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Understanding cultural specificity of positive emotions in SLA: The antecedents of foreign language enjoyment and peace of mind in the Chinese context

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Abstract

Recent evidence suggests that Chinese foreign language (FL) learners' positive emotional experiences are conveyed not only by the prevalent emotion of foreign language enjoyment (FLE), but also by the culture-specific emotion of foreign language peace of mind (FLPOM) which describes an inner state of peace and harmony. This study seeks to determine the role of various demographic and learner- and teacher-related factors in arousing FLE and FLPOM in the Chinese context. Participants were 436 learners from four Chinese middle schools. Multiple regression analyses revealed that learners' attitudes towards

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the teacher (i.e., a teacher-related variable) was the strongest predictor for FLE, whereas FLPOM was best predicted by learners' attitudes towards the FL (i.e., a learner-internal variable). Moreover, the variance in FLE was better accounted for by teacher-related variables (52.4%) than by learner-internal variables (40.1%), whereas the variance in FLPOM was better explained by learner-internal variables (42.3%) than by teacher-related variables (34.7%). Practical implications for teaching FL in the Chinese context are discussed.

Keywords: positive emotions; foreign language enjoyment; foreign language peace of mind; learner-internal variables; teacher-related variables

1. Introduction

Researchers in second language acquisition (SLA) have traditionally focused on emotional factors that may hinder learners' second or foreign language (FL) development, such as anxiety (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). It was not until a decade ago that SLA researchers started to shift their focus to factors that may help learners thrive and flourish (Dewaele et al., 2022, 2023; Li & Xu, 2019; MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). This transition was catalyzed by the development of positive psychology (PP; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Central to the PP movement is Fredrickson's (1998, 2001) broaden-and-build theory, which posits that positive emotions broaden individuals' scopes of attention and cognition and thus build personal resources.

PP has inspired both researchers and practitioners that learning or teaching an FL encompasses both linguistic and psychological factors (Li, 2021). PP offers not only a solid theoretical framework but also an established methodology for boosting positive emotions in both learners and teachers (Wang et al., 2021). The construct of foreign language enjoyment (FLE) was thus developed, describing FL learners' positive emotions towards their learning experiences, peers and teachers (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). FLE has been widely studied as a positive emotion across cultures (Botes et al., 2022; Huang, 2022; Li et al., 2019; Piniel & Albert, 2018).

Researchers in cultural psychology believe that human emotions are strongly influenced by social and cultural contexts (Lutz, 1988; Turner & Stets, 2005; Wierzbicka, 1994). This view has led to a Chinese culturally adapted positive emotion construct, namely, *foreign language peace of mind* (FLPOM; Zhou et al., 2021). FLPOM describes an emotional state of inner peace and internal harmony, believed to be key values of subjective well-being in collectivist cultures (Lee et al., 2013; Lim, 2016; Lu & Gilmour, 2004).

Zhou et al. (2021) confirmed that FLE and FLPOM are distinct emotional constructs in the Chinese context through discriminant validity analysis. Nonetheless,

in that study, a relatively strong correlation was detected between the two concepts. This finding implied that both constructs might be indicative of a mindset with broadened attention, enhanced cognition, and heightened engagement (Datu, 2017; Jiang & Dewaele, 2019; Li, 2020; Zhou et al., 2021). Zhou et al. (2021) indicated that FLE may reflect high-arousal positive (HAP) states, relative to FLPOM. Empirical studies have suggested that FLE is a powerful predictor of learners' increased willingness to communicate (Khajavy et al., 2018) and language achievement (Dewaele et al., 2023). Likewise, FLPOM has also been observed to facilitate Chinese FL learners' language learning performance (Zhou et al., 2021). Therefore, it is crucial to determine the sources of FLE and FLPOM and by doing so provide practical implications for arousing positive emotions in FL learning and teaching. Thus, our study sought to examine a range of demographic, learner-internal and teacher-related variables and their weightings as potential antecedents of FLE and FLPOM.

2. Literature review

2.1. Foreign language enjoyment

FLE emerged as the first well-established positive emotion construct in SLA, as a brainchild of Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014). It derives from the basic positive emotion of *joy* (Reeve, 2005). Enjoyment is identified as a key component of *flow* (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), a state in which individuals are fully immersed in the ongoing activity. Enjoyment is not simply an agreeable or pleasant feeling, but, rather, a more complex emotional construct that captures additional dimensions, including an intellectual focus, heightened attention, and optimal challenge (Boudreau et al., 2018).

