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Research Article

# Foreign Language Enjoyment Among Junior High School Students in Samarinda

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### KEYWORDS

Foreign language enjoyment, language academic achievement, gender differences

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## ABSTRACT

Understanding student enjoyment can lead to curriculum alignment, enhanced motivation, effective pedagogy, personalized instruction, and positive learning experiences. This study explores the complex relationship that exists between students' academic success and their level of enjoyment in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. Recognizing the complexity of this link, the study aims to determine the degree to which students' satisfaction with language learning affects their academic achievement. By implementing quantitative approach, a total of 105 participants were involved administering questionnaires for data collection. The study uses correlation analyses, gender-based comparisons, and descriptive analysis in analyzing the data. The preliminary results show that participants were reasonably happy, which is in line with other studies done in comparable EFL environments. In addition, the study carefully examines any gender differences in satisfaction levels with the goal of identifying any statistically significant differences and talking about how these can affect language learning experiences. This observation implies the existence of a possible, however slight, positive influence of enjoyment on academic performance, even though the research shows a small positive association between students' enjoyment and their academic accomplishment scores. It is imperative to recognize that the absence of statistical significance calls for a cautious interpretation of this result.

#### INTRODUCTION

The involvement of emotions in the process of acquiring a second language has garnered significant attention from researchers over the last two decades (Dewaele et al., 2016; Fredrickson, 2001; Imai, 2010). For numerous years, scholarly investigations predominantly concentrated on a single negative emotion, specifically anxiety, within the research domain (Bensalem, 2021; Botes et al., 2022; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Horwitz, 2001; Liu, 2006). It was only in recent times that the scope broadened when Dewaele & MacIntyre (2014) compared foreign language

classroom anxiety (FLCA) and foreign language enjoyment (FLE). Their objective was to comprehend the extent of their interrelation and whether they were associated with similar factors pertaining to learners, both internally and externally. The influence of negative emotions has always been linked negatively to learning academic achievement. However, the effect of positive emotion such as enjoyment to language learning academic achievement is still fairly limited. The present study aims to find out to what extent the students' level of enjoyment in EFL classroom; and how enjoyment predicts the subsequent foreign language academic achievement.

In 2012, the introduction of the Positive Psychology (PP) concept initiated a trend towards the application of positive psychology in the field of linguistics, as highlighted by In recent times, MacIntyre & Gregersen (2012). researchers in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) have transitioned from exclusively studying anxiety to exploring a broader spectrum of both positive and negative emotions within the classroom setting. This shift involves an examination of the complex and dynamic interaction among emotions and its influence on the well-being of language learners, as discussed by Dewaele & Li (2020). One positive emotion worthy of investigation is Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE). To date, researchers have delved into the dormant factors of FLE (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2016; Li et al., 2018), as well as its precursors and consequences (Dewaele & Alfawzan, 2018), and its connection to language anxiety (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014, 2016; Elahi Shirvan & Taherian, 2021). Dewaele & MacIntyre (2014) introduced a FLE scale consisted of 21 items that obtain positive emotions related to the learning process, interactions with peers, and the teacher.

The extent of students' enjoyment in learning a foreign language is influenced by various factors, including positive and negative emotions, the learning environment, instructional methods, and more. Several studies have put forth the hypothesis that enjoyment plays a crucial role as a facilitator in the process of acquiring a foreign language. This suggests that when learners experience enjoyment in their learning activity, they are more likely to focus on the learning process and effectively acquire a new language. As per the broaden-and-build theory proposed by Fredrickson (2001), positive emotions, like pleasure or enjoyment, have the potential to expand the range of cognitive activities among learners and enhance their personal resources and emotional adaptability. Positive emotions play a vital role in the acquisition of a foreign language, and the enjoyment derived from learning a foreign language significantly contributes to the overall process.

