

Review and Enlightenment: The Influence of Foreign Language Enjoyment on Learning Achievement

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Abstract

Since positive psychology has been introduced into the field of second language acquisition research, foreign language enjoyment has gradually become the focus of emotion research in second language learning. Based on the CNKI database and the core collection database of Web of Science, this paper uses CiteSpace (5.8.R3), a bibliometric tool, to make a visual analysis of positive psychology research and foreign language enjoyment research in foreign language and literature disciplines, aiming at exploring the relationship and influence factors between foreign language enjoyment and foreign language learning achievement from key words and countries (regions) of distribution, so as to provide enlightenment for foreign language teaching.

Keywords: foreign language enjoyment, learning achievement, positive psychology, CiteSpace, foreign language teaching

1. Introduction

Emotion has always been the focus of language learning research, such as anxiety, pleasure, boredom, etc. A number of emotions have been paid much attention to research topics. In previous studies, anxiety has been a topic which was discussed in a widespread way by researchers, and there are numerous related studies at home and abroad. However, with the introduction of positive psychology into the field of second language acquisition, a great many researchers have gradually turned their attention to the influence of the enjoyment. Now, foreign language enjoyment has been recognized as the most widely studied emotions contrary to classroom anxiety (Zeng, 2021). In

recent years, the research on the emotions of foreign language learners at home and abroad has gone through the development process of a foreign language learning emotional experience which is characterized by negative emotions represented by foreign language anxiety, positive emotions represented by foreign language pleasure, and multiple emotions co-existed (Dong, 2021).

Since the introduction of positive psychology into the field of second language acquisition, it has provided a totally new perspective for the study of second language acquisition. The theme of related researches combining the positive psychology and foreign language learning has emerged in a large number, including theoretical

discussion and empirical researches. The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions has explained the differences of individuals' positivity can cause their flourishing and development in different degrees, such as L2 learning and teaching (Wang et al., 2021). Jin and Zhang (2021) explored the dimensions of students' foreign language enjoyment and the influence of them on students' foreign language achievement through completing an adapted version of the Foreign Language Enjoyment Scale and found that enjoyment has produced a direct influence on their scores. To further investigate the relations between foreign language enjoyment and English achievement, Wang et al. (2023) added the L2 motivation which is an influential factor for foreign language learning. Undoubtedly, the results showed that students who are in the higher language proficiency level, will also be in the higher foreign language enjoyment level and the stronger L2 motivation. Through the index of the keyword "positive psychology", it is found that positive psychology has already been applied to various fields of research, such as psychological counseling, enterprise talent training, teacher education and so on. Under the discipline of foreign language and literature, positive psychology is mainly used to explore classroom teaching at various stages, aiming at exploring positive and encouraging teaching, weakening the influence of negative emotions such as anxiety through the integration of positive moods and positive emotions, so as to create a good classroom learning environment for foreign language learners. As a popular discipline, positive psychology covers many topics: emotional intelligence, happiness, empathy, positive emotions, etc. (Snyder & Lopez, 2002). However, through further indexing, it is found that "enjoyment", as the next mainstream topic of positive psychology, has not been applied to foreign language learning in many domestic studies. Based on the CNKI database, there are only 24 literatures on "foreign language pleasure" as the keyword; On the basis of the Web of Science database, and with the keyword of "Foreign language enjoyment" as the key word, there are 171 relevant literatures under the discipline of Linguistics, which indicates that domestic relevant research needs to be further strengthened.

A large number of studies have shown that there

is a profound relationship between emotion and foreign language learning achievement, including negative emotion such as anxiety and positive emotion such as pleasure. A review drawn by Shen (2021) concluded the effectiveness of foreign language enjoyment and foreign language anxiety on students' learning engagement, finding that researchers have been extremely interested in the studies of anxiety and enjoyment of foreign classrooms especially after the introduction of the evaluation scales. It is worth noting that negative emotions and positive emotions are not equal to bad emotions and good emotions. As long as they can exert their effectiveness under special circumstances, anxiety is not necessarily a bad emotion, and pleasure is not necessarily a good emotion. Therefore, by reviewing previous studies on pleasure in foreign languages, this paper aims to discover the relationship between pleasure and learning achievement and give suggestions and enlightenment to foreign language teaching.

2. Theoretical Basis

2.1 Development and Core of Positive Psychology

Seligman (2002), the father of positive psychology, mentioned that previous psychology has been focusing on such negative and pessimistic topics as the faults and shortcomings of human beings, mainly from the perspective of pessimism and color. Therefore, Seligman creatively proposed a quite new concept of "positive psychology", hoping to think and explore from the opposite perspective of previous studies, creating a new path in psychological cognition and providing new ideas for human research. Seligman et al. (2005) also tried their best to demonstrate the progress of positive psychology through the empirical validation of interventions. They found that interventions constantly increased happiness and decreased sadness, while positive interventions could supplement the traditional interventions. A great many studies have also provided similar views for the flourishing of positive psychology. For example, Li et al. (2003) thought that positive psychology is a new trend in the field of psychology research. They held that these studies focused on the positive aspects of our personalities in order to offer significant meanings for our life, providing a reference for relevant studies at home.

As a relatively novel topic, positive psychology has attracted many researchers to explore this

new viewpoint in various fields, including humanistic psychology (Bohart & Greening, 2001), positive education (Seligman et al., 2009) and social psychology (Salanova & Lopez-Zafra, 2011) etc. Based on Bohart and Greening's view, there wasn't many an empirical base for humanistic psychology, while the introduction of positive psychology brought an improvement for this situation. For positive education, Seligman et al. (2009) defined it as an education for both traditional skills and happiness, which was a method that combined the education and positive emotions in order to decrease the frequency of negative emotions. As for social psychology, Salanova and Lopez-Zafra (2011) attempted to insert positive psychology into sociology, aiming to deal with a series of problems in society. As it has evolved in different domains, positive psychology has roughly established three "cores": 1) subjective positive experiences; 2) the characteristics of a positive personality; And 3) communal civic virtues (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Based on the elaboration of these three cores, it could be clear that the dominant trend of positive psychology is positivity, optimism, with an upward tendency. As Seligman said, the apparent war of smoke and smoke has gone away in this modern society with a good life, but people's inner anxiety and depression are also increasingly prominent in this fast-paced society. Therefore, the introduction of positive psychology is particularly necessary for the development of human happiness and good life.

2.2 Foreign Language Enjoyment

From the perspective of positive psychology, foreign language enjoyment is one of the most representative mainstream views, which can roughly reflect the general ideas advocated by positive psychology. Therefore, the study of foreign language enjoyment has become an irresistible trend, thus many researchers have tried to define the term through a variety of studies. Huang (2022) held that foreign language enjoyment was regarded as a comprehensive emotion and a crucial component for language learners' classroom engagement which was affected by teachers' emotions and psychological attributes. Dewey et al. (2018) has given a reference that language proficiency played a role in second language learning. Students may tend to be more enjoyable and less anxious if they were in highly proficient level. Meanwhile, related studies still did further development by

combining with other ideas, ecological momentary assessment contributed to our comprehension of the dynamics of foreign language enjoyment by virtue of the interaction between different individuals and learning environments (Shirvan et al., 2020). Through a literature review, Zeng (2021) concluded that foreign language enjoyment is regarded as the response to the concept of classroom anxiety which has been already examined extensively by analyzing multitudes of theoretical and empirical studies. Overall, researchers majoring in the field of foreign language enjoyment thought it refers to a state and form in which learners can actively cope with difficulties and challenges to acquire knowledge and improve their language proficiency in the process of language learning (MacIntyre, 2016).

Enjoyment is not only a kind of emotion, but also a kind of ability and attitude. This kind of pleasure can provide learners with positive guidance, encourage them to actively deal with the difficulties in language learning in the classroom environment, and make their language learning smooth and pleasant, so as to achieve physical and mental happiness and excellent results and states. Jin & Zhang (2021) collected students' scores of a mid-term English examination as the measure of foreign language achievement. Through path analysis, they found that foreign language enjoyment had a direct influence on students' scores, which suggested pedagogical implications for language learning and teaching. The effects of emotions in foreign language learning have been observed in many cases especially classroom community. Alberth (2022) discussed enjoyment and anxiety in predicating sense of classroom because it could serve as a necessary predictor of language learning outcomes, and results turned out to be support that enjoyment was regarded as a stronger positive predictor while anxiety was considered as a negative predictor. To a large extent, the positive effect of positive emotion is far greater than that of negative emotion, and the integration of positive emotion can also promote the reduction of negative emotion, which has also been proved in many studies. Jin, Dewaele and MacIntyre (2016) have provided the opinion that positive psychology teaching can promote the improvement of students' performance and effectively reduce their sense of anxiety. At the same time, the experimental group's abilities in listening, speaking, reading,

Secondly, based on the Web of Science database, this paper combs the distribution of literatures related to positive psychology published from 2000 to 2021 across countries and regions, and sets the time slice as 1. According to the results

of the co-occurrence index, the countries with more researches are concentrated in the United States, Australia and the United Kingdom. China, Canada, Germany and other countries are also slowly joining the list.

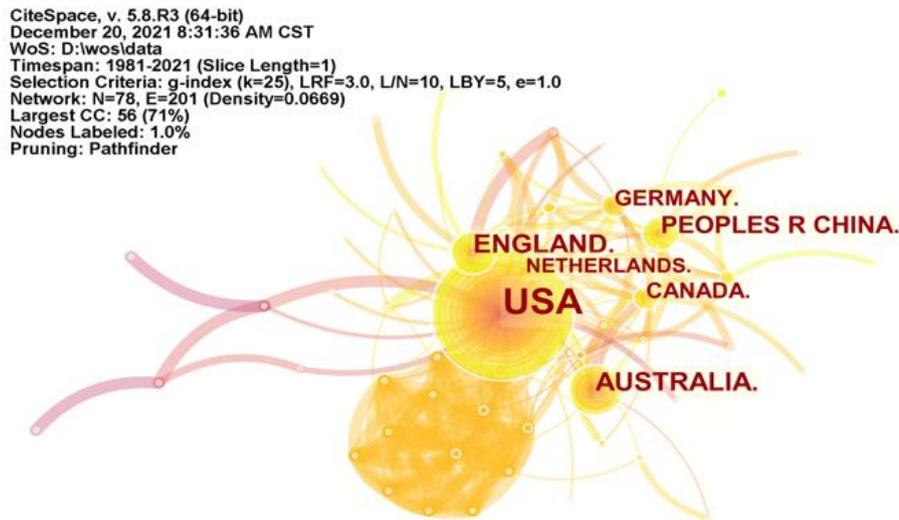


Figure 2. Map of countries (regions) involved in positive psychology research

In order to further investigate the application of pleasure emotion in foreign language learning from the perspective of positive psychology, this paper uses another keyword, “foreign language enjoyment”, to conduct quantitative investigation in CNKI database and Web of Science database respectively. There are few relevant literatures in China. Only 24 literatures have been indexed in the CNKI database, which mainly involve the influence on academic performance, the exploration of emotional factors such as anxiety and the application of

classroom teaching. It is worth noting that there are still a lot of relevant studies in the WOS database, so there is still a lot of room for exploration of this content. According to the visual analysis, there are more research countries such as the United Kingdom, China, Japan, the United States, etc., but as mentioned earlier, the domestic data shows that the penetration of foreign language pleasure related to positive psychology is not very much, although it ranks in the top several, but it still needs to be further in-depth.

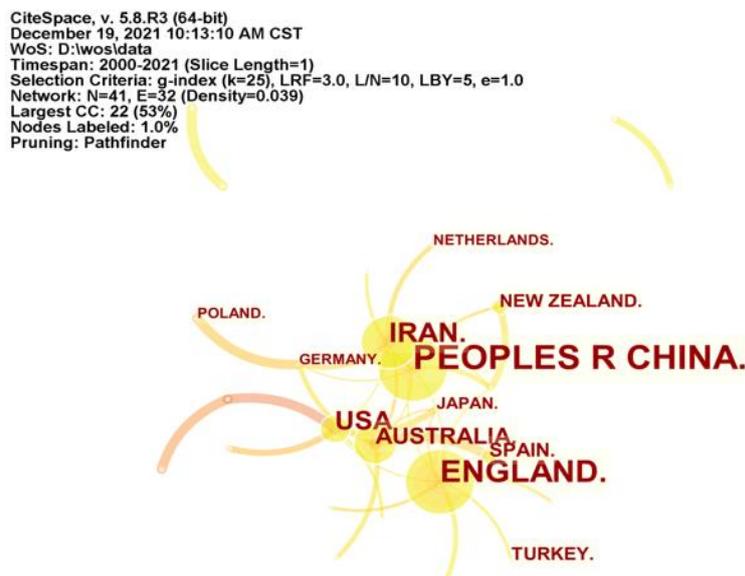


Figure 3. Spectrum of countries (regions) involved in research on foreign language pleasure

In addition, visual analysis was carried out to observe the specific usage of foreign language pleasure keywords from 2000 to 2021. As shown in Figure 4, there are still many key areas involved in relevant research, which are

discussed under each subject word: foreign language anxiety, classroom, 2nd language, achievement. All of these are all subject-related and more discussed topics, and there are also many evidences from relevant empirical studies.

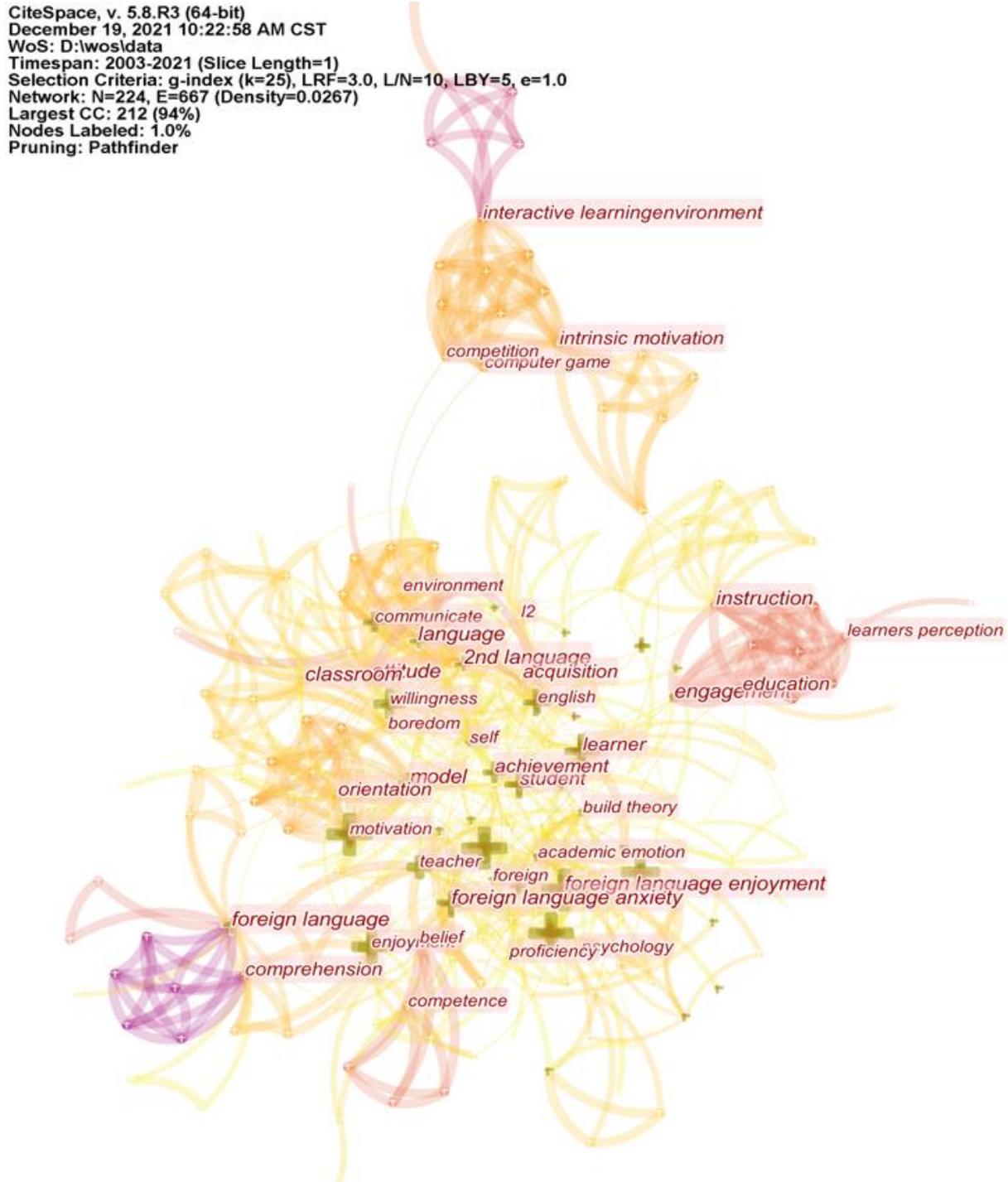


Figure 4. Keyword co-occurrence network of foreign language pleasure research

4. Results and Discussion

Through the review of domestic and foreign studies on positive psychology and foreign language enjoyment, the research situation can

be observed from the macro level. The general trend is that the research in this field has already become a hotspot, from a quite small distribution to an increase in the number of

papers published year by year, which shows that the attention in this field has been increased constantly. However, it should be noted that the situation at home and abroad is not consistent, including the origin and development of this hotspot. Therefore, we need to analyze this phenomenon aiming at domestic and abroad researches respectively.

As for the first research question, it can be observed that the number of published papers in recent years mainly involves several countries that are relatively ahead of the development in all-round aspects such as Britain, the United States and China. Researches in these countries are extensive and prominent, which have demonstrated the importance of theoretical support, on the one hand, and the effectiveness of connectivity on the other hand. As we mentioned above, many earlier related researches were performed in developed countries.

As for the second research question, in addition to the geographical distribution of the literature, the regional distribution of the literature field should also be paid attention to, so as to provide guidance for future research concerns. According to the above analysis, relevant researches mainly focus on foreign language classroom teaching, especially on the strategies to improve foreign language teaching. Scholars are applying the positive effects of positive psychology and the health concerns of foreign language pleasure to improve the foreign language teaching environment, so as to change students' psychological state of learning and reduce their inner panic and fear. Most studies have found that foreign language enjoyment can promote students' foreign language learning, while foreign language anxiety can inhibit students' learning. However, the solution to this problem has yet to be explored further. At present, most researchers only find this problem by the corresponding relationship between emotion scales and students' achievement, while there are not many corresponding improvement measures. Future studies need to broaden the solution to promote students' foreign language learning.

