



Foreign Language Enjoyment: A Web of Science Bibliometric Analysis of Research from 2000 to 2025

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Abstract: With the proliferation of research on emotions in language education informed by positive psychology, foreign language enjoyment (FLE) has gained prominence in the academic community. This bibliometric mapping analysis outlines the growth of research on FLE from 2000 to 2025. Utilizing VOSviewer and CiteSpace, the study reviews 827 FLE research documents in the Web of Science to assess the current status of the construct and identify key trends. The results revealed that the most common keywords associated with FLE were willingness to communicate and foreign language anxiety. Common abstract terms included anxiety, emotion, and motivation. The most impactful document contributing to this field was identified as '*Foreign Language Enjoyment and Anxiety: The Effect of Teacher and Learner Variables*' (Dewaele et al., 2018). Jean-Marc Dewaele, Kazuya Saito, and Livia Dewaele emerged as the most productive authors, with Jean-Marc Dewaele and Livia Dewaele being the most cited. Furthermore, the leading journals were *System* and *Language Teaching Research*, predominantly featuring studies from England, with the University of London being the most significant contributor. Convenience sampling was the most prevalent sampling scheme, despite concerns regarding its validity. Underrepresented areas, such as digital gamified language learning and AI-powered learning tools, need more attention. To uncover the hidden trajectory of the construct and further probe its role in education, future research should adopt more longitudinal approaches to examining FLE in four language skills.

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Introduction

Emotions have come to assume an important status in applied linguistics research (Kirkpatrick et al., 2025). The initial seeds of such a line of inquiry in education were planted by the now-classic studies that focused mainly on negative emotions (e.g., Gross & Levenson, 1997). Early forms of concern for the affective domain central to language learning started with Krashen's (1985) affective filter hypothesis, which highlighted the significance of negative emotions in L2 acquisition. In those days, anxiety was the most notable emotion under study, as it was believed to significantly influence the acquisition and performance of language learners in a second or foreign language (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). However, research on foreign language learner emotions later underwent a transition from focusing solely on negative emotions to embracing a more comprehensive emotional perspective (Yu, 2022).

With the introduction of positive psychology (PP) (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) and the advent of the affective turn in the field of applied linguistics (Pavlenko, 2013), scholars started probing the characteristics and role of emotional experiences in language learning (e.g., Elahi Shirvan et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2024) and teaching (Gegersen & MacIntyre, 2017; Oladrostam et al., 2025). Consequently, concepts such as happiness (Miller & Gkonou, 2022), empathy (Horton, 2024), love (Dewaele & Pavelescu, 2019), grit (Zhao & Wang, 2023), and hope (Zhao, 2023) began to attract increasingly investigative attention. One such positive emotion is enjoyment. As an emotion that is assumed to broaden the repertoire of thoughts and actions, enjoyment has gained research momentum in educational psychology (Li, 2022). In the context of language education, Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) renamed language learning enjoyment as foreign language enjoyment (FLE) to capture the positive emotions that FL learners experience, denoting feelings of fun, interest, and happiness when their psychological needs are cared for (Botes et al., 2020; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). In this respect, it entails a sense of novelty and poses a potential challenge to one's self-concept (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2016).

Over the past years, several reviews (e.g., Dewaele & Dewaele, 2020; Guo & Qiu, 2022; Guo et al., 2022; Pan, 2022; Shen, 2021; Zeng, 2021; Zhang et al., 2024) have brought scholarly attention to FLE within diverse contexts. These studies have enriched our understanding of FLE; however, most existing work has examined methodological trends (e.g., Guo et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2024), and relatively little attention has been given to

critical aspects such as sampling schemes. It is now accepted that the absence of a proper sampling structure may threaten sound inferences and the authenticity of the work. This highlights the need for a more systematic effort to address the limitations of earlier reviews and to provide a comprehensive account of the development of research on this concept across a longer publication period. With this in mind, the present study seeks to extend existing reviews on foreign language enjoyment (FLE) by adopting a visual and quantitative approach.

Foreign Language Enjoyment in the Literature

Unlocking the power of positivity in language learning traces back to [Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi \(2000\)](#), who shifted the focus to subjective emotional experiences. While negative emotions have been shown to constrain learners' attention ([Dewaele & Pavelescu, 2019](#)), positive emotions contribute to the building of personal resources ([Fredrickson, 2003](#)) and thus introduce a more balanced perspective into research on language learning emotions ([Smet et al., 2018](#)). One such positive emotion, enjoyment, is essential in education and has been found to enhance motivation and achievement ([Wu & Yu, 2022](#)) in language learning ([Dewaele et al., 2023](#)). Language enjoyment and flow foster personal growth and aid classroom engagement ([Mercer & MacIntyre, 2014](#)). Some research exists on the complexities and fluctuations of enjoyment across different factors ([Elahi Shirvan et al., 2020](#)), highlighting its importance in peer interactions and teacher support ([Pavelescu & Petrić, 2018](#)).

In this “booming era of emotion research” ([Dewaele et al., 2019, p. 2](#)), where emotions have been understood as co-constructed and context-sensitive ([Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014](#)), increasing attention has been paid to foreign language enjoyment (FLE). This phase was marked by the publication of two new books by [MacIntyre et al. \(2016\)](#) and [Gabrys-Barker and Galajda \(2016\)](#), which explored the application of PP to teaching or learning a foreign language. At that time, a prevalent belief in constant growth suggested that enjoyment can positively influence achievement, satisfaction, engagement, performance, and motivation ([Wu & Yu, 2022](#)), especially in language learning contexts. However, several researchers have argued that the concept of language enjoyment might be a misnomer, given learners' unique experiences and challenges in foreign language classrooms (e.g., [Zeng, 2021](#)). This was followed by more comprehensive classroom studies in which FLE was first introduced ([Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014](#)) and its critical role in academic success was examined ([Piechurska-Kuciel, 2017](#)).

This line of research has provided a strong foundation for understanding what FLE was like when criticized for its complex nature. Since examining FLE from a single theoretical approach may not give a complete picture, an increasing number of studies explore this relatively new concept through multiple overlapping frameworks (Wu & Kabilan, 2025). Therefore, researchers studying FLE, especially those who support theoretical plurality (e.g., Macintyre et al., 2019), often use frameworks such as the broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 2001), the control-value theory of achievement emotions (Pekrun, 2006), complex dynamic systems theory (Cameron & Larsen-Freeman, 2007), and Seligman's (2011) PERMA model. Building on this foundation, Seligman's (2018) update to PERMA—highlighting Positive emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Achievement—provides elements that can directly contribute to FLE. As a result, FLE is a key factor in EFL learners' enthusiastic involvement in educational tasks, which require steady determination (Mierzwa, 2018) and can evolve into relationships with the classroom environment (Dewaele & Alfawzan, 2018).

Given the ubiquity and importance of FLE, language education researchers have recently sought to understand its functions, sources, and dynamic nature (e.g., Dewaele et al., 2022; Wang, 2023; Wang, 2024). By way of example, in an attempt to investigate the impact of two different teachers' emotional experiences on language learners' FLE changes, Dewaele and Dewaele (2020) posited that what promotes FLE is when learners have a positive perception of the teacher and how frequently they use the target language in the classroom. FLE enthusiasts have also conducted empirical studies on this construct to demonstrate its influence on learning outcomes, such as self-perceived achievement. For instance, Saito et al. (2018) focused on 108 teenage students in EFL classrooms, finding that emotional states, such as anxiety and enjoyment, play crucial roles in language learning outcomes. By the same token, Botes et al. (2020) executed a meta-analysis of 28,166 research articles, confirming the positive relationship between FLE and willingness to communicate across different cultural backgrounds. Other studies, such as those by Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014), Dewaele et al. (2018), and Jin and Zhang (2018), further emphasize the roles of teacher characteristics, multilingualism, and a supportive learning context in boosting FLE.

