

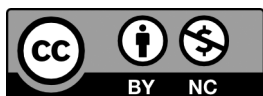
# The Mediating Role of Foreign Language Enjoyment: An Affective Pathway Through Which Academic Buoyancy Influences Learning Engagement

Baoqi Yan Shu Zhai\*

Northeast Forestry University, College of Foreign Languages, Harbin

**Abstract:** Grounded in positive psychology theory in second language acquisition (SLA), this study investigates the impact of academic buoyancy and foreign language enjoyment (FLE) on learning engagement, with a particular emphasis on the mediating role of FLE. A sample of 280 English majors from a 211 Project university in Northeast China complete questionnaire surveys, and data are quantitatively analyzed. The study yields the following results: (1) Learners exhibit moderately high levels of academic buoyancy ( $M=3.292$ ), FLE ( $M=3.293$ ), and learning engagement ( $M=3.331$ ). (2) Academic buoyancy significantly and positively correlates with learning engagement ( $r=0.764$ ); similarly, FLE shows a strong positive correlation with learning engagement ( $r=0.782$ ). (3) Bootstrap mediation analysis confirms that FLE partially mediates the effect of academic buoyancy on learning engagement (indirect effect= $0.390$ ). These findings reveal that academic buoyancy directly promotes learning engagement and indirectly enhances it by stimulating positive emotional experiences. The identified pathway — that is, Academic Buoyancy → Foreign Language Enjoyment → Learning Engagement — underscores the crucial role of affective dimensions in educational outcomes. The study highlights the importance of fostering positive psychological attributes, especially FLE, as a strategic priority in foreign language education to maximize learner engagement. Practical pedagogical implications are discussed, offering empirical support for integrating affective factors into SLA practices for English majors.

**Keywords:** Academic buoyancy; Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE); Learning engagement; Mediating effect; English majors



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## 1 Introduction

Learning engagement is a pivotal construct in second language acquisition (SLA) that significantly predicts

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\*Corresponding author: Shu Zhai, College of Foreign Languages, Northeast Forestry University, Professor, Master’s Supervisor, MA, Research directions: English teaching and language testing, Applied linguistics, Written translation.

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academic performance, linguistic proficiency, and learner satisfaction (Ren, 2023). Within China's highly demanding higher-education context, English majors confront unique academic demands such as high-stakes proficiency tests (e.g., TEM-8), extensive content-based curricula covering all language skills, and complex psychological pressures related to bilingual identity formation (Liu, 2022). Consequently, identifying psychological resources that sustain learner engagement amidst these intense educational pressures is essential.

The rise of positive psychology in SLA research has increasingly shifted attention toward adaptive psychological resources facilitating language learning (Li, 2021). Among these, two such resources—academic buoyancy (students' capacity to cope with routine academic setbacks; Martin & Marsh, 2008) and foreign language enjoyment (FLE; positive emotions experienced during language learning; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014)—have proven especially influential. Although both constructs have been independently explored, their interrelated dynamics remain understudied, particularly within specialized populations like English majors who experience distinct academic and emotional pressures (Yun et al., 2018).

To bridge these research gaps, this study pursues two objectives: (1) the direct relationships among academic buoyancy, FLE, and learning engagement specifically within language learning contexts and (2) the mediating role of FLE between academic buoyancy and learning engagement. Focusing on English majors at a 211 Project university, this study provides empirical insights into emotion-driven educational strategies and contributes valuable theoretical perspectives and practical recommendations for educators aiming to enhance student engagement through targeted psychological support in SLA contexts.