As for the third research question, as we mentioned above, classroom teaching has been widely implemented, and students' psychological state in class has also received more attention than before. There are also many empirical studies on this aspect, most of which

show that students' pleasure in a foreign language is mainly controlled by the students themselves, while the anxiety generated in class is more related to the teachers. Therefore, classroom teaching in the future can be improved from these two aspects. The one is in the aspect of students themselves, which advocates relaxing and enjoyable learning. The other is from the teachers, who always pay attention to the emotional changes of students, do not put too much pressure on students. The best results will be achieved by improving sense of pleasure and reducing sense of anxiety. In the future, the research may develop in the direction outside the classroom, such as the direction of language acquisition without academic achievement — children's primary second language acquisition is better with pleasure-oriented learning or with controlled learning outcomes.

5. Inspirations

Recent studies have shown that it is significant and effective to promote the pleasure of a foreign language in the classroom, as it can stimulate students' motivation and engagement, thus improving student's academic performance more easily (Zeng, 2021). As a kind of positive emotion, pleasure can stimulate the positive effectiveness of learning and enhance the fun of learning, so that the sense of achievement in learning will be enhanced, and the academic performance will be continuously improved. Dewaele & Pavelescu (2021) demonstrated this view through a multiple case study that the connection between emotions and willingness to communicate with a foreign language, and the results gave a support that foreign language enjoyment and foreign language anxiety were in a dynamic situation, they have already taken roots during the period of the first contact with languages. Therefore, emotions did play important roles in the process of language learning. In the past, pleasure and anxiety are two antonyms, but scholars only pay attention to one side for research, such as exploring the cause of anxiety or the role of pleasure. Jin, Dewaele and MacIntyre (2021) mentioned that pleasure teaching should be introduced into foreign language classes to reduce anxiety. They should improve learning pleasure and reduce anxiety from these two aspects. Similarly, Dewaele et al. (2019) have also attempted to do research from the perspective of these two points, while they diverted their direction to the

teacher's characteristics, which offered a new angle for the researches in this field.

Foreign language teaching and even all teaching courses should give some inspiration to this. Teachers should change the traditional teaching methods and strategies, enhance the interest of the classroom, set a variety of classroom introduction, reasonable arrangement of teaching content, add classroom activities and so on. For example, the whole class can be divided into time pieces, part of the time is used to teach teaching knowledge, interspersed with brain rest, and then classroom teaching, to reduce the brain fatigue of the whole class learning. At the same time, do a good job of psychological counseling for students. In the process of language teaching, teachers should praise their students as much as possible and criticize students the less the better. Develop encouraging teaching and allow students to make mistakes. For example, when students are not clear about a grammar knowledge, teachers should first let students try it by themselves, and then encourage and guide students to find their own mistakes, and try not to blame them in the whole process. The research shows that pleasure and enjoyment mainly come from students' self-regulation, so students' own factors play a very important role in classroom regulation. The research in this area is still insufficient, and the measures for students' aspect needs to be further discussed. Therefore, future studies may be conducted from the perspective of how students self-regulate in foreign language classes. Furthermore, it is worth noting that teachers need to consider the differences between different cultures due to people's specific attributes. Yesilcinar & Erdemir (2023) explored whether the enjoyment and anxiety are specific to cultures taking Turkish EFL learners as the example, and unsimilar results were revealed to the previous researches. Instead, this study found that external sources were more influential for Turkish EFL learners. Therefore, teachers are also required to deal with case by case in terms of the different cultures.

However, there are quite a few shortcomings in this study. This paper is only a visualization of the distribution of one keyword and country (region) for "positive psychology" and "foreign language enjoyment". Other parts, such as citation mutations, are also worth further analysis in order to get a clearer picture of the future development frontier. In addition,

although there are not a great many specific studies on "foreign language pleasure" targeted in this paper, there are not a few previous studies on classroom pleasure, but they are not carried out from the perspective of positive psychology, but some of them have functional overlap, so there may be shortcomings in the literature screening. The topic of enjoyment in foreign languages definitely need to be explored in theoretical and practical researches and is worthy of further extension in the future.

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