

# A Study on Foreign Language Learning Anxiety and Enjoyment of English Major Postgraduates

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## Abstract

With the development of humanism, positive psychology and other related theories and practices, foreign language enjoyment and self-efficacy have also received more and more attention and research. Through literature review, the research on foreign language enjoyment is limited in China, and the research on English majors is even more limited. Therefore, this study chooses English major postgraduates as the special research object, aiming at putting forward useful suggestions for promoting students' academic and professional development.

## Keywords

English major, foreign language enjoyment, learning engagement

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Research Background

For a long time, China's foreign language education has two focuses: one is language knowledge, and the other is language skills training. Although emotion and emotion are important factors that affect foreign language learners' intuition, foreign language education research always pays attention to learners' cognitive level and largely ignores the emotional level of learners. The research on foreign language teaching from the perspective of traditional psychology focuses on learners' negative emotions, such as anxiety and negative motivation, among which language anxiety is the most widely studied. The research on emotion mainly focuses on a single negative foreign language classroom emotion (Li et al., 2018; MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). In recent years, with the rise and development of positive psychology, more and more scholars begin to pay attention to the role of positive emotions in foreign language learning. Macintyre and Vincze (2017) points out that scholars should pay attention to the role of positive emotions and negative emotions in promoting foreign language learning. Reeze (2018) believes that positive emotions can enhance foreign language learners' cognition and motivation, thus promoting their foreign language learning. Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) believes that positive emotions can improve happiness.

### 1.2 Significance of the Study

Fully understanding the relationship between positive emotions, negative emotions and foreign language learning, and studying the relationship between positive emotions and negative pro-emotions in the process of foreign language learning are not only conducive to improving researchers' physical and mental health,

but also conducive to teachers' better use of positive emotions to deal with negative emotions in the classroom and improve teaching quality and efficiency.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Positive Psychology**

Maslow first put forward the concept of positive psychology. Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) clearly put forward that the goal of positive psychology is to realize the positive turn of psychological research and practice, and its three cores include positive subjective experience, such as pleasant interest, as well as positive individual characteristics, such as courage, perseverance, wisdom, tolerance, emotional intelligence, empathy and positive external environment, such as classroom learning environment. MacIntyre and Gregersen (2012) introduced positive psychology into the field of foreign language education research based on the expansion-construction theory. Since then, positive psychology has attracted more and more attention from foreign language educators at home and abroad, resulting in a series of academic conferences, academic monographs and essays related to positive psychology. Compared with foreign countries, the development of positive psychology in the field of foreign language teaching in China is relatively slow, and there is a large room for research and development.

### **2.2 The Study on Anxiety and Enjoyment in Foreign Language Learning**

In the field of foreign language education, traditional emotional research generally pays attention to students' negative emotions. Anxiety is the most widely studied emotion. Horwitz holds that foreign language classroom anxiety is a unique complex relationship of self-cognition, belief, feeling and behavior related to classroom learning, which is caused by the uniqueness of language learning process. Previous studies on anxiety have found that there are many factors that cause learners' anxiety, such as low emotional intelligence, high perfectionism, low language proficiency and teachers' factors.

With the continuous development of positive psychology, the field of foreign language education abroad has also shown a positive turn. More and more scholars began to shift from the traditional study of single negative emotions to the study of overall positive and negative emotions. Piniel and Albert (2018) pointed out that enjoyment and anxiety are the two most frequently experienced positive and negative emotions in foreign language learning. Therefore, as a typical positive emotion, enjoyment has attracted the attention of a large number of scholars.

Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) designed the Foreign Language enjoyment Scale, and investigated the foreign language classroom anxiety and foreign language classroom enjoyment of 1746 foreign language learners from 90 different countries in the world for the first time. The study found that there is a moderate correlation between foreign language anxiety and foreign language enjoyment: the higher the foreign language proficiency, the higher the foreign language enjoyment, but the less the foreign language anxiety; Compared with other countries, learners in Asian countries generally have lower levels of foreign language enjoyment and higher levels of anxiety: female learners have higher levels of foreign language enjoyment and anxiety than male learners. Dewaele and Macintyre (2016) revised the Foreign Language enjoyment Scale and determined the three-factor structure of foreign language enjoyment, namely social factors, individual factors, peer and teacher factors.

Domestic scholars Jiang and Dewaele (2020) pointed out for the first time in 2017 that scholars in related fields should pay attention to the study of positive emotions in foreign language teaching in China. Li et al. (2018) investigated the foreign language enjoyment level of China students in the context of foreign language learning in China for the first time. They took senior high school students as the research object, designed the China version of the foreign language enjoyment scale, and verified its applicability in the context of China.

Li and Xu (2019) studied the relationship between emotional intelligence, anxiety and enjoyment with 1718 senior high school students as subjects. It is found that there is a negative correlation between anxiety and enjoyment, which is consistent with the results of previous studies.

Li et al. (2019) adopted a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, based on positive psychology and complex dynamic system theory, and took 1307 senior high school students in China as the research objects to study the relationship between foreign language enjoyment and foreign language anxiety and its influence on foreign language academic performance. It is found that there is a negative correlation between foreign language enjoyment and foreign language anxiety, and qualitative data also confirm this result, which is consistent with the research results of Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014).

### **3. Research Design**

#### **3.1 Research Questions**

This study will answer the following questions:

(1) What is the level of foreign language anxiety and foreign language enjoyment of English major postgraduates? Is there a significant correlation between foreign language anxiety and foreign language enjoyment?

(2) What are the levels of foreign language enjoyment and foreign language anxiety of students of different grades? Is there a significant correlation between foreign language enjoyment and foreign language anxiety?

(3) Are the anxiety and enjoyment of students of different majors the same?

(4) What are the sources of English majors' foreign language anxiety and enjoyment?

#### **3.2 Research Tool**

This study investigates the foreign language enjoyment and foreign language anxiety of CUGB English major postgraduates by questionnaire, which consists of four parts:

The first part is to know the basic information of participants, such as gender, major, age, grade, etc.

The second part uses the anxiety scale reconstructed by Du (2019) to measure. The scale consists of three dimensions: communication anxiety, academic anxiety and classroom anxiety, and contains 21 questions. The five-point Likert scale is used to score, from “completely disagree (1 point) to completely agree (5 points). A total score below 63 indicates a low level of foreign language anxiety, a total score between 63 and 84 indicates a moderate level of foreign language anxiety, and a total score above 84 indicates a high level of foreign language anxiety.

In the third part, Li et al. (2018) validated China Foreign Language enjoyment Scale was used to test the subjects. The scale consists of three dimensions: individual, teacher and environment, and contains 11 questions. It is scored by a five-point Likert scale, ranging from completely disagreeing (1 point) to “completely agreeing” (5 points). A total score of less than 33 indicates a low level of foreign language enjoyment, a total score of 33-44 indicates a moderate level of foreign language enjoyment, and a total score of more than 44 indicates a high level of foreign language enjoyment.

The fourth part adopts the combination of online and offline. First, online respondents are required to answer two open questions: describe in detail the pleasant and anxious events experienced in foreign language learning. Secondly, semi-structured interviews were conducted with individual students by offline random method to further understand the factors affecting foreign language anxiety and foreign language enjoyment of English major graduates.

#### **3.3 Data Collection**

Questionnaires are distributed through the internet. A total of 20 questionnaires were collected in this survey, and 16 valid questionnaires were removed.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis is mainly divided into two stages. In the first stage, spss 22.0 was used to make descriptive statistics, T-test and correlation analysis on the questionnaire data to solve the first three questions raised in this study. In the second stage, two open questions and interviews are marked and analyzed by manual marking.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 The Level and Correlation between Foreign Language Anxiety and Enjoyment

In order to understand the level of foreign language anxiety and enjoyment of English major postgraduates, SPSS22.0 was used to make descriptive statistics on the variables, and the results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 shows that the respondents' average level of foreign language anxiety is 62.54, lower than 63, and the average level of enjoyment is 47, higher than 44.57, which shows that English majors have a low level of foreign language anxiety and a high level of foreign language enjoyment.

In order to understand the correlation between foreign language anxiety level and foreign language enjoyment level of English major postgraduates, SPSS 22.0 was used to conduct paired sample T test and Pearson correlation analysis. T-test results of paired samples show that there is a statistically significant difference between foreign language anxiety level and enjoyment level of English major postgraduates ( $t=18.295$ ,  $df=227$   $P=0.000 < 0.05$ ). Pearson correlation results show that there is a significant negative correlation between foreign language enjoyment level and foreign language anxiety level of English major postgraduates ( $r=-0.242$ ,  $P=0.000 < 0.05$ ). This result shows that the higher the level of foreign language enjoyment, the lower the level of anxiety.

Table 1

Classification	N	Score area	Average
Anxiety	16	21-105	62.54
Pleasure	16	11-55	44.57

### 4.2 The Level of Foreign Language Anxiety and Enjoyment of English Major Postgraduates in Different Grades

In order to understand the level of foreign language anxiety and enjoyment of English majors in different grades, SPSS 22.0 is used to make descriptive statistics on the variables, and the results are shown in Table 2 (the lower grades refer to Grade One, Grade Two and the upper grades refer to Grade Three).

Table 2 shows that the average level of foreign language anxiety of junior and senior English majors is lower than 63, which shows that the level of foreign language anxiety of English majors is low. Both junior and senior English majors have a foreign language enjoyment level of more than 44 points, which shows that their foreign language enjoyment level is high. As can be seen from Table 2, English majors' foreign language anxiety does not decrease with the increase of grade, and foreign language enjoyment does not increase with the increase of grade.

In order to find out whether there are significant differences in foreign language anxiety and enjoyment levels among English major postgraduates in different grades, this study uses SPSS 22.0 to conduct independent sample T-test on each variable. The results show that English major undergraduates in different grades have foreign language enjoyment levels ( $df=224$ ,  $T=1.836$ ,  $P=0.960$ ) and foreign language anxiety levels ( $df=224$ ,  $T=-1.270$ ,  $P=0$ ).

The above results show that there is no statistically significant difference in foreign language enjoyment level and foreign language anxiety level among English majors of different grades, and the foreign language enjoyment level of senior students is lower than that of junior students, and the foreign language anxiety level is higher than that of junior students, which may be related to the higher employment pressure, higher foreign language learning requirements and greater academic pressure of senior students.

Table 2

Classification	N		Score Range		Average Value	
	Lower Grade	Senior Grade	Lower Grade	Senior Grade	Lower Grade	Senior Grade
Anxiety	10	6	21-105	21- 105	60.23	61.25
Pleasure	10	6	11-55	11-55	47.34	46.51

### 4.3 The Level of Foreign Language Anxiety and Enjoyment of English Major Postgraduates with Different Research Directions

In order to understand the level of foreign language anxiety and enjoyment of English majors in different research directions, SPSS 22.0 was used to make descriptive statistics on the variables, and the results are shown in Table 3.

In order to know whether there are significant differences in foreign language anxiety and enjoyment levels among English major postgraduates in different research directions, this study uses SPSS 22.0 to conduct independent sample T-test on each variable. The results show that English major undergraduates in different grades have foreign language enjoyment levels ( $df=226$ ,  $T=1.426$ ,  $P=0.960$ ) and foreign language anxiety levels ( $df=225$ ,  $T=-1.357$ ,  $P=0$ ).

The above results show that there is no statistically significant difference in foreign language enjoyment level and foreign language anxiety level of English major postgraduates in different research directions, and the enjoyment level of mastering foreign language is lower than that of mastering foreign language, and the anxiety level of Academic Master is higher than that of Professional Master, which may be due to the fact that Academic Master pays more attention to scientific research, the learning process is relatively boring and the graduation requirements are higher. Professional Master pay more attention to practice, the learning process is relatively more interesting, and the graduation requirements are relatively easy.

Table 3

Classification	N		Score Range		Average Value	
	Professional master's degree	Academic master's degree	Professional master's degree	Academic master's degree	Professional master's degree	Academic master's degree
Anxiety	11	5	21-105	21-105	60.53	62.32
Pleasure	11	5	11-55	11-55	46.25	45.47

### 4.4 Sources of Foreign Language Anxiety Enjoyment

According to the analysis of the data, English major graduate students also have classroom anxiety, academic anxiety and communication anxiety in the process of English learning, and they will also be happy because of their good performance in classroom activities, good teaching methods, support and encouragement from their classmates, their interest in English learning and their learning progress.

After summing up, some universal reasons have been found. Classroom anxiety is the most common problem that puzzles students who participate in the survey. Student 1 mentioned that when the foreign teacher suddenly asked us to make an uninterrupted impromptu speech based on a point of view, he would be nervous for fear of being told by the teacher. Speaking of academic anxiety, student 3 mentioned that he was anxious and nervous when writing his thesis at the end of the term, and his brain was blank and he could not express his thoughts.

According to the data analysis, students' foreign language enjoyment comes from teachers, themselves, classmates and some classroom activities in English learning. Most students said that they would enjoy learning English when they were praised by teachers and made some progress. Student 2 said that her first class presentation was well prepared and was praised by the teacher, which made her feel very fulfilled. Student 5 said that if teachers adopt various teaching methods, such as group discussion, role-playing and news imitation, they will learn things easily and be happy.

## 5. Conclusion

The study found that:

First, the English major graduate students have a low level of foreign language anxiety and a high level of foreign language enjoyment, and there is a significant negative correlation between foreign language enjoyment and foreign language anxiety, that is, the higher the English major graduate students' foreign language enjoyment level, the lower their anxiety level.

Secondly, there is no statistically significant difference in the level of foreign language enjoyment and foreign language anxiety among English majors in different grades, that is, the foreign language anxiety of English majors does not decrease with the increase of grades, and the foreign language enjoyment does not increase with the increase of grades.

Thirdly, there is no significant difference in foreign language enjoyment and foreign language anxiety among foreign language majors in different research directions.

Thirdly, English major postgraduates' foreign language anxiety comes from classroom, study and communication, and their foreign language enjoyment comes from classroom activities, teachers' teaching methods, classmates' support and encouragement, and progress in English learning.

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