In the past few years, efforts have been made to examine the factors that can potentially influence the FLE that learners experience in different contexts. Dewaele and MacIntyre's (2014) large-scale investigation of FL learners with varied cultural backgrounds yielded a 21-item FLE scale, the higher scorers of which were those who were older, spoke more languages, had high levels of FL, had a high relative standing among their peers and had high education levels. However, contradictory findings have been offered with respect to gender and age differences in FLE (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Dewaele & Mercer, 2018; Split et al., 2012). Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014), for example, found that female students experienced more FLE than male students in a large global sample including Chinese learners, whereas Jiang and Dewaele's (2019) study did not detect gender differences in the Chinese context. This discrepancy could be attributed to regional or educational differences. A follow-up study by Dewaele and MacIntyre

(2016) explored the underlying factor structure of FLE. Two factors were revealed: *social FLE* (i.e., feelings about teachers, peers, and the environment) and *private FLE* (i.e., feelings about learners themselves). The former accounted for more than twice as much variance as the latter. A recent study by Botes et al. (2021) validated a short-form FLE scale and identified three dimensions: *teacher appreciation*, *personal enjoyment* and *social enjoyment*. Li et al. (2018) adapted the original FLE scale in the Chinese context and uncovered three dimensions: *FLE-teacher*, *FLE-private*, and *FLE-atmosphere*.

Dewaele et al. (2018) included more learner- and teacher-related variables in their search for factors related to FLE in the British high school context. They found that FLE is positively associated with favorable attitudes towards the FL and the teacher, frequency of the teacher's FL use, class speaking time, and level of mastery of the FL. A revealing finding was that FLE was more strongly related to variables linked with the teacher than to those linked with the learner's self. Dewaele and MacIntyre (2019) investigated several personality trait variables and teacher characteristics in FL learners with varied cultural backgrounds. The results showed that FLE was best predicted by teacher-related variables (i.e., attitudes towards the teacher, teachers' friendliness, and teachers' joking). Elahi Shirvan et al. (2020) indicated that learners experienced "high-enjoyment moments" when they received positive feedback and support from the teacher. Dewaele et al. (2022) reported a significant amount of variance of FLE explained by teachers' frequency of using the FL, joking, and teaching predictability (R^2 = 26.2%); interestingly, an interaction effect of a teacher's joking and time was detected, as learners with a teacher whose frequency of joking was low experienced the greatest decrease in FLE. Similar patterns of teacher behaviors (FL use and unpredictability) in fostering FLE were found in Dewaele et al. (2023). These findings confirm that FLE is more dependent on teacher-related variables than on learner-internal variables or learners' personality traits.

Li et al.'s (2019) mixed-methods study in the Chinese high school context asked students to write short essays about their enjoyable scenarios in the FL class. The accounts indicated that learners' experiences of FLE were mostly related to good exam results, positive feedback from the teacher, and higher relative standing. Jiang and Dewaele (2019) argued that the examination-oriented culture in the Chinese educational context may account for the uniqueness of FLE experienced by Chinese FL learners. Li et al. (2021) further found that the classroom environment is a stronger predictor in relation to FLE than learners' emotional intelligence in Chinese university students.

2.2. Foreign language peace of mind

FLPOM is a positive emotional construct originally developed in the Chinese FL context (Zhou et al., 2021). Peace of mind is reflective of a state of inner peace and harmony. Specifically, inner peace captures low-arousal positive (LAP) states, such as peacefulness and calmness, while internal harmony captures a balanced or homeostatic state. These two dimensions constitute a coherent and homogeneous process (Lee et al., 2013) and have long been cherished as the ideals of subjective well-being in collectivist cultures (Lu & Gilmour, 2004). Peace of mind emphasizes emotional control and regulation (Lu, 2008). It denotes a stable and autonomously regulated inner state and therefore creates the urge for learners to focus on intrinsic values and to downplay task-irrelevant stimuli (Zhou et al., 2021). Yu et al. (2020) found that peace of mind is closely linked to an individual's basic psychological needs (autonomy, relatedness, and competence) relative to vitality, which is a high-arousal emotion.

Datu et al. (2018) indicated that current studies pointing to the value of positive emotions have traditionally focused on medium- and high-arousal emotions. However, empirical evidence suggests that the low-arousal and harmonious state of peace of mind appears to be more in line with the conception of subjective well-being in collectivist contexts, in contrast with HAP states (e.g., joy, enthusiasm, elation) which are valued more in individualist contexts (Lee et al., 2013; Lu & Gilmour, 2004). Zhou et al. (2021) developed an 8-item single-dimension FLPOM scale in the Chinese context. The study indicated that FLPOM and FLE are independent yet interrelated emotion constructs, both theoretically and empirically. More specifically, FLPOM and FLE were distinct constructs based on the results of discriminant validity analysis. Meanwhile, a positive correlation ($r = .708$, $p < .001$) was detected between FLE and FLPOM, which meant that the two variables had a shared variance of 50.1%. This suggested that FLE and FLPOM were closely linked and tended to co-occur. Regression analyses showed a significant predictive effect of FLPOM on FL achievement after FLE was controlled for, whilst the predictive effect of FLE on FL achievement failed to reach significance after controlling for FLPOM. In addition, the variance of FL achievement that was explained by FLPOM was considerably larger than that explained by FLE. The authors thus concluded that FLPOM is an important emotional facilitator of FL learning in the Chinese context.

