

# The Predictive Roles of Foreign Language Anxiety, Enjoyment, and Boredom on Chinese Students' English Achievements

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This study examines the predictive roles of foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA), foreign language enjoyment (FLE), and foreign language boredom (FLB) in English achievement among Chinese senior high school students. Despite extensive research on anxiety in language learning, less attention has been given to boredom, and the combined effects of these three emotions on English achievement remain under-explored, particularly among high school students in China. To address these gaps, a sample of 142 students from Guangzhou was surveyed using questionnaires to assess their emotional experiences and English achievement. The research found that FLE exhibited a positive correlation with academic performance, while FLCA and FLB showed negative associations. Notably, FLE was the most significant predictor of English achievement, followed by FLCA and FLB. Gender differences were observed, with male students reporting significantly higher levels of environmental enjoyment, while female students experienced significantly greater communication anxiety. On this basis, this paper offers suggestions on how to enhance senior high school students' FLE while mitigating FLCA and FLB, thereby promoting more effective and sustained English learning.

*Keywords:* foreign language anxiety, foreign language enjoyment, foreign language boredom, English achievement, predictive roles

## Introduction

In recent years, the role of emotions in foreign language learning has gained considerable attention, given their significant impact on learners' motivation, engagement, and overall academic performance. According to the National English Curriculum Standard for General Senior High Schools (2017 edition, 2020 revision), English education should not only focus on language proficiency, but also on cultivating students' positive emotional attitudes and self-regulation abilities. Among the various emotions associated with language learning, foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA) has been widely studied as a negative factor that hinders learning. However, there has been a growing interest in understanding the effects of positive emotions, such as foreign language enjoyment (FLE), and other under-explored negative emotions, such as foreign language boredom (FLB), on language learning achievement. These developments reflect a shift in research focus from predominantly studying negative emotions to understanding the broader emotional landscape in foreign language education.

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Based on the current research background, this research aims to investigate the predictive effects of foreign language anxiety, foreign language enjoyment, and foreign language boredom on English achievement among Chinese senior high school students. Specifically, the study seeks to examine the levels of these three emotional variables, their interrelationships, and their individual and combined effects on students' English learning outcomes.

## Literature Review

### Foreign Language Emotions and Language Achievement

**Foreign language classroom anxiety.** Foreign language classroom anxiety, referred to as foreign language anxiety in this study, is a prevalent issue that has been extensively studied in the field of language acquisition. FLCA is often assessed using the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), created by Horwitz, and is defined as “a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process” (E. Horwitz, M. Horwitz, & Cope, 1986, p. 128).

The literature on foreign language anxiety and foreign language achievement presents a complex and sometimes conflicting picture. Numerous studies have consistently reported a negative correlation between FLCA and academic performance, indicating that higher levels of anxiety are typically associated with lower achievement (Lu & Liu, 2015; Jiang & Dewaele, 2019). Nevertheless, findings in the literature are not entirely consistent. Some studies have identified a positive correlation between anxiety and performance (Yin et al., 2012), while others have found no statistically significant relationship (Alidoost, Mirchenari, & Mehr, 2013). Moreover, there is still ongoing debate about the exact strength of the negative correlation between the two.

The introduction of meta-analysis offers the potential for a comprehensive and systematic re-analysis of the relationship between FLCA and academic achievement. For instance, Teimouri, Goetze, and Plonsky (2019) conducted a meta-analysis that spanned data from 23 countries, identifying a moderate overall negative correlation between FLCA and academic performance. This finding is supported by subsequent research (Botes, Dewaele, & Greiff, 2020). However, further research is needed to clarify the stability and strength of this relationship in different contexts.

**Foreign language enjoyment.** As the positive counterpart of FLCA, foreign language enjoyment focuses on the positive emotions that facilitate language learning. It is characterized by feelings of “enjoyment, fun, interest, and lack of boredom” during the learning process (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014, p. 242). According to Botes et al. (2021), FLE can be described as the extensive range of positive feelings that FL learners experience once their psychological necessities are satisfied within the classroom setting.

While much of the existing research has explored learner-internal and learner-external factors that influence FLE, such as age, attitudes toward the foreign language, teacher behavior, and classroom dynamics (Dewaele, Witney, Saito, & Dewaele, 2018), the relationship between FLE and academic achievement remains under-examined (Li & Wei, 2023).

The limited studies on this topic have generally indicated that FLE is positively associated with foreign language achievement and that learners' self-perceived proficiency is a significant predictor of their enjoyment levels (Dewaele & Alfawzan, 2018). Furthermore, while FLCA has been shown to negatively correlate with self-rated proficiency across all levels of academic achievement, FLE demonstrates a positive relationship (Li &

Dewaele, 2020). These results suggest that students who experience higher levels of enjoyment in foreign language classrooms are not only more likely to achieve greater academic success but also tend to view their own language abilities more favorably.

**Foreign language boredom.** Foreign language boredom, a recently recognized emotion, has been defined as a three-dimensional achievement emotion encompassing various negative feelings and symptoms, such as inattentiveness, disengagement, and the urge to withdraw (Li, 2021). More specifically, it is characterized as a negative emotional state marked by low activation or arousal, often triggered by tasks that are perceived as excessively difficult, insufficiently stimulating, or lacking meaningful relevance for the learner (Li, Dewaele, & Hu, 2023).

Research suggests that FLB can have a detrimental impact on learning outcomes (Macklem, 2015). For instance, Li and Han (2022) found that Chinese university students generally experienced low levels of FLB, a finding corroborated by subsequent research conducted by Li and Wei (2023). Furthermore, studies have consistently reported a negative relationship between FLB and foreign language achievement. For example, Li and Dewaele (2020) examined the online learning experiences of 348 non-English major university students during the pandemic and concluded that FLB moderately and negatively predicted academic performance in English. Another study showed that FLE positively but FLB negatively predicted the students' English achievement (Zhao & Wang, 2023). Despite these findings, more research efforts are needed for enhanced understandings of this construct.

**FL emotions and academic achievement.** Although related studies have found that FLCA, FLE, and FLB are the most frequent second language achievement emotions (Li et al., 2023), few studies have investigated how the three emotions jointly influence foreign academic achievement. It is worth noting that Li and Wei (2023) found that each of the three emotions independently contributed to predicting language success among Chinese junior secondary students, with FLE emerging as the strongest and most enduring positive predictor, highlighting the role of enjoyment in both immediate performance and sustained effort. Similarly, a meta-analysis by Xiao and Zhang (2024) also identifies FLE as a more potent predictor of language achievement than FLCA and FLB.

However, in the online context, Li and Han (2022) found a slightly different pattern in the joint model, where FLCA was the only significant predictor of actual language achievement, while FLE and FLB did not significantly contribute to performance. In the similar vein, Dewaele, Botes, and Greiff (2023) found that FLCA was the most significant negative predictor of language achievement, followed by FLB and FLE. Furthermore, Li and Xing (2024) found that FLCA and FLB were significant predictors of language performance, whereas FLE showed no predictive effect. There is a need for studies that simultaneously investigate these emotions to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the emotional and cognitive landscapes of language learners.

In addition, the predictive effects of FL emotions on academic achievement appear to vary across student groups and educational levels. For example, Dewaele (2022) reported notable distinctions between secondary and tertiary-level students, suggesting that the relationship between emotional factors and learning outcomes may be influenced by developmental stages. Zhang (2022) further argued that academic level (primary, secondary, or tertiary) could moderate the correlations between FL emotions and achievement.

In response to the identified research gaps, this study seeks to explore the following questions:

1. What are the current levels of FLCA, FLE, and FLB among Chinese senior high school students?

2. What are the correlations between FLCA, FLE, FLB, and students' English achievement?
3. How strongly do FLCA, FLE, and FLB, individually and jointly, predict students' English achievement?

## Methodology

### Participants

This study involved 142 Grade 10 students (74 males and 68 females) recruited from a senior high school located in Guangzhou, the capital city of Guangdong Province in China. The participants were selected from four classes within the school, ensuring a diverse representation of gender and academic achievement levels. All participants spoke English as a foreign language and rarely used English outside the classroom, ensuring a controlled context for examining the emotional factors influencing their English learning.

### Instruments

The instruments include three scales designed to assess FLCA, FLE and FLB, along with English test scores used to evaluate FL performance. All the scales were presented in Chinese, so that students can better understand the questions and give the correct answers.

**The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS).** This research employed the modified version of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale designed by Du Xin (2019). This scale comprises 21 questions divided into three categories: communication anxiety (Items 1-9), academic anxiety (Items 10-16), and class anxiety (Items 17-21). In this study, the scale demonstrated a Cronbach's alpha of 0.925 and a KMO measure of 0.885, confirming that it is a dependable and valid tool for investigation.

**Chinese Version of Foreign Language Enjoyment Scale.** For this study, the FLE scale utilized the Chinese Version of the Foreign Language Enjoyment Scale (CFLES) as adapted by Li, Jiang, and Dewaele (2018), which is a revised iteration of the original Foreign Language Enjoyment Scale (FLES) created by Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014). The scale contains 11 items and three dimensions, including individual foreign language enjoyment, teacher-related foreign language enjoyment, and classroom atmosphere foreign language enjoyment. For the present study, the scale also reached a satisfactory reliability and validity level (Cronbach's alpha = 0.841, KMO = 0.799).

**Foreign Language Classroom Boredom Scale.** The eight-item Foreign Language Classroom Boredom Scale (FLCBS) (Li, 2021), a subscale of the broader 32-item Foreign Language Learning Boredom Scale (FLLBS), was adopted for the current study. The scale in this research demonstrated excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.940) and strong construct validity (KMO = 0.916).

**English test scores.** In this study, tests from the final exam were utilized to evaluate foreign language achievement. Designed by experienced and professional teachers, the tests ensured good reliability and validity, effectively reflecting students' performance. Additionally, the administration of the tests was carried out by the school in a formal environment.

### Data Analysis

Descriptive statistical analysis was performed to detail the levels of the three emotional factors. Following this, participants were grouped based on gender, and independent sample *t*-tests were performed to explore the differences among these groups. Subsequently, Pearson correlation analysis assessed how the three emotional factors are related to English performance. Regression analysis assessed the predictive power of these emotional variables on English achievement.

## Results

### The Current Situation of Senior High School Students' FL Emotions

In this part, descriptive analysis was used to analyze the general situation of FLCA, FLE, and FLB.

**The current situation of senior high school students' FLCA.** As indicated in Table 1, the mean scores for all dimensions of foreign language anxiety range between 2.5 and 3.4, with academic anxiety having the highest mean score ( $M = 3.005$ ), and classroom anxiety being the lowest ( $M = 2.966$ ). The results suggest that the participants experience a moderate degree of foreign language anxiety across all dimensions.

Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics of Participants' FLCA*

Dimensions	<i>N</i>	Minimum	Maximum	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
FLCA	142	1.19	4.71	2.991	0.688
Communication anxiety	142	1.22	5	2.994	0.728
Academic anxiety	142	1.14	4.71	3.005	0.888
Class anxiety	142	1	5	2.966	0.834

**The current situation of senior high school students' FLE.** Table 2 reveals the overall enjoyment level among high school students falls within the moderate to high range, with an overall mean score of 3.478 ( $M > 3$ ).

Teacher-related enjoyment stands out as the most significant factor, with the highest mean score ( $4.115 > 3$ ). Individual enjoyment also shows a moderate to high mean score ( $M = 3.380$ ). Environmental enjoyment ( $M = 3.002$ ) falls within the moderate range.

Table 2

*Descriptive Statistics of Participants' FLE*

Dimensions	<i>N</i>	Minimum	Maximum	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
FLE	142	2.18	5	3.478	0.538
Individual FLE	142	1	5	3.380	0.807
Teacher-related FLE	142	2.67	5	4.115	0.582
Classroom atmosphere FLE	142	1	5	3.002	0.747

**The current situation of senior high school students' FLB.** As shown in Table 3, the overall mean score for boredom is 2.673. This score falls within the moderate range (2.5-3.4), suggesting that students generally experience a moderate level of boredom in foreign language learning. However, the relatively high standard deviation ( $SD = 0.901$ ) suggests significant variation in boredom levels among participants.

Table 3

*Descriptive Statistics of Participants' FLB*

	<i>N</i>	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	<i>SD</i>
FLB	142	1	5	2.673	0.901

### The Correlations Among Students' FL Emotions and English Achievement

All three emotions were significantly correlated with English achievement. FLCA showed a moderate negative correlation with English achievement ( $r = -0.443$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Similarly, FLB exhibited a moderate negative correlation with English achievement ( $r = -0.484$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). On the other hand, FLE demonstrated a moderate positive correlation with English achievement ( $r = 0.494$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) (see Table 4). These results

demonstrate that higher levels of anxiety or boredom, as well as lower levels of enjoyment, are linked to poorer English achievement.

Table 4

*The Correlations Between the FL Emotions and English Achievement*

	FLE	FLCA	FLB	English achievement
FLE	1			
FLCA	-0.614**	1		
FLB	-0.741**	0.647**	1	
English achievement	0.494**	-0.443**	-0.484**	1

**The Prediction of the FL Emotions on English Achievements**

**Predictive effect of FLCA on English achievement.** First of all, this study analyzes the individual predictive effects of the three emotions on English emotions. The predictive analysis results for FLCA's impact on English achievement are presented in Table 5 below.

Table 5

*Regression Analysis With FLCA as Predictors of English Achievement*

	$R^2$	$F$	Unstandardized Coefficients B Std. Error		Standardized Coefficients Beta	$t$	Sig.
(Constant)			121.17	3.728		32.503	0.000
FLCA	0.197	34.244	-7.11	1.215	-0.443	-5.852	0.000

As shown in Table 5, FLCA accounts for 19.7% of the variation in English achievement ( $R^2 = 0.197$ ). Besides, the Sig. value of FLCA is 0.000 ( $p < 0.05$ ), and the regression coefficient of FLCA is negative, implying that it significantly and negatively impacts English achievement. In other words, the higher the FLCA, the lower the English achievement.

**Predictive effect of FLE on English achievement.** Next, this study examines the predictive effect of FLE on English achievement.

Table 6

*Regression Analysis With FLE as Predictors of English Achievement*

	$R^2$	$F$	Unstandardized Coefficients B Std. Error		Standardized Coefficients Beta	$t$	Sig.
(Constant)			64.686	5.298		12.21	0.000
FLE	0.244	45.245	10.127	1.506	0.494	6.726	0.000

In Table 6, FLE accounts for 24.4% of the variation in English achievement ( $R^2 = 0.244$ ). The Sig. value of FLE is 0.000 ( $p < 0.05$ ), and the regression coefficient of FLE is positive, implying that it significantly and positively impacts English achievement. In other words, the higher the FLE, the better the English achievement.

**Predictive effect of FLB on English achievement.** This study employs simple linear regression to examine the predictive effect of FLB on English achievement.

The results, as detailed in Table 7, reveal that FLB explains 23.5% of the variance in English achievement ( $R^2 = 0.235$ ). The Sig. value of FLB is 0.000 ( $p < 0.05$ ), and the regression coefficient of FLB is negative, which

means it has a significant and negative influence on English achievement. In other words, higher levels of FLB are associated with lower English achievement.

Table 7

*Regression Analysis With FLB as Predictors of English Achievement*

	$R^2$	$F$	Unstandardized Coefficients B Std. Error		Standardized Coefficients Beta	$t$	Sig.
(Constant)	0.235	42.927	115.751	2.551		45.367	0.000
FLB			-5.927	0.905	-0.484	-6.552	0.000

**Joint predictive effects of FL emotions on English achievement.** The joint predictive effects of FLCA, FLE, and FLB on English achievement were examined through a multiple linear regression analysis.

Table 8

*Regression Analysis With Three Emotions as Predictors of English Achievement*

	$R^2$	$F$	Unstandardized Coefficients B Std. Error		Standardized Coefficients Beta	$t$	Sig.
(Constant)	0.29	18.798	96.272	11.799		8.159	0.000
FLCA			-2.654	1.563	-0.165	-1.698	0.092
FLE			5.132	2.268	0.25	2.263	0.025
FLB			-2.348	1.401	-0.192	-1.676	0.096

The findings detailed in Table 8 indicated that the combination of these three emotional factors accounts for 29.0% ( $R^2 = 0.290$ ) of the variability in English performance. The analysis showed that the regression model holds statistical significance ( $F = 18.798$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) (see Table 8). This implies that at least one of the three independent variables within the model has a significant influence on English test performance, the dependent variable.

## Discussion

### Interpretation of the Current Situation of FL Emotions

Our first research question aims to investigate levels of FLCA, FLE, and FLB among students. The findings revealed that Chinese senior secondary students generally experience moderate levels of FLCA and FLB, while reporting moderate to high levels of FLE. This finding shows that both positive and negative emotions can simultaneously exist in the language learning process, rather than being mutually exclusive (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). Additionally, the study revealed that positive emotions were more prevalent than negative ones, with enjoyment typically exceeding anxiety (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Teimouri et al., 2019; Jiang & Dewaele, 2019).

The findings indicate that Chinese senior high school students experience moderate levels of FLCA ( $M = 2.991$ ,  $SD = 0.688$ ). A majority of Chinese students, particularly those in senior high school, experience significant anxiety during tests. One possible reason seems to be the exam-oriented culture in Chinese high schools where teachers and students give high priority to scores on English exams instead of the learning process (Zhang & Bournot-Trites, 2021).

This study reveals that high school students experience moderate-to-high FLE ( $M = 3.478$ ). This observation aligns with MacIntyre, Dewaele, Macmillan, and Li (2019), who noted that the average positive emotions within

the Chinese cohort were less than those found internationally. The discrepancy can be attributed to variations in educational and cultural contexts, as well as the significant pressure exerted by China's exam-focused system, which emphasizes grades over the learning experience.

Among the dimensions, the teacher-related enjoyment ( $M = 4.115$ ) is the highest. This result supports Li et al. (2018), where teacher-related FLE ranked highest ( $M = 3.71$ ) in their large-scale study of Chinese high school students. Two factors may explain this consistency. First, China's teacher-centered classroom structure places educators at the core of pedagogical decision-making, allowing them to directly shape emotional dynamics through supportive behaviors. Second, Year 10 students, who are transitioning into senior high school, may rely heavily on teachers for both academic guidance and emotional reassurance, amplifying the perceived importance of teacher support.

The present study revealed a moderate level of FLB among senior high school students ( $M = 2.673$ ). Li and Han (2022) identified a comparable moderate level of boredom among university students ( $M = 2.62$ ). In contrast, Li and Han (2022) found that primary school students exhibited considerably lower FLB levels ( $M = 1.77$ ) in their research. These results suggest that FLB is prevalent across different learning stages and becomes increasingly pronounced during adolescence. This age-related pattern may stem from heightened academic pressures faced by senior high school and university students, mirroring comparable stressors in exam-oriented environments.

### **Interpretation of the Predictive Roles of FL Emotions on English Achievement**

The significant relationship lies between emotional experiences in foreign language learning and English performance, with these emotions serving as strong predictors of performance (Jiang & Dewaele, 2019; Li & Dewaele, 2020; Li & Han, 2022). Foreign language anxiety has a significant negative association with English performance ( $r = -0.443^{**}$ ), corroborating past studies (Teimouri et al., 2019). In contrast, foreign language enjoyment is positively linked to English performance, with greater enjoyment predicting improved outcomes (Dewaele et al., 2018; Li & Dewaele, 2020). Additionally, foreign language boredom correlates negatively with English performance, indicating that increased boredom leads to worse results (Li & Wei, 2023; Li & Han, 2022). Thus, reducing anxiety and boredom and increasing enjoyment contribute to enhancing English performance.