These attempts collectively highlight the importance of creating enjoyable learning experiences that lead to better language acquisition. Among the variables studied, FLE and its interplay with various teacher and learner variables have been systematically examined (Li, 2022), including engagement (Tsang & Dewaele, 2024), boredom (Dewaele et al., 2024), anxiety (Ma et al., 2023), emotional intelligence (Chen et al., 2024), and motivation

(Dewaele et al., 2022). Similarly, research on this context-dependent construct has also focused on willingness to communicate (WTC), showing a correlation between WTC and FLE (Fallah et al., 2024). It was only in such a positive atmosphere that WTC was likely to develop and be promoted (Dewaele, 2019). Parallels were also observed in the association of FLE with demographic variables. Regarding age differences, researchers unanimously reported that younger language learners tend to show lower levels of FLE in comparison to university students (Dewaele et al., 2018). In contrast, there have been controversies among scholars about the relationship between FLE and gender. Some have reported that women display more FLE (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2016), while others have argued that the two genders do not differ significantly (e.g., Mierzwa, 2018). These demographic variables were examined in various populations of secondary or tertiary learners of English, such as Chinese EFL learners (Li, 2019), high school students in Britain (Dewaele & Dewaele, 2017) and in Japan (Saito et al., 2018), learners in Romania (Pavelescu & Petrić, 2018), Iranian and Arab university students (Alrabai, 2022; Tahmouresi & Papi, 2021). Several studies have also aimed to explore how characteristics such as demographic variables and learner personality traits may influence FLE outcomes (e.g., Aydin et al., 2023).

Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) investigated the correlation between anxiety and enjoyment in the language learning process to assess the validity of FLE measurements. They found that FLE and classroom anxiety are conceptually distinct. Dewaele and MacIntyre (2016) revised the original FLE scale, creating a 14-item questionnaire with an internal consistency of 0.86. Since the proposed instrument proved valid and reliable, many others have utilized this FLE scale in their studies (e.g., Jin & Zhang, 2018; Li et al., 2018). Additionally, Botes et al. (2020) developed and validated the Short Form of the Foreign Language Enjoyment Scale (S-FLES) to provide a more efficient tool for measuring positive emotions associated with language learning. Utilizing a dataset of 1,603 language learners, the researchers identified a three-factor hierarchical model of FLE, comprising Social Enjoyment, Personal Enjoyment, and Teacher Appreciation. Parallel with interest in measuring FLE, researchers have also investigated how the measures prove valid in other research contexts. For example, using time-based confirmatory factor analysis to examine the measurement consistency of FLE scales, Elahi Shirvan et al. (2021) attempted to validate the previously developed FLE scale by Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014). Adopting a statistical model to examine how different factors contribute to FLE provided some insights into the temporal aspects and underlying structure of FLE. Their findings provided strong empirical confirmation that advanced L2 learners showed minimal variation in their FLE over time.

As the literature outlined above indicates, interest in FLE has surged in popularity over the past twenty years. Review studies have emerged to provide an overview of the research findings. For example, [Zeng \(2021\)](#) prepared a comprehensive review of FLE and language learning engagement during the past two decades to see how these concepts can enhance language acquisition. The key findings highlighted the interplay between learner autonomy, motivation, teaching practices, and FLE, suggesting that effective engagement and improved learning outcomes are closely linked to FLE. The study drew on the literature on PP to establish the importance of studies on enjoyment in language learning in the past two decades, determine the areas that have been disregarded in empirical studies, and confirm that promoting FLE in the classroom is associated with higher motivation and engagement. Similarly, [Shen \(2021\)](#) examined the impact of FLE and FLCA (foreign language classroom anxiety) on learners' engagement and academic performance, and categorized the key topics into three main areas: the relationship between FLCA and FLE, the strength and accuracy of the given scales used to measure these emotions, and the impact of individual and interpersonal factors on learners' emotional experiences. Shen highlighted the central role of fostering positive emotions, such as enjoyment, to enhance engagement and attainment in foreign language classrooms. Later, in 2022, [Guo and Qiu](#) provided a comprehensive review of the FLE research status in SLA, focusing on studies that address FLE while excluding those that do not meet methodological standards or are not relevant to SLA. They used the control-value theory and the broaden-and-build theory to stress the importance of FLE in creating positive classroom environments. In another attempt, [Zhang et al. \(2024\)](#) conducted a comprehensive analysis of 118 empirical studies on FLE, spanning from 2014 to 2023. They found that L2 learners with Chinese or Persian as their native languages were the primary participants of FLE studies. Yet, given the rapid expansion of research in recent years, there remains a clear need for updated and broader reviews that capture the full scope of developments in the field. In light of the background presented, this paper seeks to report on publication trends, key contributors, methodological insights, and the knowledge structures of FLE from 2000 to 2025. In particular, the study seeks to answer the following eight questions through a bibliometric mapping analysis:

1. What are the publication trend foci and citations regarding foreign language enjoyment and its associated constructs in Web of Science?
2. Which keywords are most frequently cited in studies on foreign language enjoyment?
3. What are the future trends of foreign language enjoyment research?

4. Who are the most productive authors (micro level) with maximum contribution to research on foreign language enjoyment?
5. Which journals are the most frequently cited (or co-cited) for research on foreign language enjoyment?
6. What is the profile of the most productive countries (macro level) and academic institutions (meso level) publishing research on foreign language enjoyment with scientific collaboration?
7. What are the most co-cited references on foreign language enjoyment?
8. What are the predominant sampling methods used in foreign language enjoyment research?

Methods

Data Analysis

To visualize the FLE distribution diachronically, we retrieved the WoS datasets and exported them to VOSviewer 1.6.20 and CiteSpace 6.2.R4.

The software thesaurus files of VOSviewer (<https://www.vosviewer.com/>) and CiteSpace (<https://citespace.podia.com/>) served as the primary sources of data analysis. Following van Eck and Waltman (2020), we adopted bibliometric indicators to depict the most frequent keywords as follows:

1. Occurrence: It measures the number of articles featuring the target keyword. A binary method was employed, where the presence of the target keyword in an article title, abstract, or keywords section was counted as one, regardless of the number of times it appeared in that section.
2. Total Link Strength: This indicates the overall strength of a keyword's connections with other keywords, reflecting the strength of co-occurrence links. As an example, the following figure (Table 1) shows the total link strength of the noun phrase foreign language enjoyment in the present work:

Table 1. The Keywords Information Panel in the Currently Active Map

keyword	Occurrences	Total link strength ▼
Foreign language enjoyment	43	203

Database Selection

The emergence of several platforms for citation analysis and literature research is partly due to researchers' growing reliance on academic databases, with Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus as the leading ones. Choosing a less comprehensive database can affect the value of bibliometric indicators, leading to biased assessments (Martín-Martín et al., 2018). We chose WoS for our bibliometric analysis for several reasons. First, a pressing concern regarding Scopus is the inclusion of predatory journals that may inflate scholars' metrics and misclassify subject areas. Some evidence suggests that Scopus continues to index a substantial volume of active journals that may exhibit predatory characteristics (Marina & Sterligov, 2021). Second, one major advantage of WoS, not reproduced by Scopus, is its unique features, such as quick filters (highly cited, hot paper) and citation reports. This is one reason why WoS is internationally recognized for all bibliometric analyses (Yan & Zhiping, 2023). During the searching and screening procedure, duplicates and non-English articles were removed, leaving a total of 827. The search terms and the whole retrieval process are shown in Figure 1.