Based on the above discussion, it seems clear that FLE relies more strongly upon teacher-related variables, such as teachers' attitudes and behaviors (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2019). However, far less information is available with respect to the antecedents of FLPOM. Looking simultaneously at both FLE and FLPOM in the same study can lead to a better understanding of the similarities and differences

between the antecedents of the two positive emotions, which has not been investigated in previous emotion research in SLA. Therefore, our study aims to determine the extents to which the same demographic, learner-internal, and teacher-related variables may influence FLE and FLPOM in the Chinese context. The following research questions are proposed:

1. What is the relation between FLE and FLPOM in the Chinese context?
2. What are the effects of demographic variables on FLE and FLPOM?
3. What are the effects of learner-internal and teacher-related variables on FLE and FLPOM?

3. Methods

3.1. Participants

The final sample for our study was composed of 436 students (159 males, 277 females) enrolled in four senior high schools in three Chinese cities: Beijing, Suzhou, and Huainan. Students of grade 2 in senior high school (*N* = 285) accounted for 65.4% of the sample and students of grade 3 (*N* = 151) constituted 34.6%. All participants spoke Chinese as their first language and were learning English as an FL. Participants were asked what level of FL proficiency they had achieved. A few rated themselves as "beginner" (*N* = 31), more as "low intermediate" (*N* = 68), "intermediate" (*N* = 245), "high-intermediate" (*N* = 77); only 26 participants rated themselves as "advanced."[1] Participants had a mean age of 16.5 (*SD* = .58), with a range from 15 to 20 years.

3.2. Instruments

3.2.1. Foreign language enjoyment

The *Chinese Foreign Language Enjoyment Scale* (Li et al., 2018), an adapted version of the original FLE scale (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014), was used. It contains

[1] *Beginner*: able to introduce oneself simply, use basic greetings, and write simple descriptions of one's hobbies or interests; *low intermediate*: able to converse about familiar daily topics, and read and write short, simple texts; *intermediate*: able to describe experiences and desires, follow the plot in simple English stories, and write simple texts on familiar topics; *high-intermediate*: able to take an active part in discussions in familiar contexts, understand the main ideas when reading a complex text, and write clear, detailed texts on familiar subjects; *advanced*: able to express ideas fluently, and write extensively on a diverse range of topics and approach unfamiliar ones with ease.

11 items and three dimensions (FLE-private, FLE-teacher, and FLE-atmosphere). Participants were asked to indicate their emotional experiences related to several internal and external facets of enjoyment in learning English on a 5-point Likert scale. One of the items is: "I feel proud of my accomplishments in the FL class." The Cronbach alpha coefficient was .916 for the whole scale, .888 for the sub-scale FLE-private, .943 for FLE-teacher, and .875 for FLE-atmosphere, indicating high internal consistency.

3.2.2. Foreign language peace of mind

The single-dimension and 8-item *Foreign Language Peace of Mind Scale* (Zhou et al., 2021) was used. Participants were asked to indicate their emotional experiences for feelings of peace of mind in learning English on a 5-point Likert scale. One of the items is: "I am able to find inner peace and harmony when experiencing stress or pressure in learning English." The Cronbach alpha was .951 in the current sample, which indicated high internal consistency.

3.2.3. Demographic, learner-internal, and teacher-related variables

A collection of 12 independent variables were observed in this study, including four demographic variables, four learner-internal variables, and four teacher-related variables. These variables were selected based on previous findings as they are the most fundamental and extensively studied factors in relation to learners' positive emotions (Dewaele et al., 2019; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2019; Jiang & Dewaele, 2019). Demographic variables included learners' gender and age groups, as well as FL teachers' gender and age groups. Considering that students may not be aware of the exact ages of their teachers, we used a 5-year age gap (25 ≤, 26-30, 31-35, 36-40, 41-45, 46-50, ≥ 51) to see if, or to what extent, teachers being comparatively young or old may affect learners' experienced positive emotions. Learner-internal and teacher-related variables were assessed on a 5-point Likert scale, including learners' relative standing among peers (1 = far below average, 2 = below average, 3 = average, 4 = above average, 5 = far above average), level of mastery of the FL (1 = beginner, 2 = low-intermediate, 3 = intermediate, 4 = high-intermediate, 5 = advanced), learners' attitudes towards the FL (1 = very unfavorable, 2 = unfavorable, 3 = neutral, 4 = favorable, 5 = very favorable), learners' attitudes towards the FL teacher (1 = very unfavorable, 2 = unfavorable, 3 = neutral, 4 = favorable, 5 = very favorable), teachers' frequency of FL use (1 = hardly ever, 2 = not very often, 3 = sometimes, 4 = usually, 5 = all the time), teachers' predictability (1 = very unpredictable, 2 = unpredictable, 3 = neutral, 4 = predictable, 5 = very predictable),

teachers' strictness (1 = not strict at all, 2 = a little strict, 3 = rather strict, 4 = strict, 5 = very strict), and teachers' joking (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree).