The results of this study show that each of the three emotions significantly influences English academic achievement when considered separately. However, when the emotions were analyzed together, FLE is the only significant predictor of English academic achievement, which aligns with previous studies (Li & Wei, 2023; Xiao & Zhang, 2024). This study reaffirms the central role of positive emotions in fostering student motivation and resilience, suggesting that interventions aimed at enhancing enjoyment in language classrooms could lead to improved academic performance.

However, the present study diverges from the findings of other research that highlights the stronger negative impact of FLCA on achievement (Li & Han, 2022; Dewaele et al., 2023). One possible explanation for this discrepancy is the interrelated nature of these emotional variables, which may have mitigated their individual impacts when analyzed together. When FLE is included in the model, the positive influence of FLE is strong enough to overshadow the weaker effects of FLCA and FLB.

## **Conclusion**

### **Major Findings**

This study investigated foreign language learning emotions among high school students through questionnaire



surveys, examining the relationships between anxiety, enjoyment, boredom and academic performance. The major findings are summarized as follows.

First, students generally experience a moderate level of FLCA, with academic anxiety and communication anxiety standing out as more prominent compared to classroom anxiety. The level of FLE was moderate to high, with teacher-related enjoyment being the most significant factor contributing to students' positive emotions. The level of FLB was moderate. Overall, positive emotional experiences outweigh negative ones. Furthermore, gender differences were not significant in overall FLCA, FLE and FLB; female students demonstrated significantly higher communication anxiety, while male students reported greater environmental enjoyment.

Secondly, significant intercorrelations emerged among the three emotional constructs. FLCA showed a strong negative correlation with FLE and a positive correlation with FLB, whereas FLE demonstrated a strong negative correlation with FLB. In addition, all three emotions were significantly correlated with English achievement, where FLCA and FLB were associated with lower academic performance, whereas FLE was linked to higher achievement.

Finally, regression analyses confirmed that each of the three emotions significantly predicted English achievement individually. However, in the joint model, FLE emerged as the only significant positive predictor, while FLCA and FLB exhibited negative trends that did not reach statistical significance. These results suggest the dominant role of enjoyment in influencing academic outcomes when multiple emotional factors are considered concurrently.

### **Pedagogical Implications**

Foreign language anxiety, particularly academic and communication anxiety, emerged as the most significant negative emotional factor affecting students. To alleviate academic anxiety, teachers could reconsider the frequency and format of assessments. Reducing reliance on high-stakes exams and incorporating more frequent, low-pressure evaluations, such as quizzes or project-based assessments, may help mitigate students' test-related stress. Additionally, encouraging students to engage in self-assessment can foster a more reflective approach to learning, helping them recognize their strengths and identify areas for improvement.

The study also found that foreign language boredom was moderately present among students. To reduce boredom, teachers should carefully match the difficulty of tasks with students' current abilities. It is essential to strike a balance between tasks that are too easy, which can lead to boredom, and tasks that are too difficult, which may cause frustration. Moreover, variety in teaching methods is crucial to maintaining student engagement and preventing boredom. Teachers may consider adopting different types of activities, such as problem-solving exercises, role-plays, and project-based tasks, to ensure that no single approach dominates the learning experience. Teachers could also integrate interactive technology, such as language learning apps or online quizzes, to provide immediate feedback and create a more dynamic and engaging classroom environment.

### **Limitations and Suggestions for Future Studies**

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. Firstly, the sample size is relatively small. A larger, more diverse sample, which includes students from different geographical areas and grade levels, would enhance the external validity and representativeness of the results.

Then, while this research focused on the predictive roles of FLCA, FLE, and FLB on English achievement, it did not address other potentially relevant emotional factors, such as burnout, pride, or flow, which may also influence language learning outcomes. Future studies could explore a broader range of emotions to provide a

more nuanced understanding of the emotional landscape in foreign language learning.

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