## 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 Academic Buoyancy

Academic buoyancy (AB) refers to students' capacity to effectively navigate routine academic adversities such as exam stress, assignment challenges, and temporary declines in performance (Martin & Marsh, 2008). Unlike resilience, which addresses severe and chronic adversities, buoyancy focuses explicitly on daily academic stressors. Martin and Marsh (2008) identify buoyancy as comprising self-efficacy, organizational skills, persistence, constructive attribution of failure, and low anxiety. In language-learning contexts, buoyancy is crucial due to distinct challenges, including linguistic plateaus, grammatical fossilization, and anxiety about communication (Jahedizadeh et al., 2019). Recent research further illustrates buoyancy's role in sustaining learners' strategic approaches and persistence amid communicative setbacks (Yun et al., 2018), reinforcing its significance as a valuable psychological resource.

### 2.2 Foreign Language Enjoyment

Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE), rooted in positive psychology, describes the pleasurable emotional experiences occurring during language-learning activities (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). According to the broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 2001), positive emotions like FLE enhance learners' cognitive and behavioral repertoires and build durable personal resources. FLE manifests across three dimensions: private enjoyment (self-fulfillment), teacher-driven enjoyment (positive teacher-student interactions), and a supportive classroom atmosphere (peer dynamics).

For English majors, FLE arises uniquely from specialized activities such as literary analysis and debates, as well as the professional identity formation associated with their future linguistic careers (Li, 2018). Empirical studies have consistently demonstrated FLE's positive correlation with critical educational outcomes, such as increased willingness to communicate, improved vocabulary retention, and enhanced grammatical accuracy (Dewaele et al., 2018; Li, 2021).

### 2.3 Learning Engagement

Learning engagement (LE) is conceptualized as students' active participation in educational activities, encompassing cognitive, behavioural, and emotional dimensions (Fredricks et al., 2004). Each dimension holds particular relevance for English majors, given their rigorous academic requirements. Behavioral engagement includes observable student activities, like active participation and assignment completion, while emotional engagement involves affective states such as interest and enjoyment. Cognitive engagement reflects students' deep mental investment in complex tasks, such as critical linguistic analysis and reflective practices (Ren, 2022). Studies indicate significantly higher levels of cognitive and behavioral engagement among English majors than non-majors, a difference largely driven by the structured professional orientation and academic rigour specific to their programmes (Guo & Liu, 2016).

### 2.4 Conceptual Integration: The AB–FLE–LE Pathway

While previous sections have examined academic buoyancy, foreign language enjoyment (FLE), and learning engagement as individual constructs, an integrated framework is essential to explain how these elements interact dynamically in EFL learning. The current study conceptualizes a mediated pathway: academic buoyancy influences learning engagement directly, as well as indirectly via FLE, forming a dual-route pathway grounded in both positive psychology and educational emotion theory.

According to Martin and Marsh (2008), academic buoyancy provides learners with psychological preparedness for everyday academic hurdles. Buoyant learners are less likely to succumb to anxiety and more likely to remain motivated through daily setbacks. This psychological stability is theorized to create fertile ground for positive affective experiences, such as FLE.

Here, Fredrickson's (2001) broaden-and-build theory offers foundational support: positive emotions like enjoyment expand learners' thought-action repertoires, promote creativity, and build enduring psychological resources. In the SLA domain, Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) show that FLE not only coexists with but also predicts deeper classroom engagement. When buoyant learners are more likely to experience enjoyment in language learning, this FLE, in turn, enhances their behavioral and cognitive investment in academic tasks.

Moreover, Pekrun's (2006) control-value theory provides a cognitive-motivational lens to understand this pathway. Learners with high buoyancy tend to appraise their learning tasks as controllable and valuable, fostering the emergence of FLE. Once triggered, this enjoyment becomes a motivational resource that reinforces attention, persistence, and effort—key components of learning engagement.

Integrating these perspectives, the present study proposes a sequential mediation pathway (see Figure 1) in which academic buoyancy (the adaptive trait) facilitates FLE (the emotional mechanism), which in turn stimulates engagement (the academic outcome). This conceptual pathway underscores the synergy between affective and motivational factors in shaping academic behaviors and addresses a gap in previous SLA models, which often examined emotional and resilience factors in isolation.

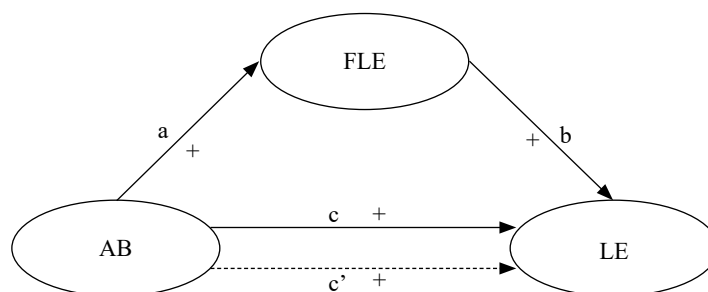


Figure 1 The AB–FLE–LE Pathway

Note: Path a: Academic Buoyancy (AB) → Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE); Path b: Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) → Learning Engagement (LE); Path c: Academic Buoyancy (AB) → Learning Engagement (LE) (direct effect); Path c': Academic Buoyancy (AB) → Learning Engagement (LE) (indirect effect).

By synthesizing these constructs into a unified pathway, this study aims to contribute theoretical and empirical insights into how positive emotions mediate adaptive dispositions and academic behaviors in EFL contexts, responding to calls for more nuanced affective-cognitive models in SLA (Dewaele et al., 2019).

### 3 Research Design

#### 3.1 Participants

This study selected English majors from a 211 Project university in Northeast China as participants. The survey adheres to the principles of anonymity and confidentiality. Questionnaires were distributed class-by-class via Wenjuanxing with standardized instructions. A total of 283 questionnaires were collected. After removing invalid responses (e.g., those showing obvious regularity patterns), 280 valid questionnaires were obtained. As shown in Table 1, the sample consists of 66 males (23.57 %) and 214 females (76.43 %); 74 freshmen (26.43 %), 70 sophomores (25.00 %), 69 juniors (24.64 %), and 67 seniors (23.93 %).

Table 1 Participant demographic statistics

Item	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	66	23.57
	Female	214	76.43
Grade	Freshman	74	26.43
	Sophomore	70	25.00
	Junior	69	24.64
	Senior	67	23.93
Total	—	280	100.00

#### 3.2 Research Questions

Although prior studies have explored positive psychological factors and learning engagement to some extent, research specifically focusing on the correlations among academic buoyancy, FLE, and learning engagement remains scarce. Therefore, to clarify the engagement mechanism among English majors, this study proposes the following

questions:

- (1) What are the correlations among academic buoyancy, FLE, and learning engagement?
- (2) How does FLE mediate the relationship between academic buoyancy and learning engagement?

### 3.3 Research Instruments

Questionnaires are distributed and collected using Wenjuanxing. All questionnaires employ 5-point Likert scales, with mean scores serving as the final measure.

#### 3.3.1 Academic Buoyancy Scale

The Academic Buoyancy Scale, developed by Jahedizadeh et al. (2019), specifically positioned for the SLA context, was used. This scale comprises four dimensions (Sustainability, Regular Adaptability, Positive Personal Eligibility, and Positive Acceptance of Academic Life), totaling 27 items. Reliability analysis shows Cronbach's  $\alpha=0.74$ , KMO=0.82, Bartlett's test  $p<0.001$ . Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) indicates acceptable fit indices:  $\chi^2/df=1.66$ ,  $RMSEA=0.05$ ,  $GFI=0.87$ ,  $AGFI=0.84$ ,  $CFI=0.91$ ,  $NFI=0.80$ ,  $IFI=0.91$ ,  $TLI=0.90$ .