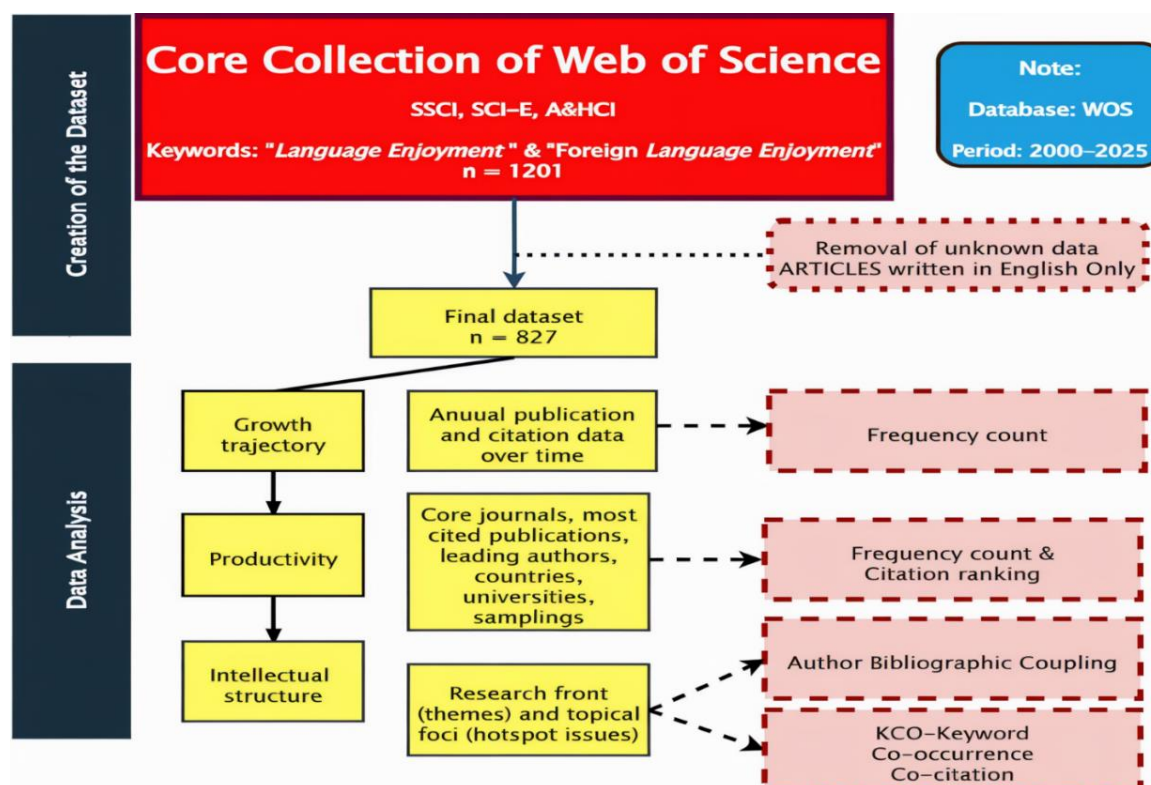


Figure 1. Selection Process of Research Documents (Data Cleaning)

Findings and Discussion

The first part of the findings presents the FLE publication pattern in 31 top-tier journals in the field. The chart illustrates the number of published articles on FLE from 2000 to 2025, followed by the relevant discussion of the findings.

From 2000 to around 2014, the number of publications remained extremely low and relatively stable, with only one to four articles published annually. This indicates that research activity in this area was limited during the early period. A gradual upward trend began after 2015, when publications rose to about eight articles, followed by a steady increase to approximately 30 by 2019. From 2020 onwards, FLE growth accelerated sharply. The number of articles more than doubled from around 30 in 2020 to about 70 in 2021, before rising further to roughly 120 in 2022 and 130 in 2023. This rapid expansion continued in the final years shown, reaching approximately 170 publications in 2024 and peaking at nearly 190 in 2025.

Overall, the data indicate that the evolution of FLE research may be divided into three phases, with 2000 to 2017 as the early phase, 2018 to 2021 as the growth phase, and 2022 to the present as the maturation phase. Figure 2 depicts a chronological view of the FLE published articles.

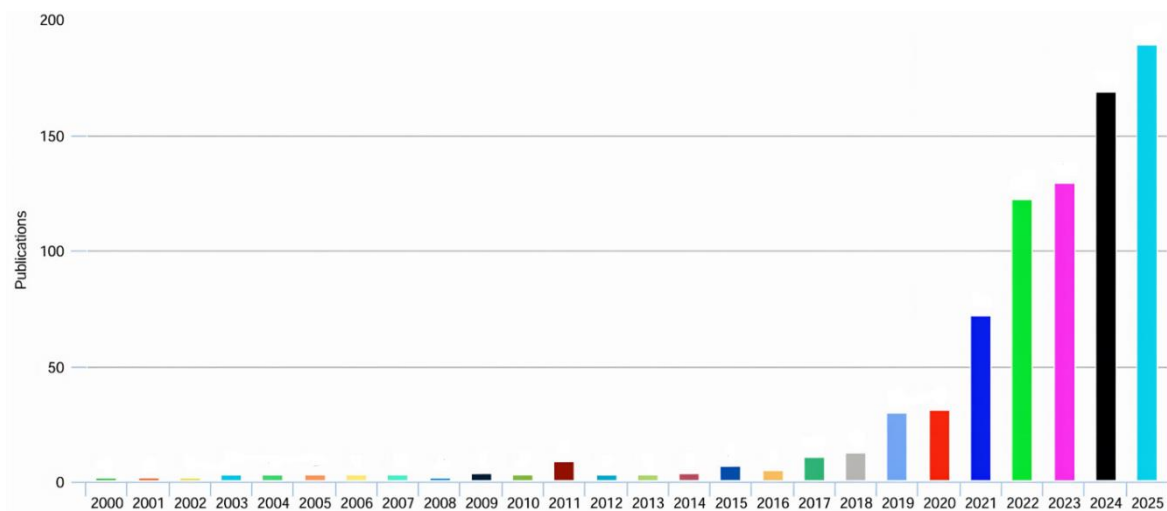


Figure 2. Distribution of Language Enjoyment Publications over the Last 25 Years

Most Frequent Keywords

Keywords are the essence of academic papers, and keyword analysis reflects the research hotspot. Figure 3 shows the top nine timeline view keywords with the strongest citation bursts constructed with CiteSpace. By manually unifying keywords with equivalent or

closely related meanings and discarding those with little relevance, a total of nine keywords appeared at least 30 times in the 827 publications. As Figure 3 shows, the conceptual focus of foreign language enjoyment can be classified into some categories as follows: (a) Interpersonal factors and learners' L2 attitudes: When enjoyment was a socially and attitudinally grounded experience shaped by relationships and learners' perceptions of the target language. (b) Engagement and motivation integration period: This reflects an emerging interest in how enjoyment can connect sustained participation and motivational dynamics in language learning. (c) Affective crossroads: When examined alongside negative emotions and learning outcomes, this construct has increasingly highlighted the dual emotional landscape of SLA and the relationship between affective experience and linguistic performance. (d) Outcome-oriented period: When communicative behavior and measurable academic success were shaped by FLE. (e) Technology-enhanced period, when innovative pedagogical tools and digital learning environments came into fashion. As can be seen, the most recent burst keyword is 'gamification,' which allows learners to experience flow. This finding invites future researchers to revisit the traditional claim that the social, cognitive, and emotional conditions of AI-powered learning tools and digital gamified language learning act as catalysts for the emergence of FLE (Liu et al., 2024).