3.3. Data collection

An anonymous online survey was administered in the four schools studied using convenience sampling, with a composite questionnaire covering participants' demographics, and learner- and teacher-related variables, FLE and FLPOM. The online survey was distributed via WeChat, a popular social media platform in China. The researchers first contacted teachers at the target schools and asked them to distribute a link to the survey to their students as part of their coursework. Before starting the survey, the researchers obtained informed consent from teachers and participants. A total of 441 cases were collected, in which 5 cases contained missing values. The final sample used therefore consisted of 436 cases.

3.4. Data analysis

Data analysis consisted of three steps. Firstly, we used Pearson correlation analyses to measure the relationship between all variables studied. Secondly, we used independent *t*-tests and one-way ANOVAs to evaluate the effects of demographic variables on FLE and FLPOM, with the purpose of determining the differences in FLE/FLPOM levels by demographic categories. Thirdly, multiple regression analyses were run to test the effects of learner-internal and teacher-related variables on FLE and FLPOM. Stepwise regression was used because of the relatively large number of independent variables included.

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations (*SD*), and correlations of all the observed variables. Pearson correlation analyses suggested a significant positive relation between FLE and FLPOM ($r = .79$, $p < .001$) with a shared variance of 62%, which is considered a large effect size (Plonsky & Oswald, 2014). Participants with higher FLE scores also had higher FLPOM scores. Applying the Bonferroni correction to multiple comparisons, we divided $p = .05$ by the number of

tests (13) to get the Bonferroni critical value, so a test would have to have $p < .004$ to be significant. Under that criterion, as shown in Table 1, 9 out of the 12 independent variables were significantly correlated with both FLE and FLPOM.

Table 1 The means, *SD*s, and correlations of the observed variables

Variables	*M*	*SD*	*r* (FLE)	*r* (FLPOM)
FLE	3.72	.73	–	.78***
FLPOM	3.51	.84	.79***	–
Learners' gender	1.64	.48	-.04	-.05
Learners' age group	4.07	.58	-.08	-.08
Teachers' gender	1.56	.50	.18***	.21***
Teachers' age group	3.50	1.86	-.21***	-.22***
Relative standing among peers	3.07	1.03	.39***	.48***
Level of mastery of the FL	2.95	.87	.40***	.46***
Attitude towards the FL	3.66	.84	.63***	.62***
Attitude towards the teacher	3.98	.91	.66***	.55***
Frequency of teachers' FL use	3.96	.94	.47***	.40***
Teachers' predictability	3.80	.88	.56***	.46***
Teachers' strictness	3.37	1.02	-.01	.01
Teachers' joking	3.80	.99	.52***	.40***

Note. *** $p < .001$, *SD* = standard deviation, FLE = foreign language enjoyment, FLPOM = foreign language peace of mind

4.2. The relation between demographic variables and FLE/FLPOM

4.2.1. Learners' gender

The results of two independent *t*-tests showed that the gender difference in the mean level of both FLE (male: $M = 3.76$, $SD = .84$; female: $M = 3.70$, $SD = .65$) ($t = .770$, $df = 268$, $p = .442$) and FLPOM (male: $M = 3.56$, $SD = .93$; female: $M = 3.47$, $SD = .77$) ($t = 1.028$, $df = 283$, $p = .305$) did not reach statistical significance.

4.2.2. Learners' age group

As shown in Figure 1, the results of two one-way ANOVAs indicated that learners aged between 15 to 20 did not show significant differences in both FLE ($F = 1.395$, $df = 2$, $p = .249$) and FLPOM ($F = 1.898$, $df = 2$, $p = .151$).

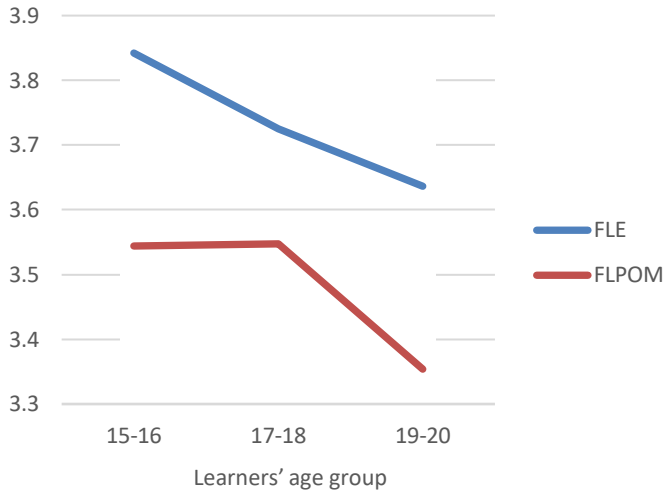

Figure 1 The effects of learners' age group on FLE and FLPOM

4.2.3. Teachers' gender

The results of two independent *t*-tests indicated that learners with male teachers perceived significantly less FLE than those with female teachers (male: M = 3.57, SD = .61; female: M = 3.84, SD = .79; t = -4.033, df = 434, p < .001, Cohen's d = .383) and also significantly less FLPOM than those with female teachers (male: M = 3.31, SD = .72; female: M = 3.66, SD = .89; t = -4.571, df = 433, p < .001, Cohen's d = .436). Both effect sizes were small (Plonsky & Oswald, 2014).

