

## Exploring the Dual Dynamics of Language Anxiety and Enjoyment in EFL Learners

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### Abstract

In recent years, there has been a growing body of research examining the role of positive psychology in language learning and achievement. However, the predominant focus has been on the impact of negative emotions, while positive emotions have often been overlooked. Moreover, the idea that two opposing emotions can occur simultaneously in language classrooms has been given very little attention. This study, therefore, aims to address this research gap by investigating both negative and positive emotions in English as a foreign language (EFL) learners. Employing a qualitative perspective, in-depth interviews were conducted to elucidate the influence of positive psychology on EFL learners and their academic achievements. The data analysis revealed key determinants of foreign language anxiety (FLA), contributors to foreign language enjoyment (FLE), and the significance of perceived competence in shaping EFL learners' overall language outcomes. The results highlight the critical role of creating a positive classroom environment that promotes enjoyment and reduces anxiety. Increased enjoyment in the foreign language classroom can enhance learning motivation and behaviors, ultimately leading to improved learning outcomes. This research contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of emotions, specifically the interplay between positive and negative ones, and their impact on the language learning process.

**Keywords:** anxiety, enjoyment, EFL learners, affective variables

### İngilizce Öğrenenlerde Dil Kaygısı ve Keyif: İki Farklı Duygu Durumunun Anlaşılması

#### Öz

Son yıllarda, pozitif psikolojinin dil öğrenimi ve başarısındaki rolünü inceleyen araştırmalar giderek artmaktadır. Ancak, bu çalışmalar ağırlıklı olarak olumsuz duyguların etkisine odaklanılırken, olumlu duygular genellikle göz ardı edilmiştir. Dahası, dil sınıflarında iki zıt duygunun aynı anda ortaya çıkabileceği fikrine çok az ilgi gösterilmiştir. Bu nedenle bu çalışma, yabancı dil olarak İngilizce öğrenenlerde hem olumsuz hem de olumlu duyguları araştırarak bu araştırma boşluğunu ele almayı amaçlamaktadır. Nitel bir bakış açısından, pozitif psikolojinin İngilizce öğrenenler ve onların akademik başarıları üzerindeki etkisini aydınlatmak için derinlemesine görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Veri analizi, yabancı dil kaygısının temel belirleyicilerini, yabancı dil keyfine katkıda bulunanları ve algılanan yeterliliğin yabancı dil öğrenenlerin genel dil çıktılarındaki etkisini şekillendirmedeki önemini ortaya koymuştur. Sonuçlar, keyfi teşvik eden ve kaygıyı azaltan olumlu bir sınıf ortamı yaratmanın kritik rolünü vurgulamaktadır. Yabancı dil sınıfında artan keyif, öğrenme motivasyonunu ve davranışlarını geliştirebilir ve sonuçta daha iyi öğrenme çıktılarına yol açabilir. Bu araştırma, duyguların, özellikle de olumlu ve olumsuz duygular arasındaki etkileşimin ve bunların dil öğrenme süreci üzerindeki etkilerinin daha kapsamlı bir şekilde anlaşılmasına katkıda bulunmaktadır.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** kaygı, keyif, İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak öğrenen öğrenciler, duygusal değişkenler

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## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been a growing awareness of the need to expand our understanding of the various emotional factors that contribute to or affect the language learning process. Although there is extensive research on the role of emotions in language learning (e.g. Boudreau et al., 2018; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014), the majority of previous research has mainly emphasized negative emotions and paid relatively little attention to positive emotions. In this sphere, foreign language anxiety (FLA) has become the most extensively studied negative emotion in the field of language education (Horwitz et al., 1986; Jiang & Dewaele, 2020; Özer & Yetkin, 2022; Yetkin & Özer, 2022). The studies on FLA demonstrated that anxiety has a detrimental influence on language learning outcomes (e.g., Dewaele & Proietti-Ergün, 2020). Given these results, previous studies have underscored the importance of understanding the factors contributing to FLA to improve learners' performance. For example, Gregersen and Horwitz (2002) found that perfectionist students are particularly prone to anxiety. Similarly, after conducting a critical examination of the factors influencing language anxiety, Zhang and Zhong (2012) concluded that FLA stems from 'instructors, peers, or classroom practices' (p. 29). Moreover, a substantial body of studies has also shown that fear of negative evaluation (Young, 1990), peers (Gregersen, 2003; Yan & Horwitz, 2008), fear of making mistakes (Gregersen, 2003; Horwitz et al., 1986), and teacher-related factors (Young, 1990) contribute to language anxiety.

