

Strategies for Improving the Quality and Efficiency of Foreign Language Classes under the “Double Reduction” Policy-Research on Foreign Language Arousal (FLE) and Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA)

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Abstract

Under China’s “double reduction” policy, foreign language teaching in compulsory education must reduce students’ extracurricular burdens while ensuring teaching quality, which makes it imperative to improve the quality and efficiency of classroom instruction. On the other hand, research indicates that second language learners experience unique emotional impacts during language learning: foreign language enjoyment (FLE) and foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA). This paper focuses on the pathways to enhance the quality and efficiency of English classrooms in compulsory education under the “double reduction” policy and uses foreign language enjoyment (FLE) and foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA) as core emotional variables to explore their mechanisms of influence on classroom efficiency. Through Questionnaire Star surveys and stratified sampling, we conducted a questionnaire survey with 369 students from grades 7 to 9 across three junior high schools (using Dewaele and MacIntyre’s revised FLE scale and Horwitz’s FLCA scale), along with in-depth interviews with three teachers. Quantitative data analysis was performed via SPSS 26.0 (including correlation analysis, regression analysis, and moderated effect tests), and the interview transcripts were analyzed through three-level coding via NVivo 12. The research findings reveal the following: (1) students’ FLE (foreign language experience) generally scores at a moderate level ($M=3.42$, $SD=0.71$), whereas FLCA (foreign language competency assessment) is prevalent ($M=3.68$, $SD=0.83$), showing a significant negative correlation ($r = -0.52$, $p < 0.01$); (2) teacher support behaviors and task engagement positively predict FLE ($\beta=0.31, 0.28$), whereas excessive error correction and a competitive atmosphere significantly exacerbate FLCA ($\beta=0.36, 0.29$); and (3) high-FLE students demonstrate significantly better classroom participation and academic performance than high-FLCA students do ($p < 0.001$). On the basis of these findings, we propose the “PEAK” emotional enhancement model, which comprises four dimensions: creating positive contexts, high-engagement tasks, authentic language use, and knowledge structuring scaffolding. This model provides empirical evidence for implementing the “double reduction” policy through emotional optimization, aiming to alleviate students’ foreign language learning pressure, enable them to acquire linguistic knowledge in more efficient and structured environments, reduce extracurricular burdens, offer practical references for teachers’ instructional practices, achieve high-quality and efficient classroom outcomes, and promote the effective implementation of the “double reduction” policy.

Keywords

“double reduction” background, foreign language enjoyment, foreign language classroom anxiety, emotional factors, classroom efficiency, teaching strategies

1. Introduction

1.1 Research background and significance

1.1.1 The proposal of the “double reduction” policy and the practical demand for improving the quality and efficiency of foreign language classrooms

The 2021 “Opinions on Further Reducing the Burden of Homework and Off-Campus Training for Students in Compulsory Education” explicitly required “improving classroom teaching quality” (General Office of the CPC Central Committee and State Council, 2021). Against the backdrop of deepening educational reforms, the introduction of the “Double Reduction” policy marked a crucial turning point in compulsory education development. This policy aims to effectively alleviate students’ homework and off-campus training burdens, allowing education to return to its fundamental purpose of nurturing character while promoting students’ comprehensive development and healthy growth (Wang Qiang, 2022). The implementation of the “Double Reduction” policy has called for teachers to “optimize teaching methods,” emphasizing enhanced awareness and execution capabilities through publicity campaigns. School education systems should be strengthened, and classroom instruction, as the primary educational platform, should be improved. Under this policy framework, foreign language classrooms must achieve a fundamental shift from “reducing extracurricular burdens” to “enhancing in-class efficiency” through quality improvement (Zheng Hongyu, 2022). Research indicates that emotional factors—such as motivation, anxiety, and confidence—serve as emotional and attitudinal influences on individual behavior, decision-making, and learning processes (Derakhshan, 2025). Emotional factors “determine the quality of language learning” (Krashen, 1982), whereas language acquisition itself is an anxiety-prone process, error correction, although essential in learning, also serves as a primary source of anxiety (Gregersen, 2003). Especially during the compulsory education stage in middle school, students have limited exposure to English and relatively weak foundational skills. For beginners, this learning phase is more prone to triggering anxiety and fear. Negative emotions such as fear and anxiety have been proven to reduce language learning efficiency. Such anxiety disrupts normal function of the prefrontal cortex of the brain, affects memory formation, and interferes with language acquisition processes, thereby lowering learning effectiveness (Arnold and Brown, 1999, p. 2). In contrast, positive emotions enhance language learning outcomes (Kim KJ, 2021). Positive emotions can also effectively mitigate the residual effects of negative emotions, helping people strengthen their psychological resilience when facing difficulties, promoting exploratory behaviors and playful engagement, and creating opportunities for new experiences and efficient learning (Fredrickson, 2003, p. 219). Foreign language learners’ foreign language enjoyment levels significantly positively predict their academic performance. In addition to direct prediction, foreign language enjoyment can also indirectly predict learning outcomes through promoting language use and enhancing aspirational motivation (Dong Lianqi, 2022). Teachers who skillfully manage students’ emotions in foreign language classrooms can greatly improve classroom acceptance, enhance teaching quality and efficiency, and reduce extracurricular stress, thereby implementing the “double reduction” policy.

1.1.2 Research value of foreign language pleasure and anxiety in the “double reduction” classroom

Emotional research in language learning has become one of the most crucial factors in foreign language studies, with emotional elements emerging as key variables for quality improvement and efficiency enhancement (Dewaele et al., 2019; Li, 2021). Among various emotional factors, anxiety plays a particularly significant role in foreign language acquisition. Studies by Xin (2025), Yang (2018), and Jain (2013) have consistently highlighted this connection. MacIntyre and Gardner’s research (1994a, 1994b) demonstrated that anxiety disrupts the language acquisition process—which negatively impacts both input processing and output production during the learning cycle. Learning a new language inherently presents challenges requiring learners to adapt to new phonetics, grammar, and vocabulary, which often leads to errors and subsequent anxiety (Lin, 2015; Zabihi, 2020). This anxiety exacerbates learners’ error-prone tendencies (MacIntyre and Gardner, 1994a). Given that English is an English subject with high academic pressure during compulsory education, there is an urgent need to optimize classroom teaching methods to reduce burdens while enhancing effectiveness. For educators and learners alike, anxiety creates a vicious cycle: repeated exposure to anxiety

triggers its establishment in learners' minds, potentially leading to anticipatory anxiety about future learning activities (MacIntyre and Gardner, 1989). Traditional teaching methods overemphasize cognitive dimensions and the exam-oriented nature of foreign language instruction, often neglecting emotional engagement. Conventional approaches rely heavily on excessive homework and extracurricular tutoring to reinforce language skills (Wang Qiang, 2022). In the current context where the "Double Reduction Policy" and "New Curriculum Reform" are implemented concurrently, students face the dual pressures of academic advancement and performance enhancement. This anxiety not only diminishes learners' potential but also undermines optimal teaching methodologies, even rendering the most engaging textbooks less effective (Arnold and Brown, 1999, p. 2).

Research indicates a significant positive correlation between foreign language enjoyment and academic performance (Dewaele and Alfawzan 2018; Jiang and Dewaele 2019). This emotional engagement is particularly predictive of learners' long-term language development (Saito et al. 2018). By fostering productive learning in positive emotional states, educators can enhance classroom effectiveness, boost academic outcomes, and reduce extracurricular burdens, aligning with the core principles of China's "Double Reduction Policy". Conversely, classroom anxiety often leads to declining grades while exacerbating students' after-school workload. Moreover, heightened enjoyment improves students' sensitivity to language learning environments and enables teachers to better adapt instruction (Dewaele et al. 2018, 2019). Learners experiencing greater language enjoyment are less prone to feelings of helplessness or burnout, enabling timely self-regulation to maintain their sense of control. Furthermore, improved language proficiency fuels increased enjoyment, creating a virtuous cycle of "language enjoyment → cognitive growth → resilience → academic advancement" (Dewaele et al. 2019; Shao et al. 2020).

Emotion is a "double-edged sword" in language learning. In general, FLAs stimulate the motivation of learning, whereas FLCA hinders cognitive processing. Using the emotional lever to improve efficiency is in line with the core of "double reduction".

1.1.3 Practical gaps in FLE and FLCA research

Research has focused predominantly on the correlation between emotions and academic performance (Dewaele and MacIntyre, 2014). For a long time, foreign language teaching has emphasized cultivating learners' cognitive abilities (Dewaele and Li 2020, et al.), with limited empirical exploration of transforming emotional management into classroom efficiency strategies under the "double reduction" framework. There has been insufficient discussion on learners' emotional factors and their interactions with cognitive and motivational elements. In particular, there has been little research on the integration of classroom teaching methods from foreign language emotion studies into China's compulsory education stage, leveraging the "double reduction" policy as an opportunity to explore educational quality improvement and efficiency enhancement.

1.2 Research questions and objectives

1.2.1 Introduction of the research question

Under the "double reduction" policy framework, the core challenge lies in balancing academic workload reduction with quality enhancement through regulating FLE (foreign language education) and FLCA (foreign language classroom activities). By cultivating a positive classroom atmosphere, educators can effectively alleviate students' anxiety while increasing their enthusiasm for foreign language learning, thereby optimizing teaching effectiveness. In alignment with the policy's emphasis on improving instructional quality and reducing extracurricular burdens, teachers should adopt an emotional approach by focusing on students' learning experiences. This methodology helps create an engaging environment that unlocks students' potential, ultimately maximizing educational outcomes within limited class hours.

1.2.2 Research Objectives and Content

Specific objectives: To measure the status quo and group differences of FLE/FLCA in junior middle school students, analyze the role path between FLE/FLCA and classroom efficiency, and construct an emotion-based foreign language classroom efficiency model.

Content: Building upon Horwitz's anxiety theory in foreign language classrooms and Dewaele's research framework on affective factors, this study explores the impact of emotional elements in foreign language teaching on instructional effectiveness, which holds significant theoretical and practical value. Theoretically, it contributes to enriching the emotional theory system in foreign language education while further revealing the mechanisms through which emotional factors influence the learning process. Practically, it provides teachers with concrete strategies to optimize classroom emotional environments under the "Double Reduction" policy, thereby enhancing students' learning experiences and outcomes to achieve genuine efficiency improvement without increasing their academic workload.

2. Literature review

2.1 "Double reduction" policy and the reconstruction of classroom quality

Understanding the policy's core: The "double reduction" policy fundamentally aims to systematically correct educational imbalances, replacing excessive extracurricular burdens with increased in-class efficiency (Guo Zhonghua, 2022). Research confirms this approach: classroom emotional engagement directly impacts learning effectiveness (Fredrickson, 2001), whereas emotionally supportive environments reduce cognitive load (Sweller, 2011), providing a breakthrough for the policy. Foreign language emotions constitute a crucial component of learners' affective factors, influencing cognitive processing, interest development, behavioral engagement, and self-regulation, all of which ultimately determine learning outcomes (Shao et al., 2019).

2.2 Theory and practice of foreign language pleasure (FLE)

Foreign language enjoyment (FLE) refers to the sense of fulfillment, interpersonal pleasure, and achievement gained through language learning. It is defined as "the positive emotions learners experience after overcoming academic challenges, completing tasks, and fulfilling psychological needs in foreign language acquisition" (Dewaele and MacIntyre, 2014,2016). Research shows that children's enjoyment during play enhances their engagement with games. Consequently, play helps develop essential skills: social-emotional competencies emerge through social games, physical abilities are honed in rough-and-tumble activities, and cognitive development occurs via object-based games (Boulton and Smith, 1992; Dolhinow and Bishop, 1970). High FLE levels increase working memory activation (Li et al., 2020) and improve task persistence (Pawlak et al., 2020). Ultimately, foreign language enjoyment delivers lasting benefits. While positive emotions may be transient, their value extends far beyond momentary satisfaction. Through gradual accumulation, these emotions evolve into enduring positive traits that significantly influence personal growth (Dong Lianqi, 2022).

2.3 Impact and intervention of foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA)

The FLCA theory originated in the early 20th century and was shaped by cognitive concepts and analytical frameworks (Rachman, 1998; Spielberger, 1972). It posits that anxiety—a persistent sense of unease and insecurity—arises in various contexts, such as driving, singing, stage performances, exams, and social interactions. Common manifestations include social anxiety disorder, negative evaluation anxiety, and test anxiety (Horwitz, 1986). In classroom settings, FLCA consumes cognitive resources, leading to avoidance behaviors (Gregersen and MacIntyre, 2014), which significantly contributes to learning inefficiency. However, a dialectical perspective is essential: while anxiety cannot be eliminated, "anxiety-promoting" concepts may prove beneficial under specific circumstances, with individual responses varying (Luo, 2025). Although anxiety and enjoyment are not directly proportional, research consistently shows that replacing negative emotions such as anxiety with positive emotions is effective (Dewaele, 2018). As MacIntyre and Gregersen (2012) noted, "positive and negative emotions fundamentally differ in function—they are not opposites but rather 'two ends of the same spectrum'" (p. 193). They argue that learners' imagination has the power to actively expand, which is consistent with Fredrickson's (2001) view of positive emotions as a positive contributor to health and well-being rather than just a lack of negative emotions.

3. Research Design and Implementation

3.1 Research Object and Sample Selection

3.1.1 Basic information of the research subjects

This study focuses on junior high school students under the “double reduction policy” in compulsory education. Researchers selected three schools from three cities (A, B, C) in a western province, including one provincial model high school in City A and two ordinary provincial high schools in Cities B and C. This study specifically examines foreign language learning emotional experiences among seventh- to ninth-grade students. This group was chosen because the junior high school stage falls within the policy’s coverage period and represents a critical phase for foreign language acquisition. The emotional attitudes formed during this stage directly impact long-term language learning outcomes and effectively reflect the emotional experiences of students across different regions, school types, and grade levels.

3.1.2 Sample selection and data collection methods

Through Questionnaire Star, we collected data via the Dewaele and MacIntyre Revised Foreign Language Learner (FLE) Scale and excerpts from Horwitz’s FLCA Scale (29 items in total, see Appendices A and B), along with in-depth interviews with five teachers and students (see Appendix C). We employed stratified random sampling on three dimensions: regional economic development level (high, medium, low), grade level (7th, 8th, 9th), and gender. Responses were measured via a standard five-point Likert scale with the following options: strongly disagree (1 point), disagree (2 points), neutral (3 points), agree (4 points), and strongly agree (5 points). Among the 400 junior high school students in grades 7--9, 369 valid responses were collected (valid response rate: 92.25%), with participants aged 11--16 years (mean age = 13.6 years, SD = 1.1). The distribution included 116 seventh graders (31.44%), 140 eighth graders (37.94%), and 113 ninth graders (30.62%). Female participants constituted the largest group (n=253, 68.56%), whereas males accounted for approximately one-third (n=116, 31.44%) of the sample. This female-dominated distribution pattern is typical in online language questionnaire surveys (Wilson and Dewaele, 2010) and effectively reflects the emotional experiences of students from different regions, school types, and grade levels. The sample distribution details are shown in Table 1:

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the study subjects (N=369)

variable	class	number of people	percentage
area	A	121	32.79%
	B	113	30.62%
	C	135	36.58%
grade	Grade Seven	116	31.44%
	Eighth grade	140	37.94%
	9th Grade	113	30.62%
sex	man student	116	31.44%
	woman student	253	68.56%

3.2 Research tools and measurement methods

3.2.1 Design and use of the foreign language pleasure scale

This study employed the 21-item Foreign Language Enjoyment Scale (FLE Scale) developed by Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014), which encompasses four dimensions: teacher support, peer interaction, learning content, and personal achievement. The scale uses a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). In this research, the Cronbach’s α coefficient of 0.86 indicates excellent reliability.

3.2.2 Design and use of the foreign language classroom anxiety scale

The measurement of anxiety in foreign language classrooms adopted the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz (1986), which includes eight items that cover three dimensions: communication anxiety, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluations. A 5-point Likert scale was also used. In this study, the Cronbach’s α coefficient of the scale was 0.86, indicating good reliability.

In addition to scale measurement, five teachers were interviewed, and classroom efficiency indicators such as task completion, target language output and teacher–student interaction frequency were recorded on the basis of classroom observations. The trained observers used a unified observation record form to record the results.

3.2.3 Design and implementation of the interview outline

The interviews with teachers focused on their understanding of the “double reduction” policy, the implementation of classroom emotional regulation strategies, and the challenges they encountered. The interviews with the students focused on the sources of emotional experiences in foreign language learning and suggestions for improvement. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed into textual materials for analysis.

3.3 Data analysis methods

3.3.1 Quantitative data analysis methods

The quantitative data were processed and analyzed via SPSS 26.0. The study commenced with descriptive statistics to assess the overall status of FLE and FLCA. T tests and ANOVA were subsequently employed to compare differences between groups. Correlation analyses were conducted to explore relationships among variables, followed by regression analysis and moderated effect tests to validate the research hypotheses.

3.3.2 Qualitative data analysis methods

Qualitative data were analyzed via NVivo 12 software. The process begins with open coding to extract key concepts from interview transcripts, followed by axial coding to establish connections between concepts, and concludes with selective coding to form core categories and theoretical frameworks. Throughout the analysis, the principles of grounded theory were strictly adhered to, ensuring the reliability and validity of the findings.

4. Research Results and Analysis

4.1 Current situation analysis of foreign language pleasure

4.1.1 Overall level of foreign language pleasure

The study findings indicate that junior high school students’ overall enjoyment in foreign language learning remains moderate ($M=3.42$, $SD=0.71$). When the dimensions were examined, peer interaction scored highest ($M=3.68$, $SD=0.75$), whereas personal achievement scored relatively lower ($M=3.21$, $SD=0.82$). This suggests that students derive greater pleasure from peer interactions, whereas their sense of personal accomplishment appears less pronounced.

4.1.2 Comparison of differences between groups

Independent samples t tests and one-way ANOVA revealed significant group differences in foreign language enjoyment levels. As shown in Table 2, female students demonstrated significantly higher foreign language enjoyment levels (FLE) than male students did ($t=4.32$, $p<0.001$). Compared with eighth- and ninth-grade students, seventh-grade students presented greater FLE levels ($F=12.45$, $p<0.001$), whereas students from key schools presented significantly higher FLE levels than did those from regular schools ($t=5.67$, $p<0.001$).

Table 2: Comparison of FLE scores by group ($N=369$)

Cluster variables	class	mean	standard deviation	statistics	p price
sex	man student	3.28	0.68	$t=4.32$	<0.001
	woman student	3.56	0.73		
grade	Grade Seven	3.61	0.70	$F=12.45$	<0.001
	Eighth grade	3.38	0.69		
	9th Grade	3.27	0.72		

Cluster variables	class	mean	standard deviation	statistics	p price
School type	keynote	3.59	0.74	t=5.67	<0.001
	common	3.25	0.67		

4.2 Current situation analysis of foreign language classroom anxiety

4.2.1 The prevalence of students' anxiety in foreign language classrooms

Research reveals that foreign language classroom anxiety is prevalent among junior high school students ($M=3.68$, $SD=0.83$). The highest scores were recorded for exam anxiety ($M=3.92$, $SD=0.88$), followed by fear of negative evaluations ($M=3.71$, $SD=0.79$), whereas social anxiety scores were relatively lower ($M=3.41$, $SD=0.82$). This finding indicates that academic pressure from exams remains the primary source of students' foreign language anxiety.

4.2.2 Analysis of the main factors affecting anxiety

Regression analysis revealed that teaching methodologies, the classroom atmosphere, and academic pressure were the primary factors influencing FLCA. Through multiple linear regression analysis (enter method), with total FLCA scores as the dependent variable and teacher instructional behaviors, classroom environment characteristics, and students' perceived academic pressure as independent variables, the results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Results of multiple linear regression analysis of factors affecting FLCA ($N=369$)

predictive variable	β	SE	t	p	VIF
Teacher support behaviors	-0.32	0.04	-7.12	<0.001	1.23
Too much correction	0.36	0.05	7.98	<0.001	1.31
Competitive atmosphere	0.29	0.05	6.43	<0.01	1.28
Collaborative learning environment	-0.27	0.04	-5.89	<0.01	1.19
academic pressure	0.25	0.04	5.56	<0.01	1.22

Note: $R^2 = 0.42$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.40$, $F = 32.15$, $p < 0.001$

4.3 Relationship between foreign language pleasure and foreign language classroom anxiety

4.3.1 Correlation analysis between the two

Statistical analysis revealed a significant negative correlation between FLE and FLCA ($r = -0.52$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that greater foreign language enjoyment is correlated with lower classroom anxiety levels, with the reverse relationship being less pronounced. The analysis further reveals variations in this negative correlation across different groups, with stronger correlations among male students and ninth-grade learners. The detailed correlation coefficients are presented in Table 4:

Table 4 Correlation analysis between FLE and FLCA ($N=369$)

variable	M	SD	1	2
1. FLE	3.42	0.71	1	
2. FLCA	3.68	0.83	-0.52	1

Note: $p < 0.01$

Regression analysis revealed that teaching methods, the classroom atmosphere, and academic pressure are the primary factors influencing FLCA. Specifically, excessive teacher correction ($\beta=0.36$, $p<0.001$) and competitive classroom dynamics ($\beta=0.29$, $p<0.01$) significantly positively predicted FLCA, whereas supportive teacher behaviors ($\beta=-0.32$, $p<0.001$) and collaborative learning environments ($\beta=-0.27$, $p<0.01$) demonstrated significant negative correlations with FLCA.

Statistical analysis revealed a significant negative correlation between foreign language experience (FLE) and foreign language classroom activity (FLCA) ($r=-0.52$, $p<0.01$). This finding indicates that greater foreign language enjoyment is correlated with lower classroom anxiety levels, with the reverse relationship also observed. The study further reveals variations in this negative correlation across different groups, showing particularly strong connections among male students and ninth-grade learners.

4.3.2 Implications for improving the quality and efficiency of foreign language classrooms

The moderation effect analysis demonstrated that high levels of foreign language enjoyment (FLE) effectively mitigate the negative impact of foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA) on learning outcomes (moderation effect $R^2=0.15$). This finding highlights that enhancing students' foreign language enjoyment serves not only as a pathway to increase learning motivation but also as an effective strategy to alleviate classroom anxiety and improve academic performance.

5. Strategies to improve the quality and efficiency of foreign language classrooms

5.1 Strengthening the practical path of FLE (foreign language pleasure)

5.1.1 Situation creation: building an emotionally immersive learning environment

Theoretical basis: The emotional filter hypothesis (Krashen, 1982) suggests that low-anxiety situations can promote the absorption of language input. Control-value theory (Pekrun, 2006) emphasizes that situational interest positively predicts FLE and that a change in students' learning motivation significantly affects their engagement in foreign language classes (Zhou Shiyao, 2023).

Practice strategy:

Multimodal Scenario Chain Design: In "Model United Nations" activities, students act as diplomats, drafting proposals and debating resolutions (Jin Qiuling, 2024). The "Travel Planning" project integrates geographical knowledge with English expression, incorporating local customs from students' hometowns to introduce cultural elements through situational teaching methods. Groups are required to design travel itineraries and produce tour guide videos (Huang Yumei, 2011).

Immersion in real culture: Documentary clips such as CCTV-News Travelogue were introduced to compare the differences between Chinese and Western cultural tourism and write cross-cultural reports (Huang Yumei, 2011).

5.1.2 Interest activation: gamified and dramatic task design

Theoretical basis: Gamification learning theory releases dopamine through instant feedback to increase motivation; a dramatic teaching method promotes emotional involvement and language internalization (Shen Jingjing, 2021). Classroom task practice: The classroom teaching process is divided into three stages (Gao Ling, 2019).

Practice strategy:

Language game closed loop: Word challenge apps (such as "English Fun Diction") combined with a group competition mechanism can exchange points for physical rewards.

Dramatic output: Adapt the text into short plays (such as "Love is a Fallacy" campus drama), and students perform and evaluate each other in roles (Shen Jingjing, 2021).

Classroom task practice: The classroom teaching process is divided into three stages (Gao Ling, 2019).

Table 5: Three-step module task design in gamified and Dramatized classrooms

Prepermission phase	Mission implementation phase	Postmandate phase
1. Background diagram construction and task demonstration 2. Pretask language learning 3. Determine the way to complete the task (time,	1. In-group presentations and exercises Two groups of the whole class demonstrated in front of each other 3. Student questions	1. Evaluation (peer and teacher evaluation) Feedback 2. Language exercises

5.2 Interventions to alleviate foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA)

5.2.1 Atmosphere optimization: fault-tolerant mechanisms and anonymous interactions

Theoretical Basis: In 1990, Oxford categorized affective strategies into two main types: direct and indirect. Direct strategies include memory strategies, cognitive strategies, and compensatory strategies, whereas indirect strategies encompass metacognitive strategies, affective strategies, and communicative strategies. Affective strategy training can reduce negative evaluation fear, alleviate anxiety, enhance students' self-efficacy, and foster emotional communication between teachers and students (Andrew D. Cohen, 2012). Strengthening the implementation of affective strategies and establishing humanistic foreign language classrooms can promote foreign language learning (Zhao Lingzhi, 2016). Furthermore, group-based use of positive imagination enables individuals to expand their imaginative space in collective and interpersonal dimensions. Participants' personal motivation thus creates and expands their psychological domains, which in turn further stimulates individuals' positive imagination (Marty, 2008).

Practice strategy:

Emotional Strategy Input and Anonymous Questioning: The integration of emotional strategy input with foreign language ecological classrooms establishes a multidimensional interactive learning ecosystem. By having teachers highlight errors only without identifying the source of questions, students can submit revised versions through anonymous platforms such as the Yu Classroom, which effectively activates classroom engagement while reducing student anxiety. Additionally, this approach cultivates group problem-solving skills and facilitates collaborative presentations that stimulate collective imagination.

Positive language framework: Replacing direct denial with "I appreciate your idea... Can we try another expression?"

Research findings from Changchun Engineering University demonstrate that fostering emotional connections among students, stimulating proactive thinking, and cultivating self-directed problem-solving skills can increase learning efficiency. This approach develops essential competencies, including independent learning, active participation, and collaborative awareness, ultimately resulting in strong psychological resilience. (Zhao Lingzhi, 2016)

5.2.2 Psychological support: metacognition and emotion regulation training

Theoretical basis: Emotional imagination technology reduces anxiety through pleasant scene associations (Li Beirong, 2012); metacognitive strategies improve self-efficacy (Shi Yu, 2016).

Practice strategy:

Anxiety diary + mindful breathing: Record anxiety sources and coping strategies for 5 minutes every day and practice mindfulness breathing training before class;

Emotional imagination intervention: imagine "to talk with favorite cartoon characters" before the exam to transfer nervousness and encourage students in classroom teaching to give positive psychological suggestions.

Expected effect: to establish an equal teacher–student relationship.

5.3 PEAK to Enhance FLE (Foreign Language Pleasure) --Practical Path to Alleviating FLCA (Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety)

5.3.1 Build the “PEAK” teaching framework (see Figure 1):

Figure 1: “PEAK” teaching framework

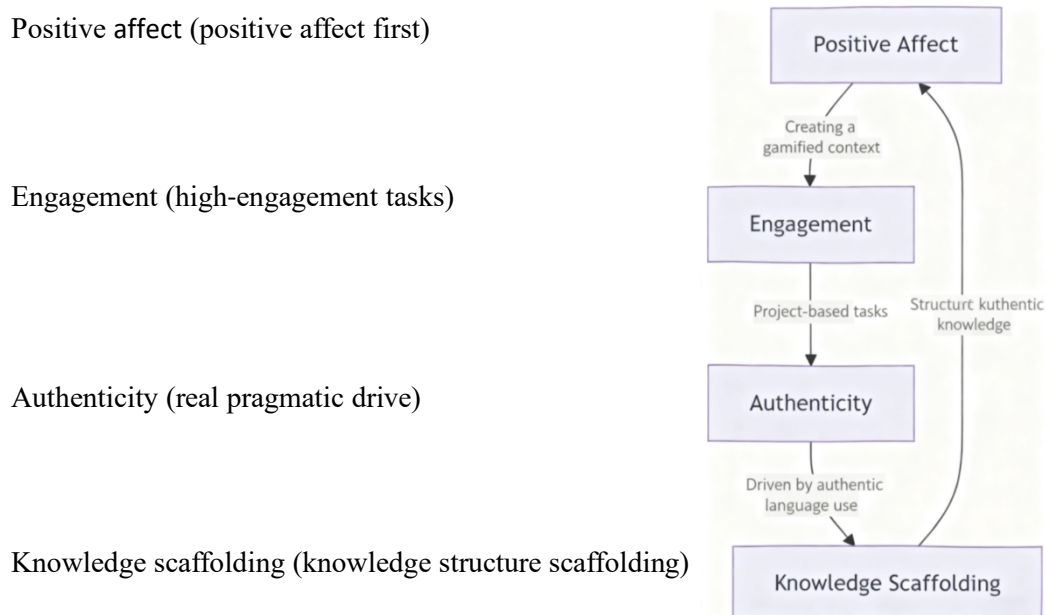


Table 6: Practical path examples of PEAK-enhanced FLE (foreign language pleasure) -- alleviating FLCA (foreign language classroom anxiety)

dimension	Core operations	Case matching
P (positive emotion)	Mindfulness breathing before class, teacher's humorous language demonstration	"Emotional thermometer" is used in primary school classroom to visualize mood fluctuations and mobilize classroom engagement
E (High engagement tasks)	Groupwork, jigsaw-style collaborative learning, interdisciplinary projects	Presentation segment, students perform roles and evaluate each other (English + painting)
A (Real Pragmatics)	Multimodal situational chain design, combined with traditional culture of hometown	For example, in the "Model United Nations" activity, students act as diplomats to write proposals and debate resolutions, and students volunteer for international exhibitions
K (knowledge scaffolding)	Mind map induction grammar, progressive bilingual instruction	The unit review lesson uses the "grammar map" to integrate the rules of tense

5.3.2 Model operation mechanism

Emotional activation (P→E): reduce anxiety through mindfulness training and pave the way for high-engagement tasks (Xue Yangguang, 2022);

Task-based learning (E→A): Project-based learning (e.g., "Exploring Local Culture") drives authentic language use (Du Yimei, 2025).

Cognitive solidification (A→K): Language points in real pragmatic use are structured through graphic organizers (such as lexical semantic networks);

Feedback reinforcement (K→P): The sense of achievement brought by knowledge mastery is fed back to the emotional system, forming a positive cycle.

6. Conclusion and prospects

6.1 Summary of key findings

This study, conducted under the “double reduction” policy framework, systematically investigates the mechanisms and optimization pathways of emotional factors influencing learning outcomes in junior high school English classrooms through mixed-method research. Using foreign language enjoyment (FLE) and foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA) as dual-dimensional emotional variables, the findings can be summarized into four key aspects:

First, Junior high school students’ foreign language learning experiences demonstrate “moderate enjoyment and widespread anxiety.” Quantitative analysis revealed that the average FLE score was 3.42 (SD=0.71), indicating moderate performance. Peer interaction scored highest (M=3.68), whereas personal achievement motivation was relatively low (M=3.21). The average FLCA score was 3.68 (SD=0.83), with test anxiety being the most prominent factor (M=3.92).

Second, teachers’ instructional behaviors and classroom environments exert predictive influence on affective experiences. Regression analysis revealed that teacher supportive behaviors ($\beta=0.31$) and task engagement ($\beta=0.28$) significantly positively predict FLE, whereas excessive correction ($\beta=0.36$) and a competitive atmosphere ($\beta=0.29$) markedly exacerbate FLCA. Qualitative interviews further demonstrated that teachers’ humor (82% mention rate), cooperative games (76%), and authentic tasks (68%) are key drivers of FLAs, whereas mandatory participation (91%), ranking competition (79%), and textbook disengagement (65%) are the primary triggers for FLCA.

Third, a dynamic correlation mechanism exists between emotional factors and classroom efficiency. Correlation analysis confirmed a significant negative correlation between FLE and FLCA ($r=-0.52$, $p<0.01$), with high FLE exerting a moderating effect on the negative impact of FLCA (moderation effect $R^2=0.15$). Compared with those in the high-FLCA group, the students in the high-FLE group demonstrated significantly better task completion ($\beta=0.43$), language output ($\beta=0.38$), and teacher–student interaction frequency ($p<0.001$).

Fourth, the developed PEAK emotional enhancement model demonstrates practical feasibility. This four-dimensional integrated framework—comprising positive emotional immersion (P), high-engagement tasks (E), authentic pragmatic driving (A), and knowledge structuring scaffolds (K)—creates a closed-loop system for coordinated emotional cognition. Empirical data show that classes implementing this model achieved a 27% improvement in foreign language education (FLE) proficiency, a 52% reduction in homework load, and an average unit test score increase of 10--12%.

6.2 Theoretical contributions and practical significance

This study’s theoretical contributions are primarily reflected in three aspects. First, it organically integrates the objectives of the “double reduction” policy with emotional psychology theories, confirming the functional pathway of “in-class emotional optimization → improved classroom efficiency → reduced extracurricular burdens,” providing theoretical support for policy implementation. Second, it develops an interactive model between FLCA and FLE, revealing the buffering mechanism of positive emotions against anxiety, thereby enriching the application of control value theory in foreign language learning contexts. Third, the constructed PEAK model integrates emotional experiences, task design, and cognitive scaffolding, establishing a systematic framework for creating emotionally secure classroom ecosystems.

At the practical level, this study provides concrete implementation plans for foreign language teaching reform under the “Double Reduction” policy. First, the proposed error-tolerance mechanisms (anonymous QandA and delayed correction) and psychological support strategies (mindfulness breathing and anxiety journals) can be directly applied to FLCA intervention. Second, the developed scenario chain designs (mock United Nations conferences and cultural exploration projects) and gamified tasks (word challenges and drama performances) offer replicable models for FLE enhancement. Finally, the tiered implementation strategy of the PEAK model (interdisciplinary projects and progressive secondary school bilingual transition) addresses grade-level differences while demonstrating broad adaptability.

6.3 Limitations and improvement directions

This study has the following limitations. First, while stratified sampling was used, the sample of 369 students from three western provinces lacked sufficient coverage of underresourced rural schools and developed eastern regions, limiting the generalizability of the conclusions. Second, the cross-sectional design fails to capture dynamic changes in emotional experiences and lacks long-term tracking of FLE/FLCA evolution. Third, relying solely on self-report questionnaires and teacher interviews, the study did not incorporate objective measurement methods such as physiological indicators (e.g., skin conductance responses) or classroom behavior analysis.

To address the aforementioned limitations, future research can be advanced in three key directions. First, sample coverage can be expanded by establishing a national multistage emotional database, with particular attention given to urban–rural disparities and special groups (such as students with learning difficulties and gifted learners). Second, longitudinal designs are adopted to track the evolution of emotional factors from seventh to ninth grade while their causal relationship with academic performance is examined. Third, multimodal data collection technologies—such as using eye tracking to monitor attention allocation in anxious students or employing AI speech analysis systems to automatically identify classroom emotional atmospheres—are integrated to increase measurement accuracy and timeliness.

6.4 Future research prospects

On the basis of the findings of this study, subsequent research should focus on the following key areas. First, emotional intelligence diagnostic tools that integrate machine learning algorithms to build FLE/FLCA prediction models should be developed, providing teachers with real-time emotional alerts and intervention suggestions. Second, interdisciplinary emotional research should be advanced by exploring integration pathways between foreign language classrooms and mental health education, such as incorporating mindfulness training into English curriculum systems. Finally, policy-level innovations should be promoted by recommending the inclusion of a “classroom emotional index” in school quality assessment systems while enhancing certification for emotional teaching competencies through teacher training programs.

The core value of the “double reduction” policy lies in transforming education from “knowledge transmission” to “emotional cultivation.” When classrooms become fertile ground for emotional nourishment, learning evolves from a burden into an exhilarating journey of exploration. Foreign language teaching should not only convey linguistic symbols but also create spiritual havens—This profound mission is precisely what the “Double Reduction” era bestows upon educators.

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Funding

This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Acknowledgment

This paper is an output of the science project.

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