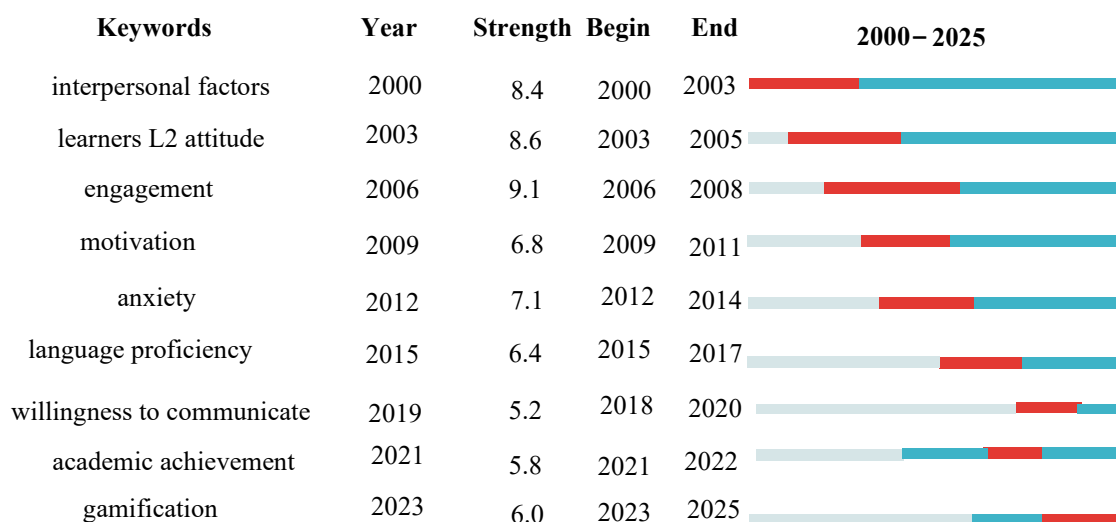


Figure 3. Burst Analysis of Keywords

Figure 4 illustrates a yearly colorful presentation of clusters in the latest phase of the timeline (2021–2025). The most common keywords are 'positive psychology' (31 occurrences), 'willingness to communicate' (26 occurrences), 'foreign language anxiety' (24 occurrences), and 'foreign language classroom anxiety' (12 occurrences). This reciprocal

relationship between FLE and anxiety opens the space for scholars to examine how other emotions in a language learning context can interact mutually with FLE, creating new emotional states. Considering the network map presented in Figure 4, several points can be inferred. First, it should be pointed out that high levels of anxiety can hinder language learning, while enjoyment can enhance it. By studying both, educators can develop strategies to minimize anxiety and maximize enjoyment (Shen, 2021), such as emphasizing progress over perfection. Second, such results highlight motivation as a prerequisite for learning a foreign language, acting as a propelling engine that sustains learners' efforts toward their goals, which aligns with the concept of motivation in PP (Mercer & Gregersen, 2023). Third, quite clearly, the word 'English as a foreign language' is a minor and unconnected keyword with less centrality to identify the preliminary inference that FLE extends beyond any particular language (Yu, 2025).

Moreover, it was indicated that FLE appears to be conditioned by a wider range of elements, related to teachers' practices or learners' differences (e.g., mindset) in a dynamic classroom context (Dewaele et al., 2018). Another variable found in the existing literature is engagement; it is believed that any attempt to promote FLE in the classroom is linked to engagement (as the second component of the PERMA model) for language learners to ensure their prolonged success (Guo, 2021; Zeng, 2021). Most studies in this field frame their overall perspective within PP. Simultaneously, they also address counter-arguments regarding FLE to discuss how the contrast between enjoyment and anxiety can strengthen the field of PP. Furthermore, FLE, PP, learner internal variables, engagement, emotions, and learner internal variables demonstrate dynamic interactions, underscoring the complexity and richness of the research area. Alongside this growth in FLE studies, however, there is increasing concern over other new areas of inquiry in the realm of FLE. The emerging domains include social media usage, socioeconomic status, meditation and mindfulness practices, online learning contexts, emotional and cultural intelligence, digital literacy, and neurodiverse conditions, whose relationship with FLE has remained unexplored. This unexplored territory presents a wealth of opportunities for future research, sparking the potential insights that lie ahead.

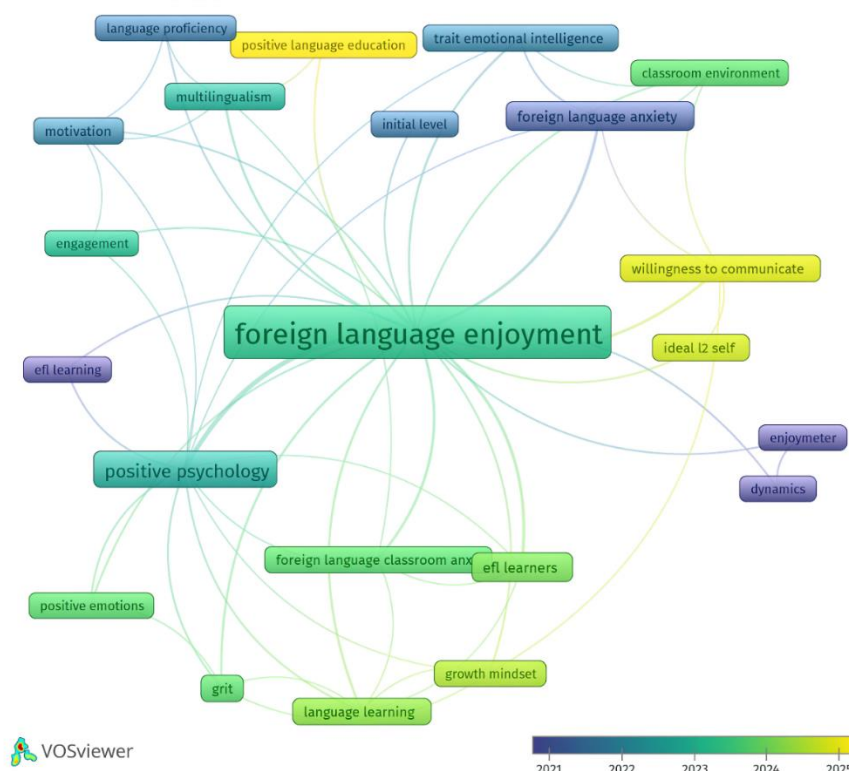


Figure 4. The Yearly Distribution of Studies Utilizing the Keywords

Most Frequently Reported Terms in the Abstracts

With a minimum of five, the total number of keywords selected was 42. When examining keywords by publication year, it becomes evident that terms such as FLE ($n = 143$), anxiety and emotions ($n = 126$), and motivation ($n = 126$) were the most reported words in the abstract sections, as presented in Figure 5 [Analyzing the frequency of studies referring to specific terms in their abstracts over time reveals a predominant emphasis on FLE and its linkage with teacher and learner variables, a connection supported by the recent literature (Dewaele et al., 2022; Liu & Wang, 2023). By comparison, the presence of anxiety in a large circle introduces new angles, making FLE and anxiety appear as two sides of the PP coin, which might be in a counterbalancing relationship. Such an inference broadens the scope of FLE research, opening up space for more fluid and context-sensitive interpretations of emotion and moving the field beyond studying feelings in isolation (Macintyre et al., 2019).

