

## Foreign Language Enjoyment among Children in the Turkish EFL Context

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**Abstract:** Current research mainly focuses on cognitive processes, negative emotions, and adult learners, while limited studies investigate foreign language enjoyment (FLE) among children and its variation by age, gender, and grade in the English as a foreign language (EFL) learning context. From this perspective, the study is novel as it is the first attempt to investigate FLE among children in the Turkish EFL context, using a large sample to address an underexplored population and setting. Considering these issues, the study aims to investigate FLE levels among young learners of EFL in Turkiye and to examine whether FLE varies according to age, gender, and grade level. A descriptive research design was employed, with 667 primary school students aged eight to 11 participating. Data were collected using a background questionnaire and the Foreign Language Enjoyment Scale for Children (FLES-C). Descriptive statistics, ANOVA, and independent samples t-tests were used for the data analysis. The study concluded that young learners have high levels of FLE. It was also found that female students have higher levels of FLE than their male counterparts. It is recommended that teachers should foster positive, engaging, and inclusive learning environments that are sensitive to individual differences.

**Keywords:** English as a foreign language, foreign language enjoyment, children

### INTRODUCTION

Learning a foreign language at an early age is crucial, as it strengthens children's linguistic development by enhancing phonological awareness and vocabulary. This process often results in near-native pronunciation and fluent speaking skills (Ghasemi & Hashemi, 2011). Moreover, initiating foreign language education at an early age strengthens students' oral and written expression skills and increases their confidence in using the target language (Domínguez & Pessoa, 2005). Second, the experience of learning a foreign language at an early age enhances children's levels of creativity and fosters the development of cognitive flexibility (Sun, 2023). This enables children to gain advantages not only in linguistic but also in non-linguistic cognitive domains, particularly by fostering mental flexibility, supporting the formation of conceptual structures related to natural phenomena, and developing diverse cognitive abilities to interpret their environment (Chanifa et al., 2020). It is also evident that foreign language learning promotes the development of social skills, such as empathy, intercultural awareness, and cooperation, thereby strengthening children's social adaptation (Uslu, 2020). Ultimately, the process of foreign language learning is also associated with psychological and emotional benefits, including deriving enjoyment from the learning experience, developing intrinsic motivation, and enhancing self-esteem (Hood, 2006). However, as can be seen in the research synthesis below, studies on FLE in the Turkish EFL context mainly focus on adult learners rather than children (Akkaş et al., 2022; Aydin & Akkaş, 2023; Aydin & Tekin, 2023; Yeşilçınar et al., 2025;

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Yeşilçınar & Erdemir, 2022; Yıldız & Aydin, 2023). In conclusion, it can be noted that early foreign language learning is not limited to fostering linguistic competence alone; instead, it provides a high-quality educational experience that holistically supports cognitive, social, and emotional development. On the other hand, while learning a foreign language brings certain advantages regarding linguistic, cognitive, social, and psychological development among children, several challenges in the learning process may limit those potential benefits.

Although initiating foreign language education at an early age supports the multifaceted development of children, various challenges arise at linguistic, cognitive, affective, and social levels throughout this process. For instance, differences between the written forms and pronunciations of words compared to the native language, as well as difficulties in forming meaningful sentences, complicate the language learning process for children (Muñoz, 2014). In addition to the linguistic challenges, children also face social environment issues, such as a fear of negative evaluation and making mistakes in front of their classmates (Nilsson, 2019). They also suffer from distraction and cognitive fatigue since selective attention in children is not yet fully mature from a developmental perspective (Aydin et al., 2017). Moreover, the ineffective use of cognitive resources in accordance with children's levels may result in a lack of motivation (Shilova et al., 2019). Within this scope, it can be concluded that linguistic, cognitive, affective, and social challenges lower academic achievement, have adverse effects on the learning process, and cause anxiety and demotivation among children (Aydin et al., 2020; Aydin & Zengin, 2008). Thus, it is evident that using positive emotions, specifically FLE, may play a supportive role in efficient foreign language learning among children (Wang & Li, 2022). Notably, while research primarily focuses on cognitive processes (Xia et al., 2023) and negative emotions, such as anxiety and demotivation (Derakhshan et al., 2022), studies on FLE mainly focus on adult learners rather than children, as illustrated in the research synthesis below. However, before providing a synthesis, a theoretical framework is drawn.

## Theoretical Framework

Enjoyment that extends beyond the satisfaction of homeostatic needs by involving new experiences rooted in curiosity and interest (Ainley & Hidi, 2014) reflects "a sense of novelty and accomplishment" (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 46). Thus, it can be defined as "good feelings coming from breaking through homeostatic limits and stretching beyond oneself to accomplish something new or even unexpected, especially in the face of some difficult tasks" (Li et al., 2018, p. 184). FLE is, thus, "a complex emotion, capturing interacting dimensions of the challenge and perceived ability that reflects the human drive for success in the face of difficult tasks" (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2016, p. 216) and includes the joy of learning a new language, positive evaluation of the learning process, engagement, the desire to sustain pleasurable experiences, and motivation for facing future learning challenges (Mierzwa, 2018). Considering that FLE operates within the dimensions of positive private (internal satisfaction), positive setting (fulfillment in the classroom), and positive atmosphere (supportive social relationships) (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2016), FLE can also be described as "a positive feeling that facilitates learning a new foreign language in the face of play and exploration tasks" (Aydin & Denkci Akkaş, 2023, p. 2).

Several theoretical models underscore the role of positive emotions in language learning. First, the Affective Filter Hypothesis proposes that positive affect lowers the filter, allowing for greater language input processing (Krashen, 1982). In the case of children, this implies that enjoyment can reduce anxiety and the fear of negative evaluation, thereby facilitating more effective intake of input. Second, the broaden-and-build theory posits that positive emotions help broaden learners' momentary thought-action repertoires to include social, psychological, physical, and intellectual resources (Fredrickson, 2004). For young learners, this suggests that enjoyment encourages playful exploration and creativity, which are central to their developmental stage. Third, the self-esteem model suggests that foreign language learning relies on self-verification processes, which are supported by positive emotions (Dörnyei, 2005). Applied to children, enjoyment can boost self-esteem by reinforcing their belief in their ability to use the target language successfully, whereas the control-value theory argues that FLE depends on the extent to which learners feel in control of their learning situation and



achievement (Piniel & Albert, 2018). This is particularly important for children, whose motivation and persistence are closely tied to their sense of autonomy and the value they place on tasks. Building on these foundations, the Positive Language Teaching Approach positions enjoyment as a catalyst for linguistic growth, contending that joy, curiosity, and excitement unlock intrinsic motivation. This approach suggests that cultivating positive emotions through engaging and collaