

## MOTIVATION, ANXIETY, AND PLEASURE (FOREIGN LANGUAGE ENJOYMENT) IN LEARNING ENGLISH: INTERACTIONS AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

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### Abstract

The article examines three key psychological factors influencing English language success: motivation, anxiety, and pleasure from learning a foreign language (Foreign Language Enjoyment, FLE). Modern approaches to studying the emotional-motivational sphere in English teaching methodology, including self-determination theory, the concept of foreign language anxiety, and positive psychology, are analyzed. Special attention is paid to how FLE can compensate for the negative impact of anxiety and enhance learners' motivation. In conclusion, pedagogical strategies for increasing motivation and FLE and reducing anxiety in English lessons are proposed.

**Keywords:** Motivation, anxiety, Foreign Language Enjoyment, learning English, emotional factors, positive psychology, EFL.

### Introduction

When learners' basic psychological needs are satisfied, they are more likely to develop internal or autonomously regulated motivation, which contributes to an overall increase in motivational intensity. In the context of English language instruction, this implies that students' motivation is strengthened when they (a) understand the personal relevance of language learning, (b) observe their own progress and experience a sense of competence, and (c) do not encounter fear of ridicule or punishment for making mistakes.

At this stage, motivation becomes closely intertwined with the learner's emotional domain. Low levels of anxiety and positive classroom experiences, including Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE), create favorable conditions for fulfilling needs related to competence and social belonging, thereby supporting autonomous motivation. Therefore, motivation should not be viewed as an isolated variable; rather, it emerges through interaction with the emotional climate of learning.

Within this framework, the relationship between anxiety and FLE occupies a central position. On the one hand, anxiety may weaken motivation by reducing confidence and increasing avoidance of communication. On the other hand, FLE contributes to the maintenance of motivation by sustaining feelings of competence and encouraging positive engagement in classroom activities. Consequently, further theoretical and empirical analysis should focus on



examining anxiety and FLE as interconnected and mutually influential phenomena. Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) refers to a distinct form of situational anxiety that arises specifically in contexts requiring the use of a non-native language. Unlike general anxiety as a stable personality trait, FLA is primarily shaped by learning experiences and is strongly associated with the social nature of language use, its public visibility, and evaluation by others [9], [11].

Common manifestations of foreign language anxiety include fear of making mistakes, fear of negative evaluation by teachers or peers, tension during speaking and oral performance tasks, and avoidance of participation in communicative activities. Horwitz et al. (1986) argue that FLA develops at the intersection of three core components: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety [9]. These elements make foreign language anxiety qualitatively different from other forms of anxiety: even learners with high general confidence may experience considerable stress when required to speak in a foreign language. For this reason, FLA should be conceptualized as a psychological factor constructed within the educational environment and reinforced by features of classroom practice such as frequent social comparison, public performance, the high significance of grades, and the absence of a psychologically safe learning climate. Research in second language acquisition (SLA) demonstrates that anxiety can exert a broad negative influence on language learning by affecting both cognitive and behavioral mechanisms. From a cognitive perspective, anxiety reduces attentional resources and concentration, interferes with information processing, and impairs the retrieval of linguistic items from memory, particularly under time pressure [10]. The effects of anxiety are especially evident in productive language skills—speaking and writing—where learners must rapidly generate ideas and select appropriate grammatical structures and lexical resources. Under high anxiety, learners tend to demonstrate reduced spontaneity, greater reliance on memorized phrases, and a tendency to avoid complex or elaborated statements [4].

From a behavioral perspective, anxiety contributes to avoidance strategies: learners participate less frequently, hesitate to volunteer answers, reduce initiative in dialogues, and show lower overall engagement during lessons. Such patterns decrease opportunities for language practice, which in turn restricts skill development and may generate a self-reinforcing cycle of anxiety and underachievement [8].

At the same time, anxiety should not always be interpreted as an exclusively negative phenomenon. Nevertheless, foreign language anxiety remains a significant emotional factor capable of reducing the effectiveness of English language instruction, particularly in learning contexts where communication is public and strongly evaluative. Contemporary research, however, emphasizes that the negative effects of anxiety may be partially mitigated through learners' positive emotional experiences, including FLE. Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) is defined as a stable positive emotional experience that arises in the process of learning a foreign language and is associated with cognitive activity, social interaction, and a sense of personal progress. Unlike superficial "entertainment" or entertainment, FLE includes deeper components such as content interest, engagement in the task, pleasure from overcoming difficulties, joy from communication, and increased self-confidence in one's competence [4], [1].

A major theoretical framework explaining the facilitative role of FLE is Fredrickson's broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. Within this model, positive emotions are not merely outcomes of well-being; they function as psychological mechanisms that expand an individual's





cognitive and behavioral repertoire. Specifically, positive emotions have been shown by Fredricson (2001) to broaden attentional focus and perceptual openness, enhance cognitive flexibility, stimulate creativity, strengthen social bonds, and support the accumulation of long-term psychological resources. In the context of the language classroom, these mechanisms may translate into increased willingness to communicate, readiness to experiment with novel linguistic forms, greater persistence in interaction, and more active participation in communicative tasks. In this way, positive affect becomes a mediating force through which learners manage communicative barriers and maintain engagement when encountering linguistic difficulties. A frequent oversimplification in both pedagogical discourse and popular representations is the assumption that anxiety and enjoyment represent opposite poles of a single affective continuum. However, according to Dewaele and MacIntyre's empirical findings indicate that FLE and Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) are only partially inversely related and can coexist within the same learner's experience. Learners may simultaneously experience enjoyment derived from engaging topics, meaningful peer collaboration, or successful interaction, while also feeling anxiety triggered by public performance, fear of errors, or evaluative classroom conditions. Such evidence suggests that the pedagogical goal should not be framed as the complete elimination of anxiety—an objective that is both unrealistic and not necessarily desirable—but rather as the creation of conditions in which positive emotional experiences become more stable and more dominant. In other words, the quality of learner engagement is shaped not by the absence of anxiety, but by the balance of affective experience and the learner's perceived capacity to cope with communicative demands.

Within this affective dynamic, FLE may serve as a form of psychological buffer, reducing the behavioral consequences of anxiety. When learners experience enjoyment, they tend to interpret mistakes as a natural component of learning rather than as indicators of incompetence. They are more likely to perceive complex tasks as challenges rather than threats, demonstrate stronger persistence, tolerate ambiguity more effectively, and maintain engagement even when performance is only partially successful. As a result, enjoyment may contribute to psychological resilience and reduce avoidance behaviors that frequently develop under high anxiety conditions (Boudreau et al., 2018; Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002). Motivation occupies a central mediating position in the relationship between FLE and FLA, as motivational intensity and quality are shaped through affective experience. Elevated anxiety may reduce motivation by weakening confidence, increasing self-protective strategies, and encouraging withdrawal from communication. Conversely, FLE may sustain motivation through positive reinforcement, engagement, and satisfaction with progress in learning (Dörnyei, 2009). Importantly, the strongest association appears to exist between FLE and intrinsic or autonomously regulated motivation: when learners experience interest and enjoyment in language learning, motivational patterns become more stable and self-determined.

This observation aligns with the core assumptions of Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which posits that motivation is strengthened when the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are satisfied [2;227]. In the language classroom, the satisfaction of these needs may simultaneously reduce anxiety and increase enjoyment, thereby contributing to sustained engagement and more frequent participation in communicative interaction.

One of the most significant contextual factors influencing both anxiety and enjoyment is the

establishment of a psychologically safe classroom environment. For this purpose, the teacher's role is to normalize errors as an expected element of learning and to reduce the social threat associated with public performance. This may be operationalized through consistent modeling of supportive responses to mistakes, emphasizing communicative meaning over formal accuracy in early stages of interaction, and systematically employing pair and group work formats in which evaluative pressure is lower than during whole-class performance [8], [11]. Such practices reduce fear of negative evaluation and contribute to learners' willingness to speak English more frequently. In addition, SDT highlights autonomy support as a critical pedagogical dimension. Providing learners with meaningful choices—even in small forms—can strengthen perceived control, reduce stress, and increase engagement. In practice, autonomy may be supported through allowing students to select project topics, choose response formats (oral or written), and contribute their own questions or discussion ideas. Even limited opportunities for choice can enhance ownership of learning and contribute to more stable positive affect.

Another robust source of FLE is the learner's perception of progress. When students can clearly observe improvement and recognize their achievements, they are more likely to experience satisfaction and sustain effort. This requires instructional design that includes a clear lesson structure, transparent success criteria, and incremental learning goals (micro-steps). For instance, replacing broad objectives such as "learn tenses" with more specific and achievable targets (e.g., "use Past Simple in five typical communicative situations") supports competence development and reinforces positive emotion [12]. As competence increases, anxiety tends to decrease, while enjoyment and confidence become more stable. FLE is also enhanced when instructional content is emotionally relevant and personally meaningful. Topics connected to learners' lived experiences, authentic communicative tasks, and materials aligned with contemporary interests (e.g., podcasts, interviews, narratives, and real-life interaction scenarios) can increase engagement and strengthen motivational persistence [5]. Emotional relevance fosters deeper involvement, encourages interaction, and creates conditions for repeated experiences of success. Finally, speaking remains the skill domain most consistently associated with foreign language anxiety. Therefore, classroom methodology should incorporate formats that reduce stress while increasing perceived preparedness. Effective approaches include providing structured supports (e.g., key phrases, outlines, and keywords), designing staged performance sequences (from pair rehearsal to small-group practice and only then to whole-class presentation), and employing formats such as think-pair-share, in which learners first plan individually, then rehearse with a partner, and only later contribute publicly. These strategies decrease immediate performance pressure, enhance perceived competence, and support a more favorable emotional balance in speaking activities.

In conclusion, motivation, anxiety, and Foreign Language Enjoyment are interconnected psychological variables that significantly influence the effectiveness of English language learning. Anxiety can reduce students' productivity, impair cognitive processes, and hinder active communication, especially in productive speech activities. At the same time, FLE serves as an important resource that expands student capabilities, strengthens stable motivation, and performs a buffer function in relation to anxiety. It is especially important to understand that positive and negative emotions can coexist, and the teacher's main task is not to completely eliminate anxiety, but to create a learning environment where the pleasure of learning the



language becomes a stable emotion. This goal can be achieved through a supportive environment, the development of autonomy, the gradual formation of competence, and the use of emotionally significant content.

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