In the same vein, the centrality of some keywords, such as motivation, suggests that FLE can act as an intrinsic motivator for language learners as their motivation declines over time (Dewaele et al., 2022). This necessitates the presence of FLE in sustaining learner motivation and engagement, a key to ultimate language learning success (Zeng, 2021; Zhang et al., 2024). Moreover, the co-occurrence of FLE and achievement among the key term

clusters can be evidence for their relationship in the presence of motivation, which may act as a mediating factor (Wang et al., 2023). The marginality of communication points to the non-transparency of enjoyment in foreign language communication (Elahi Shirvan & Talebzadeh, 2018). However, the overlap is due to the multiple dimensions of FLE connected with individual differences that control achievement (Jin & Zhang, 2018). Additionally, the absence of data on language skills development (reading, listening, writing, and speaking) and how FLE affects performance on each can provide evidence for the necessity of a richer conceptualization of FLE.

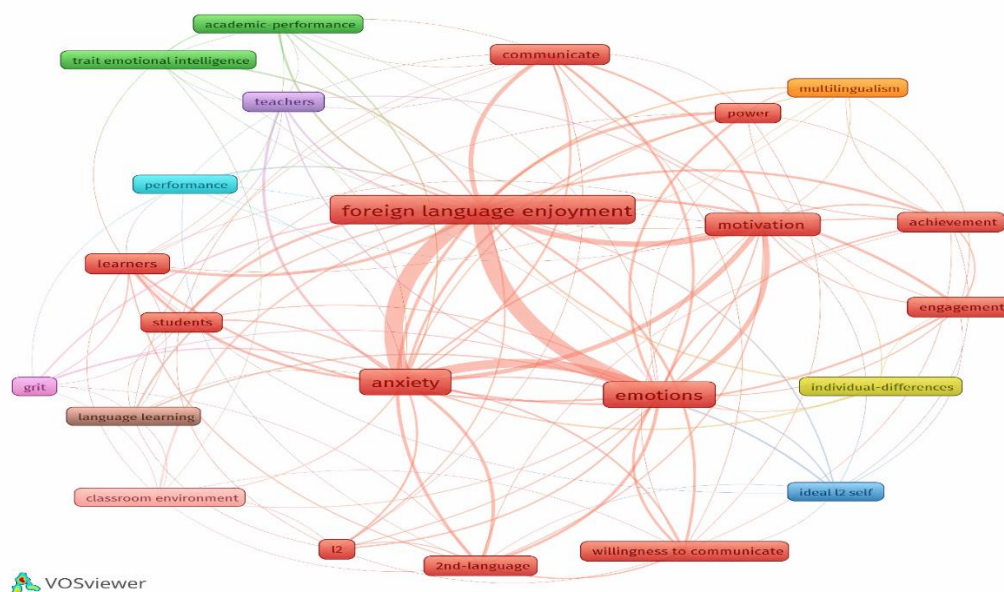


Figure 5. The Most Frequent Terms in the Abstracts

Authorship Network

The field's most prominent and commonly cited authors were identified using citation analysis. To this end, and based on common practice in the field, a minimum requirement of two documents per author was set as a publication threshold, along with a minimum of twenty citations, resulting in 51 authors meeting these criteria. This filtering process helped streamline the dataset, making it easier to manage and analyze the citation data.

Figure 6 highlights the most influential authors in the FLE research community based on citation analysis. The top contributors identified were Jean-Marc Dewaele (10267 citations, 47 documents), Peter MacIntyre (4194 citations, 12 documents), and Ali Derakhshan (495 citations, 5 documents). Ali Derakhshan's influential work on emotions (e.g., Derakhshan et al., 2022; Derakhshan et al., 2025), specifically on the predictive role of

FLE, has been instrumental in extending theoretical perspectives on how affective factors shape language acquisition processes (Derakhshan & Fathi, 2023). Mariusz Kruk's contributions have also been pivotal in exploring the intersection of FLE and boredom (Kruk et al., 2022). It is now accepted that employing bibliometric indicators derived from highly cited studies is a more effective mechanism for evaluating researchers than metrics such as the h-index (Martín-Martín et al., 2018).

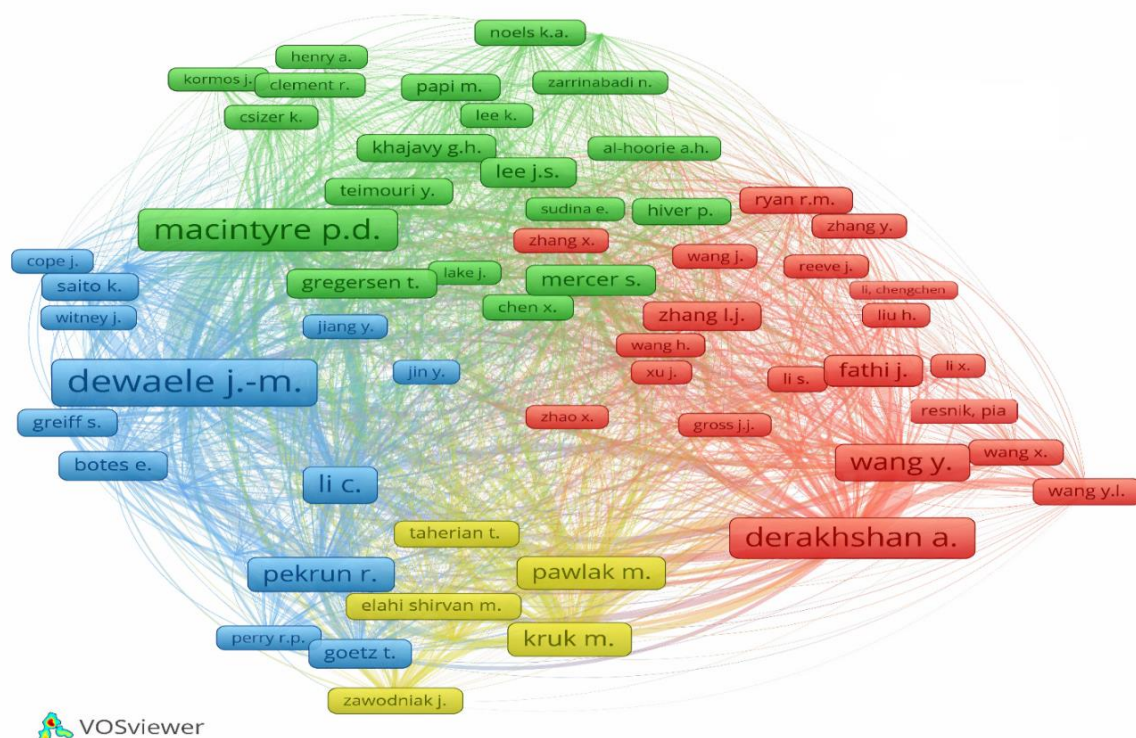


Figure 6. Author Citation Analysis

Most Cited Leading Journals

The citation analysis of the selected studies is a powerful tool that objectively maps the most cited journals. This analysis revealed the prominent role of highly-cited journals in the field. Journals with relatively similar research foci were clustered together, giving a nuanced picture of the research on FLE. The cluster threshold for a source was set at 3, and the minimum number of citations for a source was automatically calculated at 8. The results, as illustrated in Figure 7, highlighted the considerable number of studies available in the top-tier journals such as *System* (citations = 629, documents = 7), *Language Teaching Research* (citations = 517, documents = 3), *Frontiers in Psychology* (citations = 148, documents = 7), *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* (citations = 57, documents = 6). The findings from this citation analysis align with recent trends in applied linguistics and SLA research, where (some of) the editors of these journals are experts at the intersection of