This study intends to explore the foreign language enjoyment among Junior High School students in Samarinda in their foreign language classrooms as the existing studies on foreign language enjoyment were mainly conducted with senior high school students or undergraduate students as participants (Li, 2020; Li et al., 2020; Shao et al., 2020). Furthermore, the study is to investigate the FLE experienced by the students. Attempts were made to assess their total FLE level and whether their affect their language academic achievement.

The research questions of the present study are as follows:

1. What level of FLE do EFL learners report in English classes?

- 2. Are there differences in FLE between male and female students?
- 3. What is the relationship between FLE and students' academic achievement in English classes?

# Foreign Language Enjoyment

The notion of foreign language enjoyment (FLE), as outlined by Dewaele & MacIntyre (2014), is rooted in the principles of positive psychology. It is highly plausible that a more in-depth exploration of positive emotions will yield a fresh comprehension of the underlying processes. Indeed, there has been a growing interest in the study of positive emotions in recent times (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). According to Dewaele & MacIntyre, (2016), "a complex emotion, capturing interacting dimensions of challenge and perceived ability that reflect human drive for success in the face of difficult tasks" is how foreign language enjoyment (FLE) might be conceptualized. FLE is additionally described as a psychologically positive and activating condition believed to enhance motivational processes and prompt the foreign language learner to take initiative.

Similar to the study of emotions in second language acquisition, a considerable portion of psychology has concentrated on unfavorable and negative aspects such as clinical depression, fears, post-traumatic stress, bias, unfair treatment, and personality disorders, and similar phenomena (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Yet, there is a shift occurring in the field of psychology, especially in the comprehension of the characteristics and roles of positive emotions. The study of the role of enjoyment in language learning is defined as the positive counterpart of anxiety.

The existing body of literature has demonstrated that Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) is a nuanced and multifaceted concept, as established by Dewaele & MacIntyre (2016). Dewaele & MacIntyre (2014) formally introduced FLE into the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA). Their pioneering work involved the use of an online questionnaire to collect both quantitative and qualitative data from a large sample of L2 learners worldwide. Contrary to the belief that FLE and Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) are two sides of the same coin, Dewaele & MacIntyre (2014) discovered that these are distinct dimensions with a modest negative correlation. In the same study, they devised the Foreign Language Enjoyment Scale, a measurement instrument based on Likert scale ratings consist of 21 items, which has since become the primary tool for assessing FLE.

Expanding upon their initial investigation, Dewaele and MacIntyre (2016) affirmed that Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) constitutes a distinct dimension separate from Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA). They characterized it as a "complex emotion" encompassing

various aspects of challenge and perceived ability, reflecting the innate human motivation for success in the face of challenging tasks (p. 216). Additionally, they delineated two sub-categories of FLE: FLE-social, marked by positive emotions, supportive peers, and encouraging instructors; and FLE-private, involving thoughts and emotions centered around a sense of accomplishment. On a smaller scale, some researchers observed a longitudinal increase in both components of private Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) and social FLE (Elahi Shirvan et al., 2021). In a similar vein, Boudreau et al., (2018) stressed that enjoyment, distinct from pleasure, encompasses additional dimensions such as intellectual focus, heightened attention, and optimal challenge (p. 153).

Research on enjoyment in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) has focused on various aspects, including defining and gauging this positive emotion (e.g., Dewaele & Dewaele, 2017; Botes et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2021). Additionally, studies have explored potential connections between Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) and sociobiographical factors (e.g., (Jiang & Dewaele, 2019; Li et al., 2020), as well as the correlation between FLE and other psychological traits. It is hypothesized that FLE aids learners in focusing on, processing, and acquiring a target language more effectively. There is also empirical evidence supporting the impact of FLE on learning outcomes (Guo, 2021; Hagenauer & Hascher, 2014; Li, 2020; Li & Wei, 2023; Putwain et al., 2018; Tahmouresi & Papi, 2021; Zhao & Wang, 2023). In the study by Khajavy et al., (2018), it was discovered that enjoyment had a positive correlation with learners' willingness to communicate, evident at both individual and classroom levels. Previous investigations have similarly indicated that FLE serves as a substantial predictor of real Second Language (L2) performance, as demonstrated by studies such as those conducted by Dewaele & Alfawzan (2018) and Saito et al., (2018). Furthermore, within the setting of Chinese universities, research involving third language learners affirmed that the connection between learners' motivation and language proficiency is influenced by FLE (Zhang et al., 2020).

