



Foreign Language Enjoyment and Engagement Among EFL Students in Selected Chinese Universities

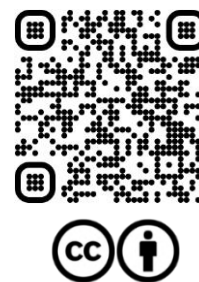
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Abstract—This study explores the levels of foreign language enjoyment and English learning engagement among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) college students in selected Chinese universities and examine the relationship between these two factors. A survey was conducted among 552 non-English major students from five different universities in four provinces of China. Respondents generally agreed with indicators of FLE, including FLE-Private, FLE-Teacher, and FLE-Atmosphere dimensions, but their sense of accomplishment, satisfaction, and interest in EFL learning was relatively weak. The participants demonstrated active participation and enthusiasm in different aspects of English learning engagement, encompassing behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and social dimensions. This underscores the significance of considering and addressing multiple facets of engagement during the process of learning the English language. The study highlighted significant relationships between FLE and English learning engagement.

Keywords—Foreign Language Enjoyment, English learning engagement, EFL students in Chinese universities



I. INTRODUCTION

In our increasingly interconnected world, proficiency in foreign languages has become a valuable asset, offering numerous advantages in personal, academic, and professional spheres. English as a foreign language (EFL) learning has become particularly important, given its status as a global lingua franca. For students studying English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Chinese universities, mastering the English language holds significant importance, given access to a wider range of opportunities and resources, such as academic publications, job markets, and cultural exchange programs. In addition, English proficiency is often a requirement for admission to universities and employment in multinational companies.

An essential aspect of successful language learning lies in the experiences of enjoyment and engagement during the learning process. Foreign language enjoyment refers to the positive emotions and satisfaction that students associate with language learning activities, while engagement

encompasses their active and motivated involvement in language-related tasks (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Reeve, 2012).

Understanding the levels of foreign language enjoyment and engagement among EFL students is crucial for several reasons.

On the one hand, when students experience enjoyment, they are more likely to be motivated, persistent, and dedicated to improving their language skills, which ultimately leads to enhanced learning outcomes (Li, 2022).

The concept of Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) has received significant attention, especially with the growing focus on positive psychology in the field of psychology. Scholars now approach the study of emotions in foreign language (FL) and second language (L2) learning from a positive psychology perspective (Macintyre et al., 2019). Enjoyment is considered a vital positive emotion in FL/L2 learning, as it fulfills learners' psychological needs,

motivating them to overcome challenges and achieve success (Vadivel et al., 2022). The presence of enjoyment in FL/L2 learning has notable implications for learners' academic performance and overall language learning outcomes (Dalton-Puffer et al., 2019).

Creating a positive classroom atmosphere is essential for fostering FLE, as it boosts students' engagement, motivation, and academic achievement (Palalić et al., 2021). Researchers advocate for student-centered and equitable teaching approaches to establish inclusive and supportive classroom environments (Biondi, 2021).

FLE plays a critical role in FL/L2 learning by motivating learners and influencing their success. Researchers are actively exploring the intricate relationship between FLE and its influencing factors to enhance language learning experiences. Understanding these connections is crucial for establishing supportive and enjoyable language learning environments, ultimately optimizing language education practices.

On the other hand, engaged learners actively participate in classroom interactions and activities, creating a dynamic and stimulating learning environment that facilitates language proficiency (Shernoff et al., 2017). Learning engagement is vital for evaluating educational effectiveness and teaching reforms as it reflects students' active involvement and enthusiasm during the learning process, especially in student-centered education and high-quality talent training (Hofkens & Ruzek, 2019).

Scholars approach learning engagement from different angles, with definitions ranging from enthusiasm and positive attitudes to emotional involvement and ongoing positivity (Reeve 2012; Schaufeli, 2013). This multifaceted construct can be categorized into behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and social engagement (Philp & Duchesne, 2016).

