (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014).

The negative correlation between enjoyment and anxiety found in this study confirms previous research that found higher FLE to be linked to lower levels of foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA), but that FLE and FLCA are partially unrelated variables (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). In terms of the control-value model of achievement emotions (Pekrun, 2006), learners are most likely to feel enjoyment if there is a high sense of perceived control over the activity, as well as if there is a strong sense that the outcome is valued; conversely, there is a higher likelihood of experiencing anxiety if there is low perceived control but high stakes. These results suggest that factors correlated with increased enjoyment—such as clear instructions and interactive tasks—may be linked to higher levels of perceived control and outcome value, which in turn could reduce test anxiety in the area of language learning.

One notable quantitative finding was a significant difference between females and males in terms of feeling anxious in class, with female students experiencing more anxiety compared to male students; however, there was no difference in terms of enjoyment. This finding is consistent with other research that has found female students to be more anxious in learning foreign languages, even if there is no difference between females and males in terms of motivation and achievement (Park & French, 2013). Nevertheless, more recently, there has been evidence that gender disparities are generally trivial and insignificant with regard to L2 learning anxiety (Piniel & Zólyomi, 2022). These results are likely to be accurate

in the sense that certain sociocultural factors may make female students more nervous about performing successfully in class. Additionally, there was qualitative evidence that some students felt more apprehensive about evaluation by teachers and class results that seemed to impact the gender difference found here with regard to test anxiety.

The qualitative themes supply these numerical observations with explanatory meaning. The first qualitative theme is "Enjoyment as a Positive Emotional Driver," in which students highlighted the role of enjoyment in terms of opportunities to communicate, connect with others, and discover new cultural meaning; these observations are supported by research that has highlighted the more personally significant elements of FLE (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). The role of teacher behavior in terms of warmth, humor, and encouragement was highlighted, as supported by research indicating that teacher-child emotional sensitivity is not only an indicator of enjoyment but also a factor that minimizes anxiety (Qiu, 2022).

The second theme, "Anxiety as a Negative but Complex Force," recognizes the ambiguous role that anxiety had in these students' experiences. While it was definitely disruptive to most students' learning experiences and was closely tied to fear of error, tests, and inconsistent study practices, there was also evidence that these students believed that certain aspects of their anticipatory reactions to time pressure and tests served as reminders to "work harder next time," which was similar to the facilitating vs. debilitating types of anxiety (Scovel, 1978). Recent research about academic and language anxieties has suggested that there is a beneficial "facilitating" form of somewhat higher-level "anxiety" that can increase focus and concerted action as long as the individual believes that they are "in enough control" (Thomas, 2018). In the current study, this more beneficial function was seen in the form that these learners' reports about their experiences with these anxieties took on—the augmentative functions that these anxieties served as warnings about more effective preparation, rather than debilitating functions.

The issue "The Relation Between Enjoyment and Anxiety" perfectly correlates with the quantitative results, with students expressing that these two factors are inversely related to each other. Enjoyable learning in class, particularly when it includes interaction and collaboration with classmates and receiving positive feedback, would lead to lower levels of anxiety and higher confidence levels. Conversely, stressful and evaluative learning environments would result in lower levels of enjoyment and higher levels of anxiety. This correlates with research indicating that FLE and FLCA are dynamically related constructs that tend to increase and decrease correspondingly, though to some degree within the same individual (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014).