Presently, Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) stands out as the predominant positive emotion within the Second Language Acquisition (SLA) field, as noted by Dewaele & Li, (2018). Dewaele & MacIntyre (2014) introduced a 21-item scale known as the FLE Scale to gauge learners' positive sentiments related to their learning experiences, interactions with peers, and relationships with teachers. Their study involved 1746 participants from various parts of the world, revealing that FLE and FLCA were distinct emotions, displaying a moderately negative correlation. Subsequent research has demonstrated not only the close connection of these emotions with learners' Foreign Language (FL) performance, as seen in studies by Dewaele

& Alfawzan (2018) and Li et al., (2020), but also their susceptibility to individual factors such as gender, personality, and proficiency level, as well as social factors like the teacher's influence, classroom environment, and cultural background (Dewaele et al., 2018; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Jiang & Dewaele, 2019).

# Enjoyment and Its Association with Academic Achievement

Educational studies in general have established connections between the three emotions and have explored their correlations with learning accomplishments over an extended period. Examining the connection between enjoyment leading to academic achievement or academic achievement leading to enjoyment, previous research indicates a positive correlation between these two constructs. Higher levels of academic achievement are associated with increased enjoyment, and vice versa. It's worth noting that the link from academic achievement to enjoyment is explored less often than the link from enjoyment to academic achievement (Hagenauer & Hascher, 2014). Additionally, reciprocal relationships between academic achievement and enjoyment are frequently discussed but infrequently tested, primarily due to a shortage of longitudinal research. According to Dewaele & Alfawzan (2018), performance in the foreign language appears to be more significantly associated with positive emotions than with negative emotions. A study conducted by Su (2022) whose participants in Chinese EFL Undergraduates with lower proficiency. Participants in the study demonstrated moderate levels of Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE). However, the reported FLE level in this research was considerably lower compared to both the global and local samples, whereas the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) level showed the opposite trend.

There have been previous investigations into the specific impact of foreign language enjoyment (FLE) on second language (L2) academic achievement (Li & Wei, 2023). The study of Dewaele & Alfawzan (2018) found that foreign language enjoyment predicted the language academic achievement positively among two samples of L2 learners in London and Saudi Arabia. In their findings, the role of enjoyment was more strongly dominates the link to academic achievement than anxiety. This findings is also supported by the study conducted by Li & Wei (2023) for junior secondary English learners in rural China that higher enjoyment predicted higher subsequent foreign language academic achievement. However, the study of Li et al., (2020) found that enjoyment also positively linked to language academic achievement. Yet, anxiety dominating the link to academic achievement. Previous study conducted in second-year senior high school students from Lu'an City, China offers empirical support indicating

that students' emotional intelligence (TEI) is a positive predictor of second language (L2) learning outcomes, demonstrating a strong correlation with students' positive emotion, specifically foreign language enjoyment (FLE) (Li, 2020). Additionally, it highlights the favorable impact of FLE on L2 learning outcomes.

#### **METHOD**

#### Study Design

This research employed a descriptive research design utilizing an analytic approach and a deductive objective. The choice of this design was deemed necessary to delve deeper into the enjoyment experienced by EFL learners in learning a foreign language. Additionally, the study aimed to explore whether levels of foreign language enjoyment varied based on specific variable, gender. The utilization of a descriptive research design was considered suitable to achieve the stated objectives. In this context, descriptive research involves analyzing data with predefined research questions. Given the study's focus on foreign language enjoyment, a scale was employed to gather data from participants without any intervention, capturing their perspectives in a natural context.

# Sample Population

The current investigation centers on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners at a junior high school in Samarinda who have limited exposure to English. The study includes 105 participants, comprising 48 male students and 57 female students, selected from three eighth-grade classes. These students provided complete responses to the questionnaire survey, which covered background information and foreign language enjoyment scales, and had attended English classes for one semester.