In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, positive teacher-student relationships and a supportive classroom environment significantly impact learning engagement (Engels et al., 2016; Nguyen et al., 2018). Learning engagement is closely linked to Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE), where positive emotional experiences in language learning lead to heightened engagement among students (Guo, 2021).

The objective of this study is to explore the levels of foreign language enjoyment and engagement among EFL students in selected Chinese universities and examine the relationship between these two factors. By investigating the significance of foreign language enjoyment and engagement in language learning experiences, we aim to gain insights into how they jointly contribute to students' language learning journey.

The study employs surveys as a primary data collection method to gather information on EFL students' attitudes and experiences related to learning English as a foreign language. By analyzing the survey data and drawing upon existing literature on language motivation and affective factors, we seek to deepen our understanding of the interplay between enjoyment and engagement in language education.

Through this research, we hope to provide practical implications for language educators and policymakers in designing effective language learning environments that enhance students' language learning potential. Ultimately, we aspire to contribute to the fostering of greater foreign language enjoyment and engagement among EFL students in Chinese universities, thereby nurturing their language proficiency and overall language learning outcomes.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study utilizes a quantitative descriptive research design, employing a questionnaire survey to assess Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) and English learning engagement.

2.1 Participants

Participants are non-English major students randomly selected from five universities in different regions of China. A total of 552 Chinese EFL learners take part in the study.

2.2 Instruments

This study designed items to collect demographic information from the participants, including gender, type of university, and English language proficiency. Extensively reviewing existing literature and adapting established scales, two questionnaires were modified: the *Foreign Language Enjoyment Questionnaire*, and the *English Learning Engagement Questionnaire*. The *Foreign Language Enjoyment Questionnaire* includes three subscales: FLE-Private, FLE-Teacher, and FLE-Atmosphere, comprising a total of 21 statements. The *English Learning Engagement Questionnaire* consists of four subscales: Behavioral Engagement, Emotional Engagement, Cognitive Engagement, and Social Engagement, with a total of 36 statements. These questionnaires serve as precise and comprehensive measuring instruments to gather data, which was efficiently collected online through the "Questionnaire Star" platform.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Foreign Language Enjoyment

The questionnaire yielded valuable insights into various aspects of foreign language enjoyment. Understanding the factors that influence the pleasure of learning a foreign language is vital for language educators in creating a more engaging and enjoyable language learning environment. By cultivating positive teacher-student interactions, fostering a supportive classroom atmosphere, and recognizing the value of personally relevant language learning, educators can enhance student motivation, engagement, and overall satisfaction in the language learning process.

Table 1 Summary Table on Foreign Language Enjoyment

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
FLE-Private	3.21	Agree	3
FLE-Teacher	3.36	Agree	1
FLE-Atmosphere	3.31	Agree	2
Composite Mean	3.30	Agree	

Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = Strongly Agree; 2.50 – 3.49 = Agree; 1.50 – 2.49 = Disagree; 1.00 - 1.49 = Strongly Disagree

The composite mean of 3.30 indicates that a majority of respondents enjoy learning a second or foreign language and find it enjoyable in different teacher and learner-related situations. Notably, the “teacher” indicator received the highest average score of 3.36, highlighting that most participants consider their language teachers as crucial sources of enjoyment in their foreign language learning journey. Additionally, respondents expressed great enjoyment in their interactions with their second/foreign language teachers. Jiang and Dewaele (2019) conducted a study among first-year undergraduates in Beijing, China, and their findings underscored the significant impact of teacher-related factors on foreign language acquisition.

Positive teacher-student relationships are pivotal for students’ language learning experience. When students feel encouraged, supported, and respected by their teachers, they are more likely to feel motivated, engaged, and satisfied with their language learning journey. According to the survey, students perceived their language

teachers as encouraging, supportive, and adept at guiding their language learning process, fostering a lively and engaging learning atmosphere that helped students enjoy and motivate themselves.