#### 3.3.2 Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) Scale

The three-dimensional FLE scale, consisting of 11 items across three dimensions (FLE-Private, FLE-Teacher, FLE-Atmosphere), translated and adapted into Chinese by Li (2018) from Dewaele et al. (2017), was used, with Li's adaptation enhancing its relevance for research with domestic learners in the Chinese EFL learning context. Reliability analysis shows Cronbach's  $\alpha=0.72$ , KMO=0.71, Bartlett's test  $p<0.001$ . CFA indicates acceptable fit indices:  $\chi^2/df=1.83$ ,  $RMSEA=0.06$ ,  $GFI=0.95$ ,  $AGFI=0.93$ ,  $CFI=0.95$ ,  $NFI=0.90$ ,  $IFI=0.95$ ,  $TLI=0.93$ .

#### 3.3.3 Learning Engagement Scale

The first three dimensions (Behavioral Engagement, Emotional Engagement, Cognitive Engagement), totaling 30 items, of Ren's (2022) "Multidimensional Assessment Scale of College Students' English Classroom Learning Engagement" were used. To maintain conceptual clarity, this study excluded the original scale's last two outcome dimensions (Academic Development and Mental Development), which are interrelated with learning engagement yet represent its downstream effects, and consequently did not examine them in detail. Reliability analysis shows Cronbach's  $\alpha=0.81$ , KMO=0.87, Bartlett's test  $p<0.001$ . CFA indicates acceptable fit indices:  $\chi^2/df=1.74$ ,  $RMSEA=0.05$ ,  $GFI=0.85$ ,  $AGFI=0.83$ ,  $CFI=0.90$ ,  $NFI=0.80$ ,  $IFI=0.91$ ,  $TLI=0.90$ .

### 3.4 Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected during regular class sessions after institutional ethics approval. Participants received standardized instructions emphasising voluntary participation and anonymity. Completion took approximately 10 minutes. Administration was scheduled outside high-stress periods (e.g., examinations) to minimize situational bias.

### 3.5 Data Processing

Analyses were conducted using SPSS 27.0 and AMOS 27.0. SPSS was used to perform normality tests, reliability analysis, descriptive statistics, and correlation analysis, while AMOS was employed for confirmatory factor analysis to assess construct validity. The mediating effect of FLE was tested using the PROCESS macro (Model 4) in SPSS 4.0

(Hayes, 2018). Of the 283 initial responses, three were excluded due to patterned responding, resulting in 280 valid cases.

## 4 Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis

The descriptive statistics for the three core variables (Table 2) were first computed. All constructs exhibited moderately high means: Academic Buoyancy ( $M=3.29, SD=0.22$ ), Foreign Language Enjoyment ( $M=3.29, SD=0.28$ ), and Learning Engagement ( $M=3.33, SD=0.24$ ). These values suggest that the sampled English majors generally maintain a relatively adaptive psychological profile characterized by academic buoyancy, positive emotional experiences, and sustained academic involvement.

Skewness (-0.110 to 0.001) and kurtosis (-0.138 to 0.008) values fell within acceptable ranges, supporting the normality assumption. Observed ranges spanned the full 5-point Likert scale: 2.63 - 3.89 for Academic Buoyancy, 2.45-4.00 for FLE, and 2.56 - 4.10 for Learning Engagement. These findings provide a robust foundation for subsequent correlation and mediation analyses, as normal distribution assumptions are sufficiently met.

Compared with the published benchmark (Jahedizadeh et al., 2019), the current means were moderately consistent but slightly lower — likely reflecting both the demanding academic context faced by English majors and cultural variations in self-report tendencies within East-Asian learning contexts (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Liu, 2022). They underscore both the daily learning resilience and ongoing challenges that characterize English majors’ learning experiences in China.

Table 2 Descriptive statistics (N=280)

Variable	Min	Max	M	SD	Variance	Skew	Kurt
AB	2.63	3.89	3.29	0.22	0.047	-0.110	-0.037
FLE	2.45	4.00	3.29	0.28	0.081	-0.070	-0.138
LE	2.56	4.10	3.33	0.24	0.056	0.001	0.008

To examine the interrelationships among the studied variables, Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were calculated (Table 3); all correlation coefficients were positive and statistically significant at  $p<0.01$ , indicating strong interconnectivity among Academic Buoyancy, Foreign Language Enjoyment, and Learning Engagement.