The emergence of positive psychology has highlighted the need to explore the influence of positive emotions in the language learning process (Dewaele et al., 2019). Existing literature indicates how positive psychology has a positive influence on both the teaching and learning processes (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012; MacIntyre & Mercer, 2014). These recent developments have led to the recognition of enjoyment in the language education field. Researchers have attempted to evaluate the impact of enjoyment on learners' achievement, with studies such as Dewaele and Alfawzan (2018) showing a positive correlation between enjoyment and language performance. In line with existing literature, Li et al. (2019) discovered that students who reported high levels of enjoyment demonstrated significant success in the language classroom.

Numerous previous studies into FLE have also investigated its contributing factors (e.g., Ahmadi-Azad, 2020; Dewaele et al., 2023; Yeşilçınar, & Erdemir, 2023). It was well established that FLE is more dependent on learner-external variables including teachers and peers (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2019). This is consistent with the data obtained by Dewaele et al. (2018) who concluded that high levels of FLE were associated with positive attitudes towards the foreign language (FL), favorable perceptions of the FL teacher, increased FL usage in class, a significant portion of time allocated to student speaking, a higher standing among peers in the FL class, and an advanced stage of development in the FL. The studies reviewed here underscore the importance of creating a more comfortable and secure environment for students.

### **The role of enjoyment and anxiety in the EFL context**

Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) argued that investigating both positive and negative emotions simultaneously provides a more comprehensive understanding of the emotions in language learning. Given this perspective, in recent years, there has been an increasing amount of literature on the relationship between positive and negative emotions, and their impact on the learning process (e.g., Boudreau et al., 2018; MacIntyre, 2002). Previous research has established that learners can experience both positive and negative emotions simultaneously or independently (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). A similar point has also been made by Dewaele et al. (2018) and Jiang and Dewaele (2019), who found a negative correlation between FLE and FLA. These results suggest that positive and negative emotions may coexist in the language-learning process.

To date, several studies have investigated the FLE and FLA in the Turkish context (e.g., Özer & Altay, 2021; Denkci et al., 2022). In a key study investigating FLE and FLA among Turkish young learners, Özer & Altay (2021) found learners experienced a heightened level of enjoyment and a moderate degree of anxiety in the process of language learning. They also highlighted that the level of achievement had an impact on the experiences, enjoyment, and anxiety among learners. Building on the exploration of enjoyment, anxiety, attitudes, and motivation of 110 Turkish pupils in Italian and English classes, Dewaele and Proietti-Ergün (2020) noted that the positive correlation between FLE and motivation was consistent in both languages. They also revealed that a high level of anxiety is associated with lower language performance. Taking a novel perspective, Yeşilçınar and Erdemir (2023) explored the underlying factors of both enjoyment and anxiety. Their findings indicated that within the Turkish context, external factors related to the learner have a more substantial impact on enjoyment compared to internal factors.

### Current study

Despite valuable contributions, the existing literature on FLE and FLA among Turkish learners still leaves a notable gap in understanding. This study aims to address this gap and contribute to the growing body of research on the emotional experiences of Turkish students in English classes. The specific objective of this study is to investigate the determinants of FLE and FLA among students learning English as a foreign language (EFL). The study aims to provide insights into the sources and triggers of anxiety and enjoyment in this specific context. It also attempts to examine the impacts of FLE and FLA on language learning outcomes. By investigating the relationship between these emotional factors and perceived language competence, as well as overall learning outcomes, the study aims to understand their influence on students' language learning experiences.