Teachers who cultivate a positive and supportive learning environment can profoundly influence their students’ language learning experiences. By promoting students’ sense of autonomy and competence, teachers can enhance enjoyment and intrinsic motivation. Furthermore, teachers’ enthusiasm, passion for teaching, and ability to cater to individual learning needs contribute to a more enjoyable language learning experience (Dewaele & Dewaele, 2020).

3.2 English Learning Engagement

This study delves into the crucial aspect of English learning engagement among students, investigating their active involvement and enthusiasm throughout the language learning process. By examining multiple dimensions of engagement, including behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and social aspects, the study aims to gain insights into students’ overall agreement and prioritization of these elements in their English language learning experiences. Understanding and fostering learning engagement are essential for educators, as it directly influences students’ motivation, persistence, and academic achievement. This introduction sets the stage for a comprehensive analysis that reveals the significance of each engagement dimension and its impact on creating a meaningful and successful English language learning environment for students.

Table 2 presents the results of English learning engagement with a composite mean of 3.30, indicating an overall agreement, or “Agree” level, among respondents in all dimensions - behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and social. Respondents showed active involvement and enthusiasm in various engagement dimensions, emphasizing the importance of addressing multiple aspects of engagement in English language learning. The highest mean, 3.32, was obtained in the “behavioral engagement” dimension, indicating that the majority of respondents actively participated in language learning activities, showcasing dedication and responsibility for their learning.

Table 2 Summary Table on English Learning Engagement

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
Behavioral Engagement	3.32	Agree	1
Emotional Engagement	3.29	Agree	4
Cognitive Engagement	3.31	Agree	2.5
Social Engagement	3.31	Agree	2.5
Composite Mean	3.30	Agree	

Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = Strongly Agree; 2.50 – 3.49 = Agree; 1.50 – 2.49 = Disagree; 1.00 - 1.49 = Strongly Disagree

The “emotional engagement” dimension obtained a mean of 3.29, still within the “Agree” level, but relatively lower compared to other dimensions. This dimension reflects the emotional component of language learning, encompassing feelings, motivation, and personal connections. Emotionally engaged students demonstrate positive attitudes and joy in learning, contributing to a conducive learning environment and increased motivation. However, the somewhat lower score suggests variations in emotional involvement during the English learning journey.

The “cognitive engagement” and “social engagement” dimensions both received a mean of 3.31, indicating comparable levels of agreement. “Cognitive engagement” relates to students' intellectual involvement and active thinking in their language studies, emphasizing the application of knowledge and metacognitive awareness for deeper learning and problem-solving skills. On the other hand, “social engagement” pertains to interactions with peers and teachers in the English language class, highlighting the significance of social connections for a sense of belongingness, motivation, and improved learning outcomes.

For educators, understanding students' engagement levels in these four dimensions can inform instructional strategies and interventions. By promoting behavioral engagement through active learning tasks, nurturing emotional engagement through positive emotions, encouraging cognitive engagement through critical thinking activities, and facilitating social engagement through collaboration, a holistic and meaningful English language learning experience can be created for students.

3.3 Relationship Between Foreign Language Enjoyment and English Learning Engagement

Understanding the factors that influence student engagement in foreign language learning is of paramount importance for educators and researchers alike. In this context, the present study examines the relationship between Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) and English learning engagement among university students in China. Through a detailed analysis of various dimensions within FLE and different dimensions of English learning engagement, the study sheds light on the significant connections that exist. The findings not only underscore the crucial role of student-related, teacher-related, and learning environment factors in fostering engagement but also align with prior research in this domain. By delving into the interplay of these factors, this study contributes to the broader understanding of how educators can create a conducive atmosphere that bolsters students' motivation and active participation in their English language learning journey.