The bivariate analysis reveals a robust positive correlation between Academic Buoyancy and Learning Engagement ( $r=0.764$ ), suggesting that students with greater capacity to manage everyday academic setbacks tend to demonstrate higher levels of behavioral, cognitive, and emotional involvement in their English language studies. Furthermore, Academic Buoyancy is strongly associated with Foreign Language Enjoyment ( $r=0.753$ ), indicating that learners who experience fewer difficulties coping with academic pressures are more likely to derive enjoyment from their foreign language learning experiences.

Importantly, Foreign Language Enjoyment itself demonstrates a similarly strong correlation with Learning Engagement ( $r=0.782$ ), underscoring the central role that positive affect plays in promoting sustained effort and commitment to language learning tasks. These robust associations (all $>0.75$ ) provide preliminary empirical support

for the hypothesized mediation pathway, wherein Academic Buoyancy may exert both direct and indirect effects on Learning Engagement through FLE.

Compared to previous studies in EFL contexts, these correlation findings are consistent with and extend prior research (Dewaele et al., 2018; Li, 2021; Yun et al., 2018), which has emphasized the synergistic interactions among daily learning resilience, affect, and engagement in second language acquisition contexts. However, there also exist differences between this study and others. For example, these correlations are notably higher than those reported by Wang (2024) among general university students ( $r=0.42$  between Academic Buoyancy and Learning Engagement). The discrepancy may stem from the fact that English majors possess stronger intrinsic motivation and language-learning identity.

Table 3 Correlation matrix (N=280)

Variables	AB	FLE	LE
AB	1.000		
FLE	0.753**	1.000	
LE	0.764**	0.782**	1.000

Note: \*  $p<0.05$ , \*\*  $p<0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p<0.001$ .

#### 4.2 Mediation Analysis: FLE as a Mediator

To formally test the mediating role of Foreign Language Enjoyment between Academic Buoyancy and Learning Engagement, a mediation analysis was conducted using Hayes’ (2018) PROCESS macro (Model 4) with 5,000 bootstrap samples to ensure robust confidence intervals.

Results showed significant effects for all paths (Table 4). Academic Buoyancy strongly predicted Foreign Language Enjoyment ( $\beta=0.753$ ,  $t=18.37$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), accounting for 56.7% of its variance ( $R^2=0.567$ ). Independently, Academic Buoyancy also exerted a significant total effect on Learning Engagement ( $\beta=0.764$ ,  $t=18.69$ ,  $p<0.001$ ).

When Foreign Language Enjoyment was entered as a mediator, the direct effect of Academic Buoyancy on Learning Engagement was reduced but remained statistically significant ( $\beta=0.512$ ,  $t=8.78$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), indicating a partial mediation effect. Simultaneously, FLE itself positively predicted Learning Engagement ( $\beta=0.518$ ,  $t=9.92$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), confirming its mediating role.

Table 4 Summary of mediation effect model

Model	Model 1: FLE (Mediator)	Model 2: LE(Direct)	Model 3: LE (With Mediator)
Predictors	$\beta$ (t)	$\beta$ (t)	$\beta$ (t)
Constant	0.209 (1.53)	-0.061 (-0.44)	-0.176 (-1.47)
AB	0.753*** (18.37)	0.764*** (18.69)	0.512*** (8.78)
FLE	—	—	0.518*** (9.92)
Model Fit Statistics			
$R^2$	0.567	0.584	0.705
Adjusted $R^2$	0.565	0.582	0.703
F value	337.52***	349.31***	333.67***

Bootstrap results (Table 5) confirmed the indirect pathway: the effect from Academic Buoyancy through Foreign Language Enjoyment to Learning Engagement was .390 (95% *BCa* CI [0.304, 0.480]). In sum, the mediation model

accounts for 70.5% of the variance in Learning Engagement ( $R^2=0.705$ ), indicating a substantial explanatory power for the proposed pathway.