The research aims to answer the following questions:

1. What are the sources of FLA and FLE among university students in their English language classes?
2. How do anxiety and enjoyment influence perceived language competence and overall language learning outcomes among university students?

## METHOD

### Research Design

The present study was designed and conducted based on the principles of phenomenological qualitative research. Qualitative research, as Creswell (2002) suggests, is instrumental in studying and comprehending the meaning of people's problems. It is inherently exploratory, allowing researchers to delve deeply into understanding phenomena (Heigham & Croker, 2009; Dörnyei, 2007). Given the complexity and subjective nature of the phenomenon being studied, qualitative research emerges as the most suitable approach to investigate emotional experiences. It enables a comprehensive exploration of participants' experiences and perspectives, thereby ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the relevant phenomena. Phenomenology, as described by Creswell (2013), focuses on understanding and interpreting individuals' subjective experiences of a particular phenomenon. Phenomenology is concerned with understanding a phenomenon comprehensively from the perspective of the individual experiencing it (Qutoshi, 2018). This study, therefore, was aimed at an in-depth understanding of the dynamics of EFL learners' enjoyment and anxiety toward English. By focusing on a small group with similar characteristics, the study aimed to uncover how EFL learners' anxiety and enjoyment beliefs have been shaped after getting three compulsory English courses as a part of their curriculum and graduation requirements.

### Setting and Participants

The study is conducted in EFL setting in Turkey. Convenience sampling was used to select the participants. This method helps researchers to access participants at a convenient time and place, as well as guides their willingness to participate (Etikan et al., 2016; Marshall 1996). In particular, convenience sampling has been selected as the most practical and effective way of selecting volunteers. This method facilitated the rapid identification and recruitment of readily available participants within the researchers' immediate environment, addressing constraints on time and resources. The study comprised a total of 10 participants, each enrolled in a Bachelor of Arts (BA) program at a state university. We chose 10 participants since it was possible to conduct in-depth interviews and successfully evaluate the data within the scope of study. 4 of the participants were males (40%) and 6 females (60%), and their ages ranged from 20-24 and they all participated to the study voluntarily. Even though they study in different departments, they all have completed English I and II courses as their FL requirement for graduation. In these courses, they were taught basic skills of English reading, writing, speaking, and listening as well as grammar and vocabulary. Furthermore, they all also completed elective Vocational English course as a part of their curriculum and they were taught children's developmental stages, examples from teacher-student-parent interactions, techniques to analyze and understand academic text, academic writing, and a basic level of translation besides the aforementioned basic skills which are similar to English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classes. In the present study, the participants were homogenous in terms of their similar age group, level of education (BA), and moderate level of FL proficiency (B1). For anonymity and confidentiality, the participants were assigned abbreviations, ranging from S1 (student participant 1) to S10.

### Data Collection and Analysis

The data collection was organized in two stages. After the study sample was defined, document analysis was conducted to understand the characteristics of the sample under scrutiny. To accomplish this, the curriculum, content of the English courses they taught, and their achievement levels in these courses were analyzed. This ensured that each participant had a moderate level of FL proficiency and understood the necessary role of English in both curriculum and real life. In the second stage, the participants were selected from the sample groups based on their voluntary participation after instructing the purpose of the study, expected study outcomes, and confidentiality of their responses. Semi-structured interviews were used as the main data collection tool. The interview questions were formed by the researchers and modified by two experts in qualitative research. According to their comments, we revised the wording of the questions, ensuring that questions are easy for participants to understand. They also provided feedback on scope of the interview questions to ensure in depth analysis of participants' experiences. Each of the ten participants was interviewed by the same interviewers to ensure consistency in the manner of conducting the interview. Each of the interviews lasted 30-45 minutes, depending on the participants' willingness to provide further information on the topic. To get in-depth responses from the participants, the interviews were conducted in L1 (Turkish).