psychology and language learning. This will allow for more recognition of articles submitted in the area of FLE, ensuring that published articles remain within the scope of these journals. Authors may also better understand which editors to write for and how to write their articles to increase their chances of publication. If the two journals are closer in scope, their research agendas are more similar (as shown in Figure 7). The following section focuses on the co-citation analysis of cited sources. A citation threshold of 20 was applied, and nine sources met this criterion. *Frontiers in Psychology* and *International Journal of Multilingualism* (total link strength = 17) were the top co-cited journals (depicted in Figure 8).

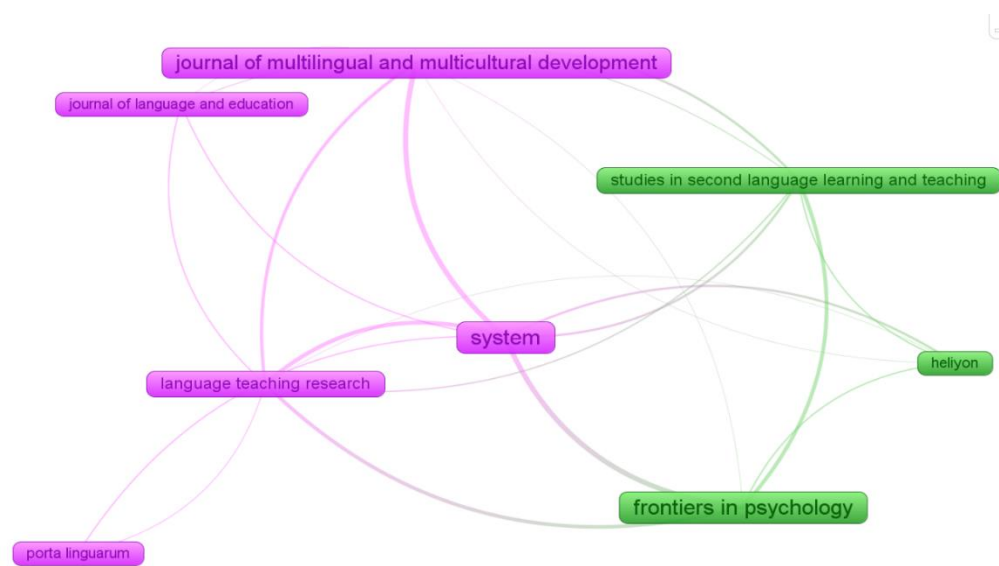


Figure 7. The Citation Analysis for the Top Journals

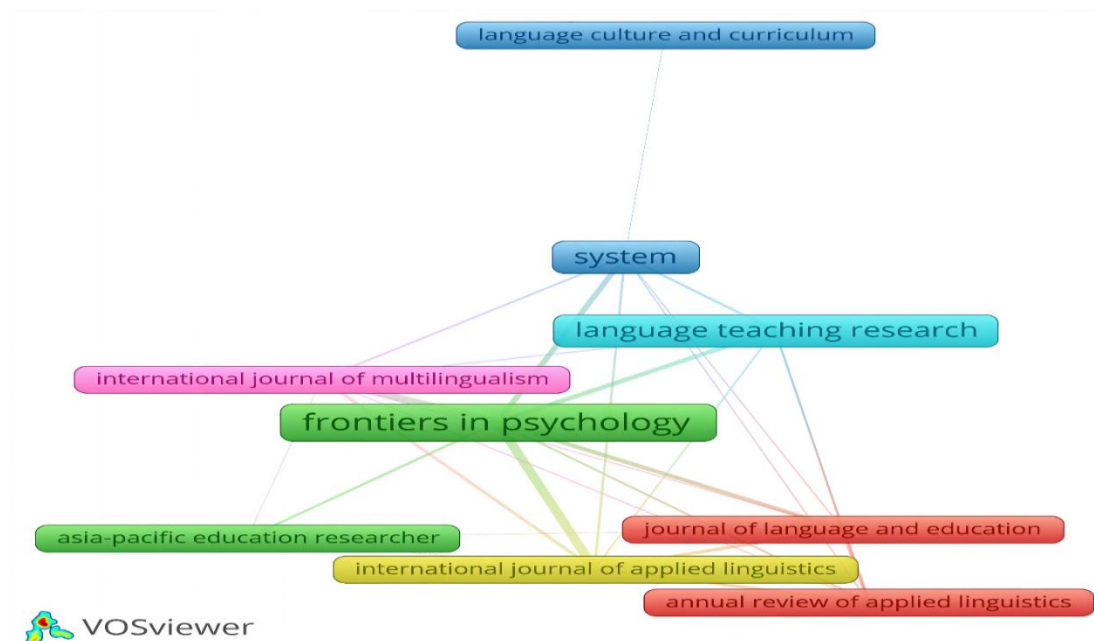


Figure 8. The Co-citation Analysis for the Top Journals

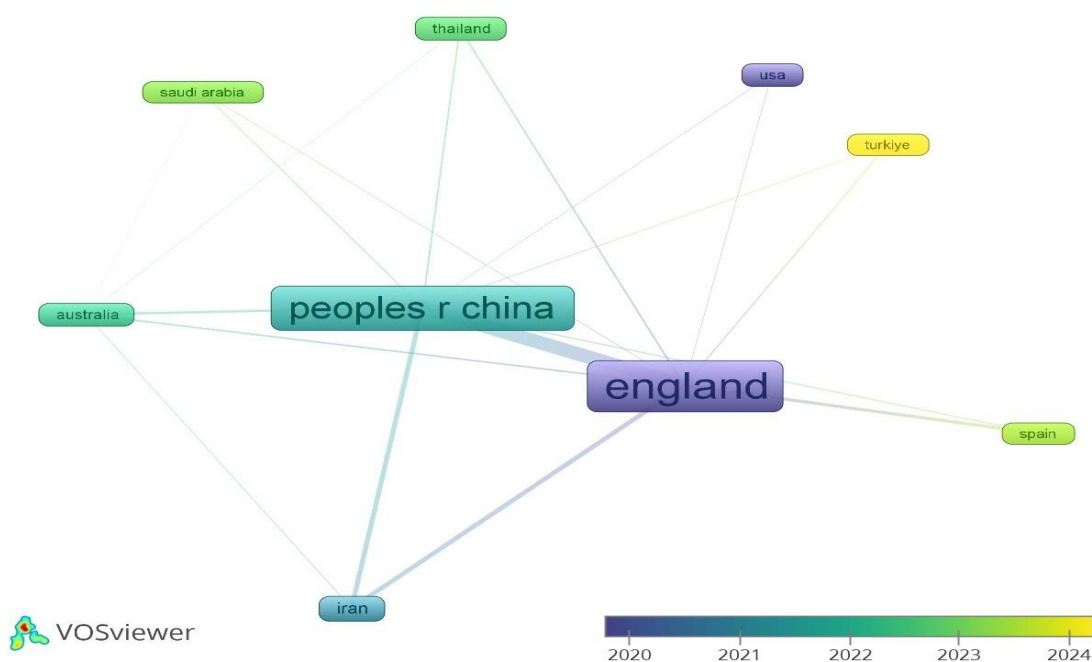


Figure 9. The Yearly Distribution of Study Counts across Different Countries

When countries were clustered, the published documents were found to be concentrated mainly in China, England, and Iran. Furthermore, the data suggest a surge in FLE that started in 2021, which was located in England. It is worth noting that England, China, and Iran, with the thicker connections among frames, are the top contributing countries (green, blue, and purple-shaded, respectively).

Geographical Scope

A comprehensive map of citation analysis was created to identify which countries have the greatest scholarly impact. The threshold for the number of source manuscripts was set at 2, ensuring a thorough analysis. The smallest citation number for a country was chosen at 2, further ensuring inclusivity in the analysis. Nine countries met these requirements. The countries are marked on the map depicted in Figure 9. The map of analysis indicates that most authors with publications on FLE can be found in England (citations= 1300, documents = 10), China (citations = 1018, documents = 23), Iran (citations = 158, documents = 9), Australia (citations = 66, documents = 3), USA (citations = 53, documents = 2), Thailand (citations = 40, documents = 2), Turkey (citations = 43, documents = 4), Saudi Arabia (citations = 13, documents = 3), and Spain (citations = 7, documents = 4). It should be noted, however, that these statistics may not fully reflect the global distribution of FLE research, as database coverage and indexing limitations could affect the counts. Table 2 outlines information for the top research organizations in the rapidly expanding field of FLE. It can be

seen that the University of London took the lead in scientific production, addressing theoretical issues related to FLE (documents = 72, citations = 13682, total link strength = 421). As observed in Table 2, universities working on FLE are from different continents. These universities are all globally recognized for their academic excellence and research contributions. Notably, two of the most productive organizations in this list are located in Iran, making these academic institutions more visible. This publication's outperformance reflects the growing research capabilities in the Global South countries, contributing to a more diverse global research community where the quality and impact of research can be promoted (Albanna et al., 2021).

Table 2. The Number of Documents Published by the Research Institutes

Institutions	Official Records	Citations	Total Link Strength
University of London	72	13682	421
University of Luxembourg	12	915	73
University of Bojnord	12	794	61
Cape Breton University	11	4192	301
University of Kurdistan	9	357	211
Shanghai Jiao Tong University	8	1472	121
Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań	7	223	94
University College of Teacher Education Vienna	3	84	25
University of New South Wales	3	66	21
Málaga University	3	6	20
Oxford University	2	396	29
Hainan Normal University	2	152	25
Taiyuan Normal University	2	66	13
Suleyman Demirel University	2	54	19

Note. $N = 11$

The Most-used Sampling Scheme

Both Table 3 and Figure 10 show the six most frequent sampling structures as key components in research on FLE. Since the absence of an appropriate sampling structure scheme is a prerequisite for authenticity in interpretations (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2017), overlooking them may prevent FLE researchers from shaping sound inferences. As can be seen, research on FLE is generally divided into two distinct categories: experimental and non-experimental. Table 3 outlines the sampling methods used in these two types of research in language-related journals. It was observed that most studies ($n = 387$, 47.01 %) adopted

convenience sampling, later targeting participants purposively. When researchers opt for easily accessible participants, they expedite the research process, possibly introducing biases and limiting the generalizability of findings (Andringa & Godfroid, 2020).

Table 3. Sampling Schemes, Percentages, and Frequencies

		Sampling scheme						Total
		Convenience	Purposive	Longitudinal sampling	Time-based sampling	Simple random sampling	Pseudo-longitudinal sampling	
		N						
Experimental	N	0	0	0	0	11	0	11
	%	0	0	0	0	1.34	0	1.34%
Non-experimental	N	387	236	44	33	108	8	816
	%	47.01	27.90	5.39	3.90	13.13	1.33	98.66%
Total	N	387	236	44	33	119	8	827
	%	46.79	28.53	5.32	3.99	14.39	0.98	100.0%

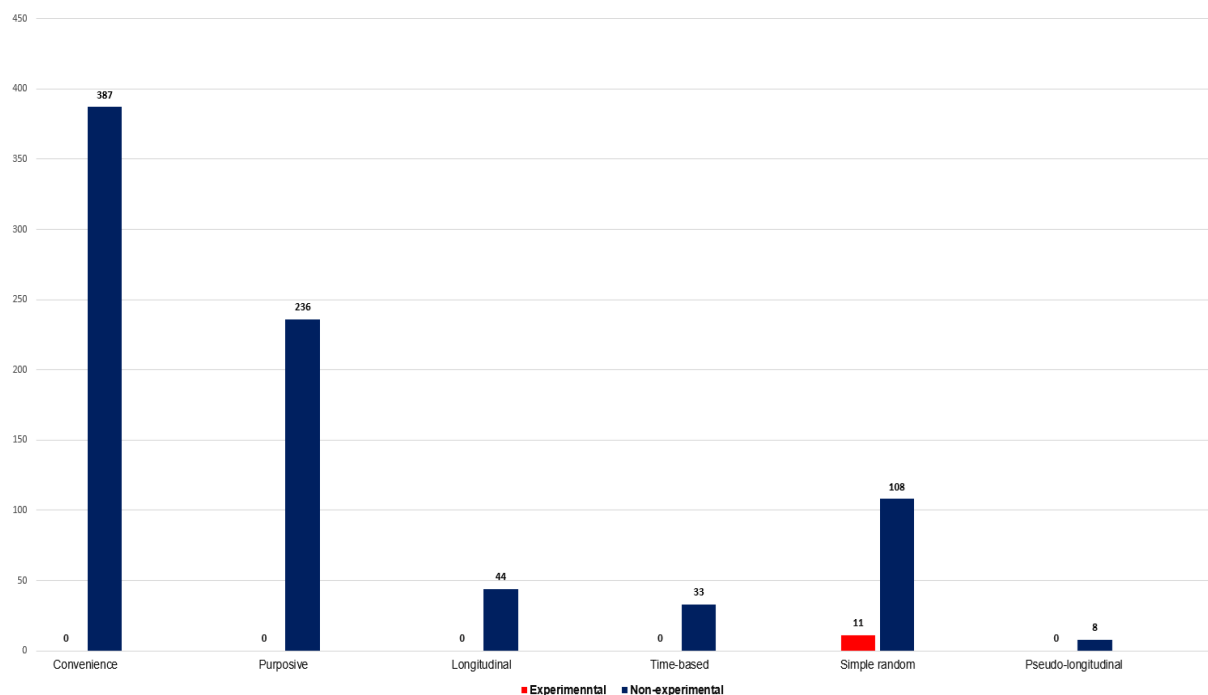


Figure 10. Visualization of Sampling Schemes by Types of Design

However, the frequent use of these sampling schemes might suggest that researchers prioritize depth and specificity of information over broad generalizability and opt for more manageable research designs (Moosa, 2024) or choose other types of research (since they cannot observe the true experimental protocols), leading them to conduct one-shot studies rather than longitudinal ones. These categories inherently influence the choice of sampling

methods, as outlined by [Cohen et al. \(2018\)](#). The least common sampling scheme was pseudo-longitudinal ($n = 8$, 0.98 %). Although resource-intensive, longitudinal studies seem essential for understanding how FLE develops and changes over time, as they provide insights into patterns of change in the field. They are especially useful when researchers are interested in the dynamic aspects of FLE through methodological diversity (e.g., Q-methodology) at different time intervals. Similar patterns are seen in both experimental and non-experimental studies, with convenience sampling used most often, followed by purposive sampling. Therefore, prospective researchers should plan more carefully how they select and report samples, as careful implementation of a sampling scheme can improve the precision of their studies and minimize selection bias ([Andringa & Godfroid, 2020](#)).