4.2.4. Teachers' age group

The results of two one-way ANOVAs found that FL teachers' age group significantly influenced FLE (F = 6.940, df = 6, p < .001, eta^2 = .088) and FLPOM (F = 6.990, df = 6, p < .001, eta^2 = .089). Both were small effect sizes (Plonsky & Oswald, 2014). This finding indicates that teachers' age group accounted for 8.8% of the change in FLE and 8.9% in FLPOM, respectively. Figure 2 depicts the variation trends of FLE and FLPOM levels with the increase of teachers' age. The two polylines showed close similarity.

Learners with FL teachers under 25 years old reported a FLE level (M = 4.15, SD = .78) significantly higher than those with teachers within any other age group (all p < .026). Learners with teachers aged 26-30 reported the second highest

FLE level (*M* = 3.88, *SD* = .78), significantly higher than those with teachers aged 31 or more (all $p < .050$). No significant differences in FLE were detected among learners with teachers aged 31-35, 36-40, 41-45, 46-50, and ≥ 51 (all $p > .101$).

Learners with teachers aged under 25 also reported the highest FLPOM level (*M* = 3.95, *SD* = .96), significantly higher than all other groups (all $p < .015$) except for the group of 26-30. Learners with teachers aged 26-30 reported the second highest level of FLPOM (*M* = 3.71, *SD* = .91), significantly higher than learners with teachers aged 31-35, 41-45, 46-50, and ≥ 51 (all $p < .007$). No significant differences in FLPOM were found among learners with teachers aged 31-35, 36-40, 41-45, 46-50, and ≥ 51 (all $p > .145$).

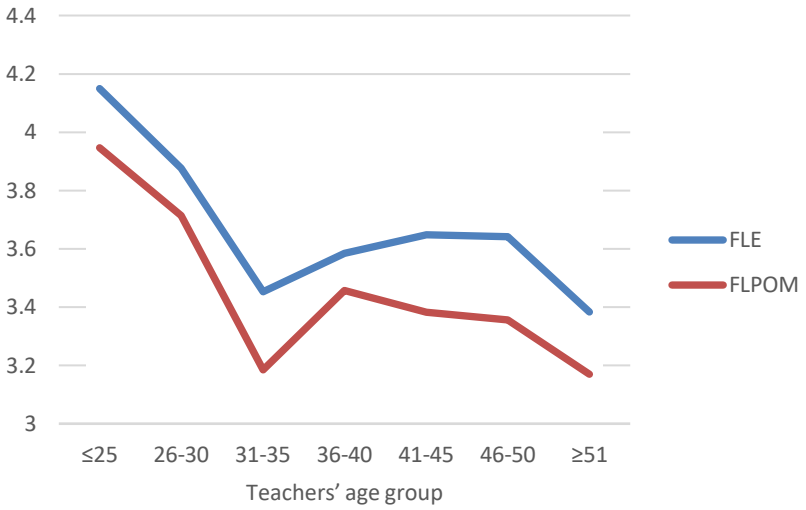

Figure 2 The effects of teachers' age group on learners' FLE and FLPOM

4.3. The effects of learner-internal and teacher-related variables on FLE and FLPOM

As presented in Table 2, the results of multiple linear regression analyses revealed that six out of the seven independent variables significantly positively influenced FLE, and one variable (relative standing among peers) failed to display an additional significant effect on the outcome variable and was thus excluded from the regression model. The six independent variables collectively explained 59.6% of the variance in FLE, with a large effect size (adjusted $R^2 = .596$) according to Plonsky and Ghanbar (2018), indicating a good fit between the model and the observations. The best predictor for FLE was attitude towards the teacher ($\beta = .261$, $p < .001$), a teacher-related variable, followed by attitude

towards the FL, teachers' joking, teachers' predictability, frequency of teachers' FL use, level of mastery of the FL. No signs of multicollinearity were detected (variance inflation factors [VIF] < 3).

Table 2 The regression effects of learner-internal and teacher-related variables on FLE

Independent variables	*B*	*β*	*t*	*VIF*
(Constant)	.501***	-	3.789	-
Relative standing among peers	-	-	-	-
Level of mastery of the FL	.121***	.144***	4.149	1.301
Attitude towards the FL	.204***	.236***	5.461	2.014
Attitude towards the teacher	.209***	.261***	5.709	2.245
Frequency of teachers' FL use	.106***	.136***	3.665	1.476
Teachers' predictability	.105**	.127***	3.082	1.831
Teachers' joking	.123***	.168***	4.495	1.496
Model Summary				
(R^2 = .601; Adjusted R^2 = .596; *SE* of the Estimate = .463; *D-W* = 1.812; *F* = 107.761***)				

Note. *** p < .001, *SE* = Standard error, *VIF* = Variance inflation factor, *D-W* = Durbin-Watson statistic

As presented in Table 3, all seven independent variables significantly positively influenced FLPOM, which collectively explained 49.7% of the variance in FLPOM, with a medium to large effect size (adjusted R^2 = .497), according to Plonsky and Ghanbar (2018), indicating a good fit between the model and the data. The best predictor for FLPOM was attitude towards the FL (β = .315, p < .001), a learner-internal variable, followed by relative standing among peers, teachers' predictability, attitude towards the teacher, teachers' joking, level of mastery of the FL, and frequency of teachers' FL use. No signs of multicollinearity were detected (*VIF* < 3).