The sixth theme, "Positive Learning Climate as a Mediating Factor," highlights the key element that learning climate and teachers' behavior are the mediating factors between enjoyment and anxiety. The group illustrated that feeling comfortable in class with such learning climates encouraged them to feel free to share ideas and make mistakes. This was supported by recent reviews suggesting that teachers' use of positive learning climates to build strong bonds with students helps develop intrinsic motivation to participate and alleviate fear in learning environments (Qiu, 2022). In these regards, the current results conformed to the call made by positive psychologists emphasizing SLA to "look beyond" focusing on trait approaches to understanding the potential impact that learning climates with strong bonds with teachers may ensure the pursuit of wellness and learning (Dewaele et al. 2019)

In terms of the theoretical perspective adopted by the study in its assessment procedure, the application of the Cognitive Test Anxiety Scale - 2nd Edition (CTAS) situates this study within the cumulative body of research on test anxiety, which is viewed as a domain-general but context-dependent construct. The CTAS has been found to be reliable and structurally robust with respect to its psychometric properties in other research settings (including Turkish university students) (Dogan and Beycan Ekitli, 2021). The finding that the study already has moderately

anxious mean values and that these are in conjunction with moderately high values on the CTAS scale implies that while these students do tend to be concerned with test-related matters, these are still perhaps more within the manageable zone with regard to levels that might be seen in earlier research delineations (Thomas, 2018), and with potentially more emphasis on the enjoyment side if approaches are made to adjust these balances.

Despite these findings, several limitations of the study need to be highlighted. First, the data are cross-sectional and gathered through self-report measures, which makes it difficult to draw strong conclusions about the causal relationships between enjoyment and test anxiety. To that end, more longitudinal intervention studies are needed to explore whether measures of increased enjoyment are related to subsequent decreases in test anxiety over time. Second, the study drew on data from one state university's summer school population, which may limit the level of generalizability to other types of institutions and proficiencies. Third, the study's qualitative element was limited due to the sampling requirements, which drew only 10 volunteers; consequently, these results offer a rich perspective that is more suggestive than comprehensive. Fourth, the study drew upon measures that captured enjoyment and test anxieties more generally, which are unlinked to more specific measures such as speaking anxieties and measures of writing enjoyment.

Conclusion

The current research followed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design to investigate the correlation between FLE and test anxiety within university-level EFL learners. The quantitative results showed moderate to high levels of FLE and moderate to low levels of test anxiety, with no significant effect of age, department, or status (preparation vs. faculty) in either construct. The sole significant demographic variable was gender, with female students registering higher levels of test anxiety compared to male students. This is supported by various studies suggesting that female

students tend to display higher levels of FLE-related anxieties, yet with similar or greater levels of motivation and achievement (Park & French, 2013). At the same time, the impact of demographic factors on FLE highlights that positive experiences within the classroom are generally possible if supported by the quality of the environment.

In combination, these results underscore the importance of giving serious attention to creating emotionally supportive learning environments in classrooms. From an instructor and learning perspective, this means attending to (a) interactive tasks that are designed to be enjoyable, (b) tasks that provide useful and clear feedback to reduce uncertainty, (c) assessments that are challenging yet provide psychological safety, specifically, and (d) tasks that communicate concern and respect to build trust. When these needs are met, enjoyment will be enhanced, and test anxiety—and its debilitating cognitive aspect in particular—can be managed.

One possible extension of the current research would be to design longitudinal studies to better understand the development dynamics between enjoyment and anxiety. Additionally, it might be useful to conduct research within the realm of classroom interventions linked to positive psychology (for example, activities focusing on people's strengths, gratitude, and savouring activities) to assess the effect these might have on the results in EFL settings. Furthermore, rather than using more general assessments to evaluate enjoyment and anxiety (for example, enjoyment in general versus anxiety in general), more precise results may be obtained with measures designed for each skill (for example, speaking enjoyment versus speaking anxiety). Lastly, further research needs to be conducted to gain more insight into the dynamics between enjoyment and anxiety during various settings (for example, an online environment vs. an offline environment).

In conclusion, the current study contributes to the growing body of evidence that enjoyment in learning foreign languages and test anxiety are fundamental and interrelated components of the emotional experience of

learners in EFL contexts. Demographics are found to be insignificant factors, but class environment, teacher factors, and learning design are identified as strong drivers of student outcomes. Language teachers' deliberate attempts to induce enjoyment and create positive environments during assessments can therefore be effective approaches to alleviating test anxiety and positively impacting learners' well-being and continued commitment to the foreign language.