Most Cited References

With a minimum citation number of 40 (a researcher-defined threshold to create a meaningful map), of the 1723 cited references, 4 met this threshold, and the co-citation link was provided. It should be noted that high citations most often reflect quality research, and if a reference within a citing document acknowledges another study, the focus of a discipline can be reflected ([Haddow, 2010](#)). Figure 11 graphically presents one cluster with different labels showing the top-cited articles of the two decades. Four critical publications have played a central role in shaping research on foreign language enjoyment. These include *Foreign Language Enjoyment and Anxiety: The Effect of Teacher and Learner Variables* ([Dewaele et al., 2018](#)), which has 396 citations, and *How Unique Is the Foreign Language Classroom Enjoyment and Anxiety of Chinese EFL Learners?* ([Jiang & Dewaele, 2019](#)) with 259 citations, *Understanding Chinese High School Students' Foreign Language Enjoyment: Validation of the Chinese Version of the Foreign Language Enjoyment Scale* ([Li et al., 2019](#)), with 251 citations, and *Does the Effect of Enjoyment Outweigh That of Anxiety in Foreign Language Performance?* ([Dewaele & Alfawzan, 2018](#)) with 224 citations. Collectively, these articles are the most highly cited and have significantly attracted researchers' attention over the years. In addition, some more recent studies ([Derakhshan & Fathi, 2023](#); [Li et al., 2024](#); [Wang & Wang, 2024](#)) have gained considerable recognition and citations shortly after their publication. This demonstrates that both foundational and recent research continue to shape the understanding and investigation of foreign language enjoyment in the field.

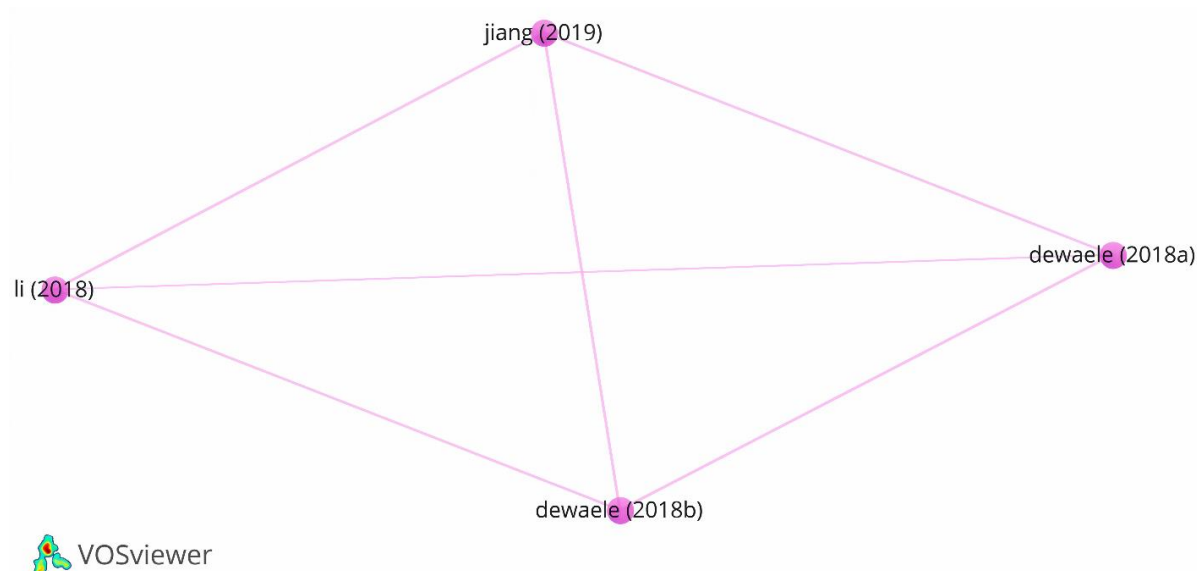


Figure 11. Network Map of the Most Cited Studies

Conclusions

Creating a positive atmosphere in the classroom that fosters learners' maximum emotional well-being and enjoyment of learning a foreign language is now a critical issue for language teachers and L2 researchers. In recognition of this importance, this work presents a holistic overview of the research on FLE in the past quarter century. The findings underscore the growing prominence of FLE, which unfolds in three successive phases: 2000 to 2017 as the early phase, 2018 to 2021 as the growth phase, and 2022 to the present as the maturation phase. As international collaboration is important for journal editors, the FLE network and pattern can serve as a guideline for inviting researchers from different countries. For reviewers, identifying the most frequently used keywords can help screen the most relevant topics in FLE research. Researchers can direct future studies on engagement mechanisms, such as AI-powered and gamified digital tools, to support positive affective experiences associated with FLE, helping identify a better choice of journals. This list can be a handy guide for novice researchers, providing them with a nomological network of themes and topics (Mukherjee et al., 2022), helping them choose appropriate topics for their research and refine their documents in terms of sampling. Furthermore, as FLE consistently occupies a central position in visual maps of research themes, teachers can perceive it as a central pedagogical priority, not a peripheral concern.

The citation analysis output of the most cited studies guides scholars in discovering the influential works on FLE over the last two decades and using them as signposts when writing their documents. With England and its reputation as the home of world-leading universities, it

is now clear that countries in the Global South (e.g., Iran) are on their way to constructing knowledge about FLE and enhancing their scientific research capabilities. Such progress can be facilitated by focusing on FLE in more longitudinal studies and improving language learning outcomes. Additionally, their presence in this line of research is employed to help identify trends that may not be visible in cross-sectional studies, and allows researchers to observe the evolution of FLE over time. This outcome can clarify the unresolved debate about the nature of FLE, how contextual factors influence it, and how it can be sustained over time.

Another step to prevent the underappreciation of FLE appears to be geographically dispersed research publications, which include diverse contexts and render each scholar's contribution valuable and significant, even if they are researchers from developing countries rather than high-income ones ([Albanna et al., 2021](#)). This panorama of academic works outlines potential future directions for FLE researchers to avoid reinventing the wheel in researching relevant emotion frameworks. In general, the present paper provides empirical support for [Zhang et al.'s \(2024\)](#) calls to expose gaps and trends in current research and direct further scholarly work on enjoyment in language learning more effectively. The most cited author was Jean-Marc Dewaele, whose name has entered the annals of FLE. An analysis of publication trends over the years reveals that the majority of studies were published in England. Our study, with its reliance on WoS and narrower coverage in comparison to Scopus, may make it difficult to trace the research performance of other FLE researchers from local contexts. The focus on English-language articles may also prevent FLE knowledge dissemination in certain countries.

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