The chosen school is a public institution where the researcher is employed. All participants hail from the local community and possess diverse backgrounds, including varying ethnic and cultural origins. They primarily communicate in the local dialect and are learning English as a foreign language, with none of them having experience studying abroad. Instruction for all participants occurred in English, utilizing the same textbook and adhering to a uniform curriculum. Evaluation methods included quizzes for each chapter, monthly tests, a midterm examination, and a final test.

## Data Collection Techniques and Instruments

The method employed for data collection involved administering questionnaires. Participants were given the FLE scale on one occasion, at the initiation of the EFL courses to consider the initial status factor. The questionnaires were completed in a classroom setting under the supervision of the researcher. Participants were

assured of the confidentiality of their provided information, and their voluntary participation in the research was confirmed.

#### Foreign Language Enjoyment

To assess Foreign Language Enjoyment, participants received a translated version of a scale containing 21 items developed by Dewaele & MacIntyre, (2014). The scale comprises 21 items that encompass different aspects of Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE), including creativity, pride, interest, and fun, as well as aspects related to a positive environment in the foreign language class involving both the teacher and peers. Then, Dewaele & MacIntyre (2016) divided FLE into two factors; FLE-Social and FLE-Private. The learning subscales, ranging from item 1 to item 13, were employed for evaluating Private FLE. In contrast, the measurement of Social FLE involved both the peer support subscale (items 14, 18, 19, 20, 21) and the teacher support subscale (15, 16, 17). The questionnaire was translated by Language Centre of Universitas Muhammadiyah Kalimantan and assessed by two university proffessors, participants were instructed to assess their level of agreement with the questionnaire statements using a 5-point Likert scale. The scale ranged from 1, denoting "strongly disagree," to 5, indicating "strongly agree," resulting in scores ranging from a minimum of 9 to a maximum of 45. All items were positively phrased. Meanwhile, in this study FLE Private and FLE Social sub-scale reliability stood at  $(\alpha) = .868$  and  $(\alpha) = .866$  respectively. Internal consistency of the 21 items, as measured by Cronbach alpha coefficient, was high (.86).

#### Data Analysis Techniques

Quantitative data were processed using the SPSS statistical software. Initially, the 21 composite questionnaires were coded in the following way: "strongly agree" = 5, "agree" = 4, "neither agree nor disagree" = 3, "disagree" = 2, "strongly disagree" = 1. Hence, in this research, a greater score denoted an elevated level of enjoyment. Average scores on the 5-point scale were calculated for FLE (N = 105, M = 3.99, SD = .59). Scores ranged from 1.86 to the maximum 5.0. Internal consistency of the 21 items, as measured by Cronbach alpha coefficient, was high (.909). The score categories followed the rules for calculating the low, moderate and high level. The formula to define low level is X < M - SD, moderate level is M - SD <= X <= M + SD, high level is X > M + SD. Detailed score categorization is shown in Table 1.

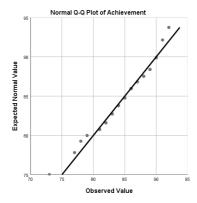
Table 1. Score Categories for FLE Level

Categories	Score
Low	X < 3.39
Moderate	$3.39 \le X < 4.58$
High	X >= 4.58

#### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Following the input of all questionnaire data into SPSS 25.0, one-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests were performed to assess the distribution of the data. The outcomes indicated the distribution of Foreign Language Enjoyment (KS = .72, P = .200) and academic achievement score (KS = .081, P = .084) followed the normal distribution. Hence, this research chose to use parametric statistical methods.

No instances of missing values were observed, as the questionnaire was administered online, using google form, necessitating compulsory responses for all items. At the end of the first semester of the academic year 2023/2024, students completed an electronic version of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was presented to students in their native language to prevent language interference with the results. The collected data were subsequently subjected to statistical analysis using SPSS 25.0. Means and standard deviations were calculated to assess the extent of students Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE). The t-test for independent samples was employed to examine gender disparities in FLE. Additionally, Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to explore the correlation between English as a Foreign Language (EFL) enjoyment and academic achievement scores. A closer examination of the QQ-plot (Figure 1) indicated the data were distributed normally. Thus, a wider range of parametric methods could be opted in the present study.



**Figure 1.** The Normal Distribution of Academic achievement Score

# Level of students' FLE

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To address Research Question 1, we conducted descriptive analyses using SPSS 25.0. As shown in Table 2, the mean score for FLE was 3.98. This indicates that participants in this study exhibited moderate levels of FLE. Additionally, the mode and median in Table 2 provided an overview of the general characteristics of the FLE among the research subjects, while the standard deviation, maximum, and minimum values reflected individual differences.

**Table 2.** FLE Descriptive Statistics of FLE, FLE Private and FLE Social (N=105)

	Mean (SE)	SD	Min	Max
FLE	3.98 (.058)	.59	1.86	5.00
<b>FLE Private</b>	3.81 (.064)	.65	1.92	5.00
<b>FLE Social</b>	4.26 (.062)	.64	1.63	5.00

Based on the 2 factors of FLE, FLE-Social and FLE-Private, it is found that the FLE level of the participants was mainly dominated by FLE Social (M= 4.26, SD= .64). It is indicating that the participants' enjoyment was dominated by the satisfaction that a learner can draw from a buzzing, positive FL classroom.

The present study focused to examine the foreign language enjoyment of the EFL learners in middle school context. The first research question is aimed to investigate the level of FLE among learners using descriptive analysis. The participants showed moderate level of FLE in their English classes. This finding align with previous studies of Su (2022) which also showed moderate level of FLE among low proficiency Chinese learners. The descriptive analysis showed the mean of FLE is 3.98. This FLE level is slightly higher compared to the mean of FLE level in Dewaele & MacIntyre (2014) (M= 3.82), but lower than the mean of M. Kassem (2021) (M= 4.11). In the other side, the mean of this finding is almost similar with the mean of Jiang & Dewaele (2019) (M= 3.94).

Based on the descriptive statistics, it also showed the FLE factors that volunteer the level of FLE in classroom. FLE Social gave more impact on students' FLE than FLE Private. Jiang & Dewaele (2019) divided FLE Social into two dimensions: FLE-Peer and FLE-Teacher. It can be seen such findings revealed that the social factors of FLE played more role than the private factors in this research. This was followed by the teacher's amicable nature and the incorporation of humor in teaching language skills and knowledge (Fang & Tang, 2021). The preceding findings highlight the significance of the teacher's contribution to enhancing students' FLE. Consequently, it is crucial for educators to grasp their role to guarantee that their instructional approaches positively impact their students. This suggests that factors associated with teachers may have a greater influence on eliciting positive emotions in students (Liu & Wang, 2023; M. Kassem, 2021). Thus, this finding affirmed earlier findings with the qualitative

examination by Jiang & Dewaele (2019) that the participants' FLE encounters in the EFL classroom is closely linked to the teacher. Teacher educators should stress the importance of fostering a positive classroom atmosphere and positive emotions among future educators, as it plays a crucial role in enhancing student engagement and academic performance (Mohammad Hosseini et al., 2022). Next, the finding also suggest that classmates can contribute to improving a student's enjoyment in foreign language. Unlike teachers, Students engage in increased interaction with their peers on campus. These positive influences, both inside and outside the classroom, also contribute to a lasting FLE for the students (Fang & Tang, 2021). FLE can emerge not only from direct interventions by teachers but also indirectly through facilitating peer interaction and establishing an environment where learners can privately experience FLE (Li et al., 2018).

# Gender Differences on FLE

An independent t-tests revealed that there was no significant gender difference in FLE (df = 103, t = -1.741, p = .085 > .05). The female participants scored higher for FLE (Male = 3.87, SD = .62; females = 4.07, SD = .56).