REFERENCES

Aydın, S., Denkci Akkaş, F., Türnük, T., Baştürk Beydilli, A., & Saydam, İ. (2020). Test anxiety among foreign language learners: A qualitative study. *The Qualitative Report, 25*(12), 4289–4309.

Aydın, S., Tekin, I., & Akkaş, F. D. (2024). Construction and validation of the foreign language learning enjoyment scale. *Psychology in the Schools, 61*(2), 657–670.

Cohen, J. (1992). A power primer. *Psychological Bulletin, 112*(1), 155–159.

Dewaele, J., & MacIntyre, P. D. (2014). The two faces of Janus? Anxiety and enjoyment in the foreign language classroom. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching, 4*, 237–274. https://doi.org/10.14746/ssllt.2014.4.2.5

Dewaele, J. M., MacIntyre, P. D., Boudreau, C., & Dewaele, L. (2016). Do girls have all the fun? Anxiety and enjoyment in the foreign language classroom. *Theory and Practice of Second Language Acquisition, 2*(1), 41–63.

Dewaele, J., Özdemir, C., Karci, D., Uysal, S., Özdemir, E., & Balta, N. (2022). How distinctive is the foreign language enjoyment and foreign language classroom anxiety of Kazakh learners of Turkish? *Applied Linguistics Review, 13*(2), 243–265. https://doi.org/10.1515/applirev-2019-002

Dewaele, J. M., Witney, J., Saito, K., & Dewaele, L. (2018). Foreign language enjoyment and anxiety: The effect of teacher and learner variables. *Language Teaching Research, 22*(6), 676–697.

Dewaele, J. M., Chen, X., Padilla, A. M., & Lake, J. (2019). The flowering of positive psychology in foreign language teaching and acquisition research. *Frontiers in Psychology, 10*, 2128. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02128

Dogan, S., & Beycan Ekitli, G. (2021). Evaluation of the psychometric properties of the Cognitive Test Anxiety Scale in Turkish university students. *International Journal of Caring Sciences, 14*(1), 233–243.

Gregersen, T. (2020). Dynamic properties of language anxiety. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching, 10*(1), 67–87.

Han, L. (2013). Foreign language anxiety: Past and future. *Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics, 36*(4), 442–464.

Horwitz, E. (2001). Language anxiety and achievement. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 21*, 112–126.

Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., & Cope, J. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal, 70*(2), 125–132.

Horwitz, E. K., Tallon, M., & Luo, H. (2010). Foreign language anxiety. In *Anxiety in schools: The causes, consequences, and solutions for academic anxieties* (Vol. 2, pp. 96–115).

Inada, T. (2022). Levels of enjoyment in class are closely related to improved English proficiency. *English Language Teaching, 15*(5), 69–76.

Li, H. (2022). Classroom enjoyment: Relations with EFL students' disengagement and burnout. *Frontiers in Psychology, 12*, 824443.

MacIntyre, P. D., & Gardner, R. C. (1991). Language anxiety: Its relationship to other anxieties and to processing in native and second languages. *Language Learning, 41*(4), 513–534.

MacIntyre, P. D., & Gregersen, T. (2012). Emotions that facilitate language learning: The positive-broadening power of the imagination. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching, 2*, 193–213. https://doi.org/10.14746/ssllt.2012.2.2.4

MacIntyre, P. D., Gregersen, T., & Mercer, S. (2016). *Positive psychology in SLA*. Multilingual Matters. https://doi.org/10.21832/9781783095360

Mercer, S. (2021). An agenda for well-being in ELT: An ecological perspective. *ELT Journal, 75*(1), 14–21.

Mercer, S., MacIntyre, P. D., Gregersen, T., & Talbot, K. (2018). Positive language education: Combining positive education and language education. *Theory and Practice of Second Language Acquisition, 4*(2).