Table 3 The regression effects of learner-internal and teacher-related variables on FLPOM

Independent variables	*B*	*β*	*t*	*VIF*
(Constant)	.249	-	1.503	-
Relative standing among peers	.187***	.230***	5.863	1.331
Level of mastery of the FL	-	-	-	-
Attitude towards the FL	.312***	.315***	6.499	2.032
Attitude towards the teacher	.105*	.114*	2.248	2.230
Frequency of teachers' FL use	.093*	.104*	2.515	1.474
Teachers' predictability	.106*	.112*	2.437	1.822
Teachers' joking	.093**	.111**	2.671	1.496
Model Summary				
(R^2 = .504; Adjusted R^2 = .497; *SE* of the Estimate = .592; *D-W* = 1.839; *F* = 72.708***)				

Note. * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001, *SE* = standard error, *VIF* = variance inflation factor, *D-W* = Durbin-Watson statistic

In order to evaluate to what extent FLE and FLPOM are affected by the two different sets of independent variables (learner-internal and teacher-related), we further conducted regression analyses with the enter method by entering the two sets of independent variables into the regression model, respectively. The results indicated that learner-internal variables accounted for 40.1% of the variance in FLE (adjusted R^2 = .401; F = 98.248, p < .001) and that teacher-related variables accounted for 52.4% of the variance in FLE (adjusted R^2 = .524; F = 120.700, p < .001). By contrast, learner-related variables explained 42.3% of the variance in FLPOM (adjusted R^2 = .423; F = 107.211, p < .001), and teacher-related variables explained 34.7% of the variance in FLPOM (adjusted R^2 = .347; F = 58.855, p < .001).

5. Discussion

5.1. The link between FLE and FLPOM

Our study found a strong correlation between FLE and FLPOM with a shared variance of 62%, which is even higher than that found in Zhou et al. (2021). This broadly supports previous observations pointing to a link between FLE and FLPOM. On the one hand, FLE and FLPOM are both used to reflect learners' positive emotional arousal, meaning that both are positively valenced and thus tend to co-occur. On the other hand, FLE and FLPOM appear to show a relatively high degree of commonality in their effects on individual functioning. Specifically, both enjoyment and peace of mind, as positive emotions, are closely linked with an individual's broadened scope of attention, action and cognition and personal resources accrued or built during the processes (Fredrickson, 2001). Enjoyment, for instance, can help learners better notice, process and acquire language input in the learning environment (Dewaele & Alfawzan, 2018; Khajavy et al., 2018). In the same vein, peace of mind also has a positive broadening power on learners' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement (Datu et al., 2018) and on academic motivation (Datu, 2017).

5.2. The effects of demographic variables

It was found in our study that a learner's gender was not significantly linked to FLE. This outcome is contrary to that of Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014), Dewaele et al. (2016) and Dewaele et al. (2018), who found that female students reported higher levels of FLE than male students within a large global sample, whereas it is consistent with Jiang and Dewaele's (2019) finding in the Chinese context.

Gender differences in FLPOM were also not detected. Chaplin and Aldao (2013) pointed out that female FL learners are often credited with better learning performance and more intense emotional arousal than male learners. Further studies with larger Chinese samples and utilizing rigorous methods are required to confirm how learners' FLE or FLPOM may vary by gender or by context. Similarly, FLE and FLPOM do not seem to be noticeably different across the high school years of Chinese FL learners. This finding contradicts previous studies which suggested that learners' age positively affects FLE (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Dewaele et al., 2018). This discrepancy, however, is probably due to the relatively small age range in this study.

Interestingly, the two teacher demographic variables (i.e., gender and age group) were observed to be significantly related to Chinese FL learners' positive emotional experiences. Learners with female teachers reported significantly higher levels of both FLE and FLPOM than those with male teachers, despite small effect sizes for both. Again, prior studies diverge in their findings. Dewaele et al. (2018) identified a significant effect of teachers' gender on FLE. Split et al. (2012) found that female teachers perceived more favorably (i.e., closer, less conflictual and less dependent) teacher-student relationships than their male colleagues. Dewaele and Mercer (2018) also suggested that female teachers' attitudes towards their students are more favorable than those of male teachers. In contrast, Dewaele et al. (2019) reported no significant link between a teacher's gender and a learner's FLE. Dewaele et al. (2018) found that FL teachers' gender has no effect on teachers' creativity, classroom management skills, and pedagogical skills and predictability.