Further decomposition of the effects reveals that approximately 51.1 % of the total effect of Academic Buoyancy on Learning Engagement is mediated through FLE (indirect effect=0.390), while approximately 66.9 % is accounted for by the direct effect (direct effect=0.512). The discrepancy between the sum of these proportions and 100% is due to standardization artifacts inherent in bootstrap estimation (Hayes, 2018).

Collectively, these results empirically validate the hypothesized “Academic Buoyancy → FLE → Learning Engagement” pathway, illustrating a dual-process model in which Academic Buoyancy not only directly enhances engagement but also indirectly fosters it by nurturing positive emotional experiences in foreign language learning.

Table 5 Indirect effect analysis

Effect Type	Effect Size	Boot SE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
Total Effect	0.764	0.037	0.691	0.837
Direct Effect	0.512	0.047	0.419	0.605
Indirect Effect	0.390	0.044	0.304	0.480

Note: Results are based on 5,000 bootstrap samples; minor rounding discrepancies are due to standardization.

These findings provide empirical support for the broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 2001), suggesting that positive psychological traits like academic buoyancy enable learners to experience greater emotional enjoyment, which in turn enhances learning engagement, where daily learning resilience and enjoyment mutually reinforce each other to maintain learner investment.

### 4.3 Comparison with Prior Research

Compared with prior studies, the indirect effect observed in this study (0.390) is substantial. For instance, Fan (2024) reported a smaller indirect effect (0.241) of enjoyment in mediating the link between academic buoyancy and willingness to communicate. This suggests that in the case of English majors, FLE may exert a more substantial role in regulating engagement due to their continuous exposure to linguistically challenging environments.

Further, unlike studies such as Ni (2011), which emphasizes school-level predictors of engagement (e.g., teacher feedback and institutional support), this study centers on personal psychological traits as key mechanisms — offering a more internally driven framework of engagement. This individual-focused lens complements environmental models, implying that optimal engagement may emerge from a synergy between internal traits (buoyancy, FLE) and external conditions (supportive classroom environments).

In addition, the mediating role of FLE resonates with longitudinal studies such as those by Yu et al. (2024), which note that enjoyment fluctuates but maintains consistently positive effects on engagement across academic experiences, and engagement operates dynamically with emotional regulation in a mutually reinforcing system. Compared to their temporally extended data, the present study’s cross-sectional results confirm that even at a single time-point, enjoyment functions as a reliable emotional driver in EFL classrooms.

As evidenced by the findings, the results validate the integrative conceptual pathway, where “Academic Buoyancy → Foreign Language Enjoyment → Learning Engagement” forms a psychologically coherent chain. It underscores the need for foreign language pedagogy to incorporate emotional scaffolding and daily learning resilience training, thereby

sustaining long-term learner engagement, especially in programs with high linguistic and academic demands.

## 5 Conclusions

### 5.1 Summary of Key Findings

This study sets out to examine how academic buoyancy and foreign language enjoyment jointly shape sustained learning engagement in English language learning. Specifically, it examines the mediating role of FLE in the buoyancy-engagement relationship among English majors. Rigorous statistical analyses and theoretical alignment validated a dual-pathway framework: buoyancy influences engagement both directly and indirectly via FLE.

The findings confirm the centrality of affective experiences in second language acquisition and underscore the value of integrating emotional and motivational constructs in SLA research. Rather than treating academic buoyancy and FLE as peripheral variables, this study positions them as central drivers of cognitive and behavioral commitment. In doing so, it corroborates and extends core psychological theories — Fredrickson’s broaden-and-build theory and Pekrun’s control-value theory — into the domain of EFL classroom engagement.