Ozer, Z., & Altay, I. F. (2021). Examining the level of enjoyment and anxiety among Turkish EFL students. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies, 17*(S1), 663–671.

Park, G.-P., & French, B. F. (2013). Gender differences in the foreign language classroom anxiety scale. *System, 41*(2), 462–471. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2013.04.001

Pekrun, R. (2006). The control-value theory of achievement emotions: Assumptions, corollaries, and implications for educational research and practice. *Educational Psychology Review, 18*, 315–341. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-006-9029-9

Piniel, K., & Zólyomi, A. (2022). Gender differences in foreign language classroom anxiety: Results of a meta-analysis. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching, 12*(2), 173–203. https://doi.org/10.14746/ssllt.2022.12.2.2

Proietti Ergün, A. L., & Ersöz Demirdağ, H. (2023). The predictive effect of subjective well-being and stress on foreign language enjoyment: The mediating effect of positive language education. *Frontiers in Psychology, 14*, 1007534. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1007534

Resnik, P., Dewaele, J. M., & Knechtelsdorfer, E. (2023). Differences in the intensity and nature of foreign language anxiety in in-person and online EFL classes during the pandemic: A mixed-methods study. *TESOL Quarterly, 57*(2), 618–642.

Qiu, F. (2022). Reviewing the role of positive classroom climate in improving EFL students' social interactions in the online classroom. *Frontiers in Psychology, 13*, 1012524. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.1012524

Scovel, T. (1978). The effect of affect on foreign language learning: A review of the anxiety research. *Language Learning, 28*(1), 129–142. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-1770.1978.tb00309.x

Thomas, C. L., Cassady, J. C., & Heller, M. L. (2017). The Cognitive Test Anxiety Scale–Second Edition (CTAS-2). *Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment, 35*(4), 1–14.

Thomas, C. (2018). Identifying severity standards on the Cognitive Test Anxiety Scale: Cut score determination using latent class and cluster analysis. *Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment.* https://doi.org/10.1177/0734282916686004

Véliz-Campos, M., Villegas, C., & Veliz, L. (2023). Foreign language anxiety in online and in-person learning environments: A case from Chile. *Language Teaching Research Quarterly, 35*, 37–56.

Von Worde, R. (2003). Students' perspectives on foreign language anxiety. *Inquiry, 8*(1).

Wang, Y., Derakhshan, A., & Zhang, L. J. (2021). Researching and practicing positive psychology in second/foreign language learning and teaching: Past, current status, and future directions. *Frontiers in Psychology, 12*, 731721.

Wei, M. (2007). The interrelatedness of affective factors in EFL learning: Motivational patterns in relation to anxiety in China. *TESL-EJ, 11*(1), n1.

Yang, Y., Cui, Y., & Yao, S. (2024). Teacher support, grit, and L2 willingness to communicate: The mediating effect of foreign language enjoyment. *BMC Psychology, 12*(1), 383.

Yeşilçınar, S., & Erdemir, N. (2023). Are enjoyment and anxiety specific to culture? Sources of Turkish EFL learners' foreign language enjoyment and anxiety. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching, 17*(2), 453–468.

Zhang, H., Dai, Y., & Wang, Y. (2020). Motivation and second foreign language proficiency: The mediating role of foreign language enjoyment. *Sustainability, 12*(4), 1302.

Ethical Declaration and Committee Approval

In this research, the principles of scientific research and publication ethics were followed. Necessary permission was obtained from the Abdullah Gül University Institutional Review Board in July 2025. The document number for the ethics committee approval is 129957. According to the IRB, the project has been deemed ethically appropriate.

Proportion of Authors' Contribution

Author 1: Conceptualization, Methodology, Results, Data Collection, Data Analysis, Review & Editing, Writing - Last Draft.

Author 2: Literature Review, Review & Editing, Visualization, Data Collection, Writing– Original Draft.

Author 3: Data Collection, Review & Editing, Data Analysis