Teachers' age group was identified as another important characteristic related to Chinese learners' positive emotional experiences. Learners with teachers aged under 25 reported the highest levels of both FLE and FLPOM, significantly higher than those with teachers within any other age group. Learners with teachers aged 26-31 scored the second highest levels of both FLE and FLPOM, significantly higher than nearly all the other groups. FLE and FLPOM were not significantly different between learners with teachers aged 31-35, 36-40, 41-45, 46-50, and ≥ 51. This finding is somewhat counter-intuitive. Stereotypically, older or more experienced teachers are often credited with knowing better how to manage a classroom and helping students to regulate and become attuned to emotions. For instance, Dewaele et al. (2018) showed that teachers' teaching experience (i.e., numbers of years in the profession) is positively associated with their creativity, classroom management skills, and pedagogical skills, and negatively associated with teachers' predictability. However, it is possible that, as our findings suggested, younger FL teachers or teachers who have just graduated from college are better able to boost Chinese learners' emotional well-being. A possible explanation for this might be that younger teachers may have a more

open, positive, youthful and creative mind, care to listen to students' voices, be more conscious of students' psychological needs, and give them equal opportunities for participation, thereby imbuing students with greater engagement and enjoyment in the FL classroom. Wu et al. (2019) found that Chinese secondary school teachers who have 10 to 20 years of teaching experience and who possess a middle-level professional title have relatively high levels of job burnout. Dewaele et al. (2019) also noted that older FL teachers are normally perceived to be stricter and less friendly than their younger colleagues. Young teachers may help lessen the culture-specific hierarchical relationship or high power distance between teachers and students in the Chinese educational context (Han & Han, 2019; Shi, 2006) that may cause less comfort and enjoyment in the FL classroom.

5.3. The effects of learner-internal and teacher-related variables

Our study identified significant predictive effects of six antecedent variables on FLE, including the level of FL mastery, attitude towards the FL, attitude towards the teacher, frequency of FL use by the teacher, teachers' predictability and teachers' joking, which basically echoes earlier findings (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014, 2019; Dewaele et al., 2018, 2019; Jiang & Dewaele, 2019). It is worth mentioning that teachers' predictability positively predicted FLE, which is contrary to the finding that unpredictability is positively linked with enjoyment (Dewaele et al., 2018), but partly supported Jiang and Dewaele's (2019) view that teachers' unpredictability may not fit the Chinese FL learning context as it may trigger sudden and intense feelings of anxiety instead of enjoyment. Among the measured variables, learners' attitude towards the teacher was observed to be the strongest predictor of FLE. This result lent support to Dewaele and MacIntyre (2019) as well as Jiang and Dewaele (2019), who found that the same variable explained the largest variance in FLE among a myriad of learner- and teacher-related predictors. Likewise, six antecedent variables were found to significantly affect FLPOM, including learners' relative standing among peers, attitudes towards the FL, attitudes towards the teacher, frequency of FL use by the teacher, teacher' predictability and teachers' joking. Learners' attitude towards the FL was found to be the strongest predictor of FLPOM.

Further regression analyses indicated that the degree to which FLE and FLPOM were affected by the two sets of independent variables (learner-internal variables and teacher-related variables) seemed to be different. Specifically, FLE was better predicted by teacher-related variables (52.4% of variance explained) than by learner-internal variables (40.1% of variance explained). FLPOM was better predicted by learner-internal variables (42.3% of variance explained) than

by teacher-related variables (34.7% of variance explained). In other words, FLE seems to be more dependent on teacher characteristics, whereas FLPOM is more dependent on learner characteristics.

This discrepancy may be because FLPOM inherently involves not only LAP emotional states but also states of internal harmony (i.e., balance and homeostasis). It has been previously established that peace of mind is closely linked with individuals' basic psychological needs, that is, autonomy, relatedness and competence, and emphasizes what is intrinsically valuable to individuals (Ryan et al., 2008, Yu et al., 2020). FLPOM is indicative of an introspective psychological climate that emphasizes spiritual cultivation and enrichment. A high level of FLPOM may be induced when "internal conditions" are being met (e.g., when learners' internal psychological needs are satisfied). The high relevance of FLPOM to a learner's internal characteristics also suggests that FLPOM is a comparatively stable emotional state. By contrast, FLE proves to be more strongly linked to teacher characteristics than factors related to learners themselves (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2019; Dewaele et al., 2019; Jiang & Dewaele, 2019). Dewaele and MacIntyre (2016) illustrated the concept of enjoyment by analogy with how athletes feel after they play against a worthy opponent in a closely-contested match where they performed better than expected no matter if they won or lost. This can be well differentiated from feelings of pleasure after an easy victory. In other words, enjoyment is awakened when learners are deeply engaged in tasks that are challenging but not overwhelming (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). FLE is indicative of an action tendency towards challenging one's limits and breaking through internal homeostasis in FL learning (Zhou et al., 2021). Therefore, FLE is elicited in the interaction between learners and the external environment. This also suggests that FLE may be more susceptible to distractions in relation to external stimuli (e.g., behaviors, events or conditions), which may render it short-lived and fluctuant.