After all the interviews were completed, each interview record was transcribed and translated into English. After the data familiarity, both researchers analyzed the data by using qualitative content analysis. Initial codes were derived from the literature, such as positive emotions and engagement for enjoyment, and communication apprehension and test anxiety to compare with existing literature. Yet, additional codes were created when the responses did not fall into meaningful codes. In the second stage, the reduction of the codes /sub-codes was done and each researcher finalized their version of the data analysis. In the third stage, both researchers compared and contrasted their codes and sample excerpts under the guidance of Miles and Huberman's (1994) formula. In the last stage, the codes and excerpts were presented to an expert in qualitative research in education, and required modification was done based on the recommendations. All the extracts presented in this paper were translated into English by the first author and they were back-translated into Turkish by the second author. This process ensured that the participants' comments were translated accurately and in a consistent manner, while preserving their original meaning across languages.

### Research Ethics

Data was gathered after getting the required permission from the Niğde Ömer Halisdemir Ethical Commission by decision dated 31.01.2024 and numbered 2024/01-60. All participants voluntarily took part in the study and informed consent was obtained from each individual before data collection. Their privacy and confidentiality were maintained through anonymization procedures during the entire research process.

## FINDINGS

Upon the analysis of interview data, findings were categorized into three main headings: determinants of anxiety, determinants of enjoyment, and their impact on language learning outcomes. These detailed classifications provide a structured framework for understanding the factors influencing both positive and negative emotional experiences of language learners. Furthermore, we can present the influence of those emotions on language learning outcomes. We incorporated direct excerpts from the interviews to support the identified themes. We used identification numbers for individual participants to help maintain their anonymity.

### Determinants of FLA

This study aimed to explore the sources of FLA among Turkish EFL students. Through qualitative analysis, five main themes emerged, including fear of making mistakes, poor language performance, specific classroom activities, fear of negative evaluation, and speaking in public. Among the 10 participants, 6 stated that "fear of making mistakes" is responsible for FLA. The pressure to perform in academic settings significantly contributes to the fear of making mistake. Learners worry about their performances and may be afraid that errors will contribute to their language proficiency in a negative way. The following extracts illustrate their perspectives.

*"...I believe the main reason for this anxiety was the fear of making a mistake." (S4)*

*“...I’m often afraid of making mistakes. I’m feeling that every mistake I make has a negative impact on my language competency.” (S7)*

*“Making language mistakes is something to fear. It adds stress to the learning process and makes me a bit anxious during the lesson.” (S9)*

Another common theme was that “poor language performance” is an underlying factor in FLA. Five participants experiencing anxiety attributed their feelings to concerns about their performance in class. When learners perceive their language performance as below expectations, they may experience feelings of inadequacy. These learners may find it difficult to express themselves clearly, understand others, or participate in class discussions. These challenges can lead to frustration and stress, which contributes to the FLA. The following extracts illustrate their view points:

*“I’m not doing very well in my English class, and it worries me.” (S5).*

*“Having low proficiency in English makes me feel nervous”. (S9)*

Three participants highlighted that speaking in public is a factor strongly related to anxiety. While describing their anxiety-provoking moments, they emphasized feeling nervous during presentations and speaking activities. Learners who lack confidence in their speaking abilities may experience anxiety when speaking in front of others. They may fear that they are unable to express their ideas effectively, contributing to feelings of anxiety. The following extracts illustrate their comments:

*“Particularly during my speaking turns, I noticed a rise in my anxiety”. (S3)*

*“I feel nervous before a presentation because I worry that I won’t be able to express my thoughts clearly.” (S7)*

Two participants stated that “challenging classroom activities” lead to anxiety. They mentioned that their anxiety levels heightened when they encountered difficulty. Learners may worry that they lack the necessary skills or knowledge to complete the challenging tasks successfully. Furthermore, the fear of failure can influence their perceptions of challenging tasks. Learners may associate the failure with low grades and feelings of incompetence, which can lead to reluctance to take on difficult tasks. The following extracts illustrate their view points.

*“Reading a text is a difficult activity ... it triggers my anxiety” (S3).*

*“When faced with challenging activities, I feel anxious. I think it is because of the fear of not understanding... As a result, I try to avoid challenging task”. (S10)*

The final theme, “fear of negative evaluation”, centers around concerns about being negatively judged and receiving unfavorable feedback. Performance pressure and anticipation of criticism can significantly impact learners’ anxiety levels. They may worry about being perceived as incompetent and judged harshly. Participants expressed their fear of negative evaluation through the following statements:

*“...The fear of appearing ridiculous triggers my anxiety.” (S1)*

*“If I mispronounce words, my friends will laugh at me”. (S3)*

### **Contributors of FLE**

The second aim of this study was to explore contributors to FLE among Turkish EFL students. The recurring themes were out-of-class activities, specific in-class activities, self-improvement, and authentic language use.

There was unanimous agreement among interviewees (n=5) that “specific in-class activities” such as games, watching videos, listening to songs, reading stories, and making dialogs, were the sources of FLE. Incorporating these activities, can increase engagement and interaction in the classroom. Learners can expose to authentic materials, which makes learning process more meaningful. Moreover, by incorporating a wide range of activities, teachers can increase students’ motivation. By creating an engaging learning environment teachers can foster a positive and enjoyable language learning experience for their students. In the following extracts, participants share their experiences.

*“Playing word games in class made me enjoy it more.” (S6)*

*“... Our teacher showed us movies and videos about the lesson. It made the class more fun and interesting.” (S7)*

*“Reading stories and translating them into Turkish was enjoyable.” (S9)*



*"Using Kahoot was fun."* (S10)

Another commonly expressed opinion among those interviewed was the significant role of "out-of-class activities". Participants emphasized the value of extracurricular activities and independent study sessions, which significantly increased their enjoyment. These activities provide learners with autonomy and independence. They can control their learning process and they have freedom to choose activities based on their interests, preferences, and learning goals. This autonomy contributes to a more enjoyable learning experience. Participants described their experiences with "out-of-class activities" through the following statements:

*"I used Duolingo, and it was very enjoyable."* (S4)

*"Watching TV shows and movies with English subtitles...I had a lot of fun."* (S6)

*"...for example, I love watching videos in English. ...have a lot of fun."* (S9)

*"I have fun while writing the English words on one side of small cards and their meanings on the other side, then collecting them and trying to remember"* (S10)

For a small number of participants, "authentic language" use was the source of FLE. According to them, applying the language in real-world situations increased their enjoyment of learning. They also emphasized how it enhanced their overall language-learning experience. They said it made learning a lot more fun when they could use the language in real life situations, such as talking to their native tongue or traveling. The language learning journey was more fulfilling because of these authentic experiences. This shows that it is necessary to include opportunities in language learning programs for the actual use of a language, as this would really improve motivation and enjoyment among learners.

*"...understanding everyday language is enjoyable."* (S2)

*"If I learn English, I can communicate with foreign people. That is really exciting."* (S5)

The last theme that emerged from the data was "self-improvement". According to participants, language learning is a path to self-improvement. The theme emphasizes the intrinsic value of language learning beyond linguistic proficiency and underlines its role in personal development and self-improvement. One participant described their enjoyable experience with language learning as follows:

*"I enjoy learning languages because it provides self-improvement."* (S1)

### **The effect on perceived competence**

Another purpose of the study was to identify the impact of FLE and FLA on students' perceived competence and overall language learning outcomes. Issues related to unwillingness to participate in classroom activities and low academic achievement were prominent effects of FLA. Reduced English language apprehension, good language performance, and increased classroom participation recurred as the effects of FLE.