In this study, Table 3 presents the relationship between Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) and English learning engagement, with various dimensions within each construct. FLE is divided into three dimensions: “FLE-Private” (related to students), “FLE-Teacher” (related to teachers), and “FLE-Atmosphere” (related to the learning environment). English learning engagement includes four dimensions: “behavioral engagement”, “emotional engagement”, “cognitive engagement”, and “social engagement”, representing different aspects of students' involvement in English learning.

The statistical analysis reveals a strong and significant association between FLE and English learning engagement, with all p-values being lower than the alpha level of significance ($p < 0.001$). The “FLE-Private” dimension of FLE shows substantial connections with all aspects of English learning engagement, indicating that personal experiences, interests, and satisfaction significantly influence students' behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and social engagement in English language learning.

Similarly, the “FLE-Teacher” dimension of FLE exhibits significant relationships with all dimensions of English learning engagement, suggesting that teaching style, supportiveness, and passion have a considerable impact on students' levels of engagement.

Furthermore, the “FLE-Atmosphere” dimension of FLE demonstrates significant connections with all aspects of English learning engagement, highlighting the influence of classroom atmosphere, teacher-student interactions, and peer relationships on student engagement.

Table 3 Relationship Between Foreign Language Enjoyment and English Learning Engagement

FLE-Private	$\lambda 2c / U$	p-value	Interpretation
Behavioral Engagement	.597**	<.001	Highly Significant
Emotional Engagement	.614**	<.001	Highly Significant
Cognitive Engagement	.597**	<.001	Highly Significant
Social Engagement	.577**	<.001	Highly Significant
FLE-Teacher			
Behavioral Engagement	.550**	<.001	Highly Significant
Emotional Engagement	.537**	<.001	Highly Significant
Cognitive Engagement	.487**	<.001	Highly Significant
Social Engagement	.539**	<.001	Highly Significant
FLE-Atmosphere			
Behavioral Engagement	.520**	<.001	Highly Significant
Emotional Engagement	.603**	<.001	Highly Significant
Cognitive Engagement	.500**	<.001	Highly Significant
Social Engagement	.552**	<.001	Highly Significant

Legend: Significant at p -value < 0.01

Overall, the study indicates a substantial association between FLE and English learning engagement, indicating that higher FLE evaluation corresponds to increased student engagement.

Guo (2021) conducted a study, confirming a positive association between FLE and Language Engagement (LE). The analysis revealed that teacher-related factors had the most significant impact on FLE, followed by FLE-private. Chinese EFL learners preferred emotional, behavioral, and cognitive interactions with their English studies.

Mercer and Dörnyei (2020) conducted a comprehensive study on learner engagement, including FLE findings. They found that creating positive feelings in students

through teacher-student rapport, healthy peer interactions, and engaging activities with appropriate challenges was crucial for enhancing student engagement.

Li, Jiang, and Deweale (2018) found that teachers could influence learners' engagement by creating a positive learning environment that encourages peer interaction and provides ample foreign language input.

These findings align with the current study, emphasizing the importance of considering student-related, teacher-related, and learning environment factors to promote active and meaningful student participation in English learning. By addressing these factors effectively, teachers may enhance students' motivation, satisfaction, and overall engagement in English learning.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study explored the crucial aspects of Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) and English Learning Engagement among university students in China. The study highlighted the significance of cultivating positive teacher-student interactions, a supportive classroom atmosphere, and personally relevant language learning experiences to enhance student motivation, engagement, and overall satisfaction in language learning. The findings indicated that the majority of respondents enjoyed learning a foreign language and valued their language teachers as essential sources of enjoyment. Moreover, students' active involvement and enthusiasm were evident in various dimensions of English learning engagement, including behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and social aspects. The study also revealed a strong and significant association between FLE and English learning engagement, emphasizing the impact of student-related, teacher-related, and learning environment factors on students' language learning experiences. Overall, these findings contribute to our understanding of how educators can create a conducive and meaningful language learning environment that fosters students' motivation and active participation in their English language learning journey.

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