5.4. Pedagogical implications

The principal finding of this study is that numerous teacher and learner characteristics are closely related to Chinese FL learners' psychological well-being. Teachers should be aware that their own characteristics related to behaviors, attitudes, classroom management and pedagogical skills have a critical impact on learners' experiences of positive emotions, which, in turn, will affect learners' achievement in FL learning. Teachers being friendly, humorous, and predictable in class, having a favorable attitude towards students and using FL more often can help learners reach their emotional "high ground" in FL learning. It is highly recommended for teachers to obtain feedback from students on a regular basis.

For example, teachers may ask students to rate their attitudes and behaviors in an anonymous manner. Chinese FL teachers should be conscious of how they are perceived in the eyes of their students. This can be conceptualized as students' attitudes toward the teacher, which was confirmed as an important predictor of FLE in our study. Jiang and Dewaele (2019) indicated that learners' attitude towards the teacher derives from learners' appreciation of teachers' both character traits and pedagogical skills. Therefore, it is fair to say that teachers with expert teaching skills, optimistic attitudes and abilities to build strong bonds with students are more likely to form favorable learner attitudes towards them.

Furthermore, it is advisable to provide teachers with greater autonomy in teaching plans (Jiang & Dewaele, 2019), which can certainly contribute to a more relaxed and enjoyable learning environment. Novel and interesting classroom tasks or activities can promote FL learners' learning autonomy and mobilize their imagination, and are closely linked to positive emotional experiences (Dewaele et al., 2019, 2018). However, a note of caution is due as our findings demonstrated a significant positive link between teachers' predictability and both FLE and FLPOM in the Chinese FL learning context, which contradicts previous findings in the Western context that unpredictable, challenging, and surprising teaching activities can boost positive emotions (Dewaele et al., 2018). We thus suggest that Chinese FL teachers be more cautious of the potential risk of (over-)unpredictability involved in classroom tasks and take into account relevant learner and sociocultural factors. Needs analysis performed by teachers is highly recommended because it can help teachers understand their students' needs and what tasks and activities are appropriate to be applied (Kessler et al., 2021).

Moreover, we recommend not to over-emphasize the effect of Chinese FL teachers' teaching experience (years in the profession) or rank in improving FL learners' subjective well-being in the same way as it has been done for their role in classroom management or pedagogical skills assessment. Our findings showed a significant negative effect of teachers' age on both FLE and FLPOM in the Chinese context. Learners are more likely to reach their emotional high ground with younger teachers who may be more capable of catering for their psychological needs. Nowadays the teaching population in China is getting older and the teaching profession has become less appreciated and popular among young people, especially in the primary and secondary education system, which may result from relatively low social and economic status and poor benefits (Tang, 2018), and shortage of school material resources (Chen, 2017). Considering the key role of young teachers in promoting the psychological well-being of students in FL learning, there is a need to recruit more qualified young teachers in China's secondary education system. Efforts should be made to improve the attractiveness of the teaching profession for future young teachers by, for example, responding positively

to the material and spiritual needs of the teaching community and by increasing appreciation and recognition of the teaching profession.

5.5. Limitations and directions for future research

Our study has some limitations. First, the study is limited by the cross-sectional research design and it could thus only provide a snapshot of the participants' subjective feelings in FL learning. More solid evidence from longitudinal research designs is needed to validate the relations between teacher/learner characteristics and learners' positive emotional experiences. In addition, this study used single item scales to measure the learner- and teacher-related variables, which should be recognized as a major flaw of the research design. It is advisable to use scales with multiple items and high internal reliability in future research. Furthermore, the learners' age ranging from 15 to 20 years might be too small to indicate significant age differences in positive emotional experiences. Larger age ranges are required in future studies. Moreover, a five-year gap for the teachers' age was used because students might not be aware of the exact ages of their teachers. This could have potentially affected the validity of the results. Exact ages should be used instead in future research. Finally, the scope of this study was also limited in terms of its choice of sample. The sample consisted of students from several quality institutions, which may reduce the generalizability of the findings to the whole population. It is recommended that future studies use a larger, more diverse sample.

6. Conclusion

This study was undertaken to investigate the roles of a range of demographic, learner-internal and teacher-related variables in Chinese FL learners' positive emotional experiences (FLE and FLPOM). It was found that learners' gender or age did not significantly affect both FLE and FLPOM, whereas teachers' gender and age had a significant effect on FLE and FLPOM. Furthermore, learners' attitude towards the teacher (a teacher-related variable) was observed to be the best predictor of FLE and attitude towards the FL (a learner-internal variable) was the best predictor of FLPOM. The findings also suggest FLE may rely more strongly on teacher characteristics and FLPOM more on learner characteristics.

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