The majority of participants mentioned that FLA has a negative impact on the willingness to participate. They reported that anxiety hinders their active engagement in classroom activities. Anxiety negatively affects their willingness to actively engage in learning tasks, potentially leading to reduced participation and interaction during lessons. The statements below illustrate their perspectives.

*"... I don't want to participate in classroom activities."* (S4)

*"...I didn't want to participate in speaking activities due to the fear of making mistakes."* (S9)

Another common view amongst interviewees was that anxiety has a detrimental impact on language performance. Anxiety may impede language proficiency in various ways. For example, it may lead to difficulty in recalling vocabulary or expressing the ideas clearly. This highlights the detrimental effects of anxiety on various aspects of language performance. Participants mentioned that low achievement is a consequence of anxiety.

*"... anxiety negatively affected my performance."* (S5)

*"... and I received lower grades because of my anxiety."* (S9)

On the question of the relationship between FLE and willingness to participate, a widely held opinion was that enjoyment has a positive influence on willingness to participate. This suggests a positive correlation between enjoyment and the motivation to actively engage in the language learning process. Students are more likely to willingly participate in teaching activities, discussions, and interactions when they find language learning entertaining. This result highlights the importance of fostering a positive and stimulating learning environment to enhance learners' motivation and participation in language learning.

*"...During those times, I would completely focus on the lesson, and I would actively participate in the class."* (S2)

*"I want to engage in activities such as playing games."* (S8)

*"The class became more enjoyable and engaging. For example, we were playing games and I wanted to play more. I wanted to take my turn immediately."* (S10)

Several participants reported that FLE reduces language apprehension. Their positive experiences alleviate anxiety in language learning environments. This suggests that the enjoyment of engaging in language-learning activities has a calming impact on individuals, making language learning more pleasant for them. Participants shared their views on this issue as follows:

*"I believe it reduces anxiety."* And another commented *"I do not experience anxiety during enjoyable activities"* (S5)

*"I think having fun while learning has reduced my anxiety because it creates a more positive learning environment."* (S8)

Two participants attributed good language performance to FLE. According to them, enjoyment was a contributing factor to achievement. This suggests that learners' enjoyment of language learning activities has a positive effect on their performance levels and language abilities, in addition to increasing their motivation. The following extracts showcase their opinions.

*"...enjoyment increases my achievement... learning is definitely easier and more memorable when having fun."* (S4)

*"I think when I enjoy in class, I have a better grasp of the topic. As a result, I get good grades."* (S10)

Overall, the analysis revealed five principal sources of FLA: fear of making mistake, poor language performance, specific classroom activities, fear of negative evaluation, and speaking in public. On the other hand, contributors to FLE included out-of-class activities, specific in-class activities, self-improvement, and authentic language use. The study also highlighted that FLA was associated with reluctance to participate in classroom activities and low academic achievement. Conversely, FLE could contribute positively to students' language learning outcomes. These findings underscored the importance of addressing anxiety-inducing factors and promoting enjoyable learning experiences to enhance language learning outcomes among EFL students.

## DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

This study was conducted to identify the FLE and FLA among Turkish EFL learners. With respect to the first research question, consistent with the literature, participants mentioned that fear of making mistakes (Horwitz et al., 1986), poor language performance (Dewaele & Proietti-Ergün, 2020), specific classroom activities (Jiang & Dewaele, 2020), fear of negative evaluation (Young, 1990), and speaking in public (Jiang & Dewaele, 2020) lead to FLA. These findings seem to be consistent with other research (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2019), which found FLA mainly related to learner-internal variables (e.g., fear of making mistakes, fear of negative evaluation, poor performance). The fear of making mistakes and negative evaluations may impact learners' confidence and motivation, consequently leading to poor language performance. This result indicates the need for scaffolding and constructive feedback to overcome anxiety. Participants also reported experiencing high levels of anxiety while speaking in front of the classroom. A lack of confidence in language abilities and fear of negative judgment from peers and teachers may increase anxiety during speaking activities. Collaborative group work activities can be effective for students to practice their speaking skills in a supportive environment. The identification of those factors as significant sources of anxiety among participants and addressing them during the language learning process can reduce anxiety.