Empirically, the significant mediating effect of FLE highlights enjoyment as a key psychological mechanism that transforms adaptive academic buoyancy into sustained effort and academic presence. This is especially pertinent in high-pressure contexts, where persistent challenges may otherwise lead to disengagement or emotional burnout. In short, learners who bounce back from setbacks are more likely to stay engaged not just because they are resilient, but because they derive meaning and enjoyment from learning itself.

Synthesizing these findings, the results enrich the understanding of how psychological adaptation and emotional positivity jointly sustain engagement in language education, offering a more holistic view of engagement in language education — one that is both empirically grounded and pedagogically actionable.

### 5.2 Theoretical and Pedagogical Implications

Theoretically, this study offers a psychologically integrated account of how resilience-related traits and positive affect co-function in second language learning. By validating the pathway “Academic Buoyancy → FLE → Learning Engagement”, the present study advances the field’s understanding of the emotional architecture that sustains persistent learning behavior in high-challenge academic contexts.

The pathway aligns with recent efforts in SLA research to reposition positive emotion not merely as an outcome of effective learning but as a key mechanism that fuels cognitive and behavioral engagement (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). Whereas previous work often examined academic buoyancy and FLE in isolation, this study’s findings reveal that their synergy forms a self-reinforcing system that enhances learner agency, effort, and achievement.

Pedagogically, the results provide actionable guidance for educators, curriculum designers, and policy-makers. First, academic buoyancy training should be systematically embedded in the language programme, through explicit instruction on adaptive coping, growth mindset, and emotional regulation. Second, FLE can be cultivated via emotionally responsive teaching practices, humor, collaborative learning, and authentic communicative tasks. By intentionally designing environments that maximize enjoyment and buffer against frustration, instructors can optimize

conditions for sustained engagement.

These conclusions also resonate with a growing call for strength-based educational models in SLA (Dewaele et al., 2019). Rather than focusing narrowly on anxiety reduction or deficit remediation, pedagogical interventions should aim to foster flourishing. To nurture truly engaged and resilient language learners, educators must go beyond delivering content or correcting errors; they must construct emotional scaffolds that empower learners to find joy in the struggle, meaning in their efforts, and identity in their achievements.

### 5.3 Limitations and Future Directions

While this study offers meaningful theoretical and pedagogical contributions, several limitations must be noted.

First, its cross-sectional design constrains causal inference. Although the observed relationships and mediation effects are statistically robust, longitudinal research is required to confirm the temporal stability and directionality of the proposed pathway. Future studies could employ latent growth modeling to trace changes in Academic Buoyancy, Foreign Language Enjoyment, and Learning Engagement over time.

Second, the data relied exclusively on self-report questionnaires, which may introduce social desirability bias and limit the interpretation of actual behavioral engagement. To strengthen validity, future research should consider triangulating self-report data with classroom observations, performance metrics, and teacher evaluations.

Third, the sample was restricted to English majors from a single research-intensive university in China, potentially limiting generalizability. Broader investigations that include learners from diverse educational and cultural contexts — such as vocational programs or non-English majors — would enhance the external validity of the findings and reveal context-specific dynamics in the “Academic Buoyancy → Foreign Language Enjoyment → Learning Engagement” pathway.

This study provides evidence that emotional dynamics — particularly foreign language enjoyment — play a pivotal role in bridging academic buoyancy and learning engagement in EFL contexts. By demonstrating that FLE mediates the AB — LE relationship, this research highlights the essential interplay between affective and motivational forces in second language learning.

In an era when language learning is both a cognitive challenge and a socio-emotional journey, this pathway offers a roadmap for sustainable pedagogy. It invites a reevaluation of classroom priorities, encouraging not only linguistic accuracy but emotional resonance, not only performance but persistence. Ultimately, attending to the emotional dimensions of learner experience enables deeper, more enduring forms of engagement and supports the development of more human-centered approaches to language education.

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