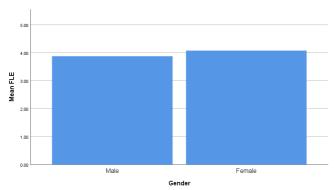


Figure 2. A comparison of mean of FLE by Gender

The second research question delved into the potential influence of gender on FLE. The findings revealed no statistically significant disparity in FLE levels between male (M= 3.87) and female learners (M= 4.07) (df = 103, t = -1.741, p = .085 > .05), thereby supporting prior studies that emphasized the negligible impact of gender on FLE (M. Kassem, 2021; Su, 2022). Nevertheless, a slight distinction in mean scores between male and female learners was observed, with females reporting marginally higher FLE levels than their male counterparts. This outcome aligns with earlier research, no notable gender differences were observed in the enjoyment of learning a foreign language (Bensalem, 2021; Dewaele et al., 2022; Guo, 2021; Jiang & Dewaele, 2019). Dewaele & Alfawzan (2018) proposed a plausible explanation for the absence of a gender effect on enjoyment, suggesting that participants in the survey might predominantly be proficient learners satisfied with their English classes, rather than struggling students. This could result in a neutralization of the gender effect, as the sample may include students who defy social

norms and reject the detrimental impact of those norms. In essence, the gender impact might have been nullified due to the characteristics of the participants, and it is suggested that different outcomes might have arisen if the majority of participants were struggling students. If female foreign language learners, as opposed to their male counterparts, tend to derive greater enjoyment from language classes, they may tap into their potential more swiftly, leading to more significant progress. This could occur even if they also encounter certain aspects of anxiety more frequently or intensely (Dewaele et al., 2016).

# The relationship between FLE and Academic achievement score

A Pearson correlation analysis revealed in Table 3 that the correlation is positive, indicating that as FLE increases, academic achievement tends to increase as well. In other words, higher level of enjoyment was linked to higher academic achievement score. Meanwhile, the p-value suggests that there is no statistically significant correlation at the conventional significance level of 0.05. In other words, the observed correlation could be due to random chance.

Table 3. Correlation Analysis between FLE and Academic achievement

	Academic ac	Academic achievement		
	r	p		
FLE	.156	.111		

Finally, the third research questions revealed the correlation analysis between FLE and academic achievement score. It showed that FLE is positively correlated with academic achievement score. Although it's not significant, FLE tend to be the positive predictor for academic achievement. The results indicated that a favorable impact on English proficiency was observed due to FLE. Consequently, an enhanced enjoyment in second language (L2) learning contributed to improved English academic achievement, aligning with the conclusions drawn in earlier research (Botes et al., 2021, 2022; Dewaele et al., 2023; Guo, 2021; Hagenauer & Hascher, 2014; Li, 2020; Li et al., 2020; M. Kassem, 2021; Wu & Kang, 2023; Zhao & Wang, 2023). Positive emotions can serve as a catalyst for students to assimilate second language (L2) content, expand their social resources, and alleviate negative emotions. This, in turn, contributes to an improved emotional state and academic achievement (Zhao & Wang, 2023). Our results indicate that enjoyment extends beyond mere positive feelings; rather, it exerts more profound and enduring impacts on subsequent academic achievement.

#### **CONCLUSION**

This study aimed to explore FLE among EFL learners in a middle school context in Indonesia. The analysis of FLE levels, as addressed in the first research question, revealed a moderate level among participants during their English classes. Answering the second research question, it is also revealed that no statistically significant gender disparity was found in FLE levels. Moreover, the third research question was answered through the correlation between FLE and academic achievement scores, revealing a weakly positive relationship. While not statistically significant, the results suggest that FLE tends to be a positive predictor for academic achievement.

In conclusion, this study provides insights into the moderate levels of FLE among EFL learners, the negligible impact of gender on FLE, and the potential positive influence of FLE on English academic achievement. Further research is recommended to explore these dynamics in different contexts and with diverse learner populations.

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