Another objective of this study was to identify the sources of FLE. It was revealed that out-of-class activities, specific in-class activities, self-improvement, and authentic language use were sources of enjoyment. In line with the present results, previous studies have found that in-class activities were driving factors of enjoyment among learners (Jiang & Dewaele, 2020; Yeşilçınar & Erdemir, 2023). Incorporating well-designed and fun activities including games, watching videos, listening to songs, and reading stories into lessons can significantly increase learners' enjoyment. Drawing from the results provided by Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014), it becomes evident that teachers play a crucial role in enhancing the language learning process by deliberately incorporating various engaging activities to foster FLE. They can create a supportive environment that fosters positive emotions

through the inclusion of meaningful and stimulating activities. In addition, teachers make an important contribution to the positive classroom atmosphere by demonstrating enthusiasm and passion for language learning. In turn, motivation, self-confidence, and overall language skills of learners can be enhanced. This result further supports the idea that teachers should prioritize the stimulation of learners' enthusiasm and enjoyment of the language learning process rather than the reduction of anxiety (Dewaele et al., 2018) since FLA is closely associated with learner related factors. Furthermore, it was also found that out-of-class activities have a positive effect on enjoyment, which was also reported by Jiang and Dewaele (2020). Engaging in extracurricular activities including watching movies, playing games, and reading books, learners can improve their language skills while enjoying the learning process. These activities give students the chance to use the language outside of class in meaningful and fun ways. Moreover, using AI-based language learning tools such as Duolingo can significantly enhance learners' enjoyment of the language learning process. Teachers may incorporate these tools into their classes as supplementary practice outside the classroom to foster an engaging learning process. The possibility of authentic language use was also mentioned as a source of enjoyment. Mierzwa (2019) similarly emphasized the impact of learning real-life language on FLE. A possible explanation could be authentic language experiences make learning more meaningful and practical. Learners can apply language in real-life situations and involve genuine communication, which may increase their motivation and, consequently lead to increased enjoyment. This further supports the idea of the necessity of incorporating extracurricular language experiences into language teaching practices because these activities provide students with opportunities to use the language in authentic settings and promote enjoyable learning experiences. The participants also associated self-improvement (Mierzwa, 2019; Onodera, 2023) with language enjoyment. It highlights the importance of personal fulfillment in promoting positive learning experiences. This may be due to intrinsic motivation that shapes their commitment to language learning, allowing them to enjoy the learning process while improving their language skills.

The second question in this research was to determine how FLE and FLA impact students' perceived competence and overall language learning outcomes. Participants attributed their unwillingness to participate in classroom activities and low academic achievement to anxiety, which may be stemmed from fear of negative evaluation and the fear of making mistake (Yan & Horwitz, 2008). As stated by Gregersen (2003), lack of error tolerance may also lead to learners' reluctance to actively participate in activities and speak in front of peers. It is possible that when students worry about negative feedback and mistakes, they may struggle to focus on tasks and participate actively in class. Teachers may help students in overcoming these obstacles and fostering a more positive learning environment by addressing the causes of anxiety. They can establish a supportive learning atmosphere where errors are seen as chances for improvement. Another possible explanation is that being a perfectionist (Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002) potentially leads to anxiety since perfectionist learners may be more likely to feel disappointed when faced with a failure. Those students see mistakes as personal failures rather than opportunities to learn. When they consider that they could make mistakes or have less-than-ideal results, they might get extremely disappointed, critical of themselves, and anxious. Previous studies (Dewaele & Proietti-Ergün, 2020; Horwitz et al., 1986; Özer & Altay, 2021; Zhang, 2019) also confirmed that anxiety is negatively correlated with achievement. It is possible to say that a high level of FLA decreases learners' success because they lose their motivation to learn English, and they may invest less effort in language learning. Additionally, FLE was a significant contributory factor to reduced anxiety, good language performance, and willingness to participate. By drawing on the relationship between FLE and FLA, Denkci-Akkas et al. (2022) found out that FLE can mitigate anxiety in the process of language learning. In line with the present result, a prior study (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014) suggests that a positive correlation exists between FLE and achievement. It can be hypothesized that positive emotions enhance overall learning experiences. The positive relationship between FLE and willingness to participate showcases the importance of fostering a supportive classroom atmosphere. In a classroom where students feel valued, supported and encouraged anxiety levels tend to decrease. They are more likely to enjoy the learning process and actively participate in classroom activities. These results suggest the importance of a positive classroom environment to foster enjoyment among learners.

### Implications

This study set out to scrutinize the determinants of FLE, FLA, and their relationship with perceived competence in language. It was established that fear of making mistakes, poor language performance, specific classroom activities, fear of negative evaluation, and speaking in public give rise to anxiety. Considering the contributors of FLE, four broad themes including out-of-class activities, specific in-class activities, self-improvement, and authentic language use emerged from the analysis. It was also found that while FLA negatively



influences participants' willingness to participate in classroom activities and academic achievement, FLE is positively related to reduced anxiety, willingness to participate, and good language performance.

The findings suggest enjoyment plays a facilitating role in the language learning process, which contributes to our knowledge of the role of positive emotions in language learning. Given the relationship between anxiety and fear of negative evaluation, this study emphasizes the significance of establishing a positive classroom environment, where learners feel comfortable and secure, to alleviate anxiety in language classes. An important finding of this study highlights the role of enjoyment in reducing anxiety. Building on this result, teachers should foster positive emotions by integrating enjoyable classroom activities which were mentioned as the source of enjoyment by participants. For example, teachers can design group or pair work activities which can be less anxiety-inducing for students compared to traditional lecturing where they are expected to speak alone in front of their peers. They should also design novel and interesting activities based on students' language levels and personal interests to create an engaging learning environment. It is also well-established that self-fulfillment is a significant determinant of enjoyment. Hence, teachers should motivate students, both externally and internally, to boost their enjoyment. Overall, this study strengthens the idea that creating an enjoyable environment for language learners positively contributes to their overall language performance. Friendly and low-anxiety environments can foster learners' enthusiasm and enjoyment.

The identified sources of both FLE and FLA are likely to resonate with learners from different backgrounds (e.g. Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2019; Jiang & Dewaele, 2020; Yan & Horwitz, 2008). Therefore, while the study targeted Turkish EFL students, its findings offer important insight with a wide range of applicability. These insights can be used by educators and researchers from all over the world, to guide their language teaching practices and provide a more positive, effective environment for students of various backgrounds.

The study is not without its limitations. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews; therefore, we cannot explain change patterns in the learners' emotions. Further longitudinal studies should be conducted to identify those patterns and the dynamic nature of emotions. The findings reported in this study cannot be generalized to all learners due to the small sample size. The results of the study cannot be representative of the entire student population. Furthermore, every learning environment has a specific culture. Researchers should thoroughly examine the specific characteristics and dynamics of each learning setting before making any conclusions. Therefore, future research should include a larger and more diverse group of participants. Despite its limitations, the study provides new insights into enjoyment and anxiety among language learners. Understanding the sources of FLE and FLA will help educators enhance language learning practices by creating a positive and supportive language learning environment.

#### **Statements of Publication Ethics**

The study adheres to ethical guidelines.

#### **Researchers' Contribution Rate**

The authors contributed equally to the study.

#### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors of this article declare that there is no personal conflict of interest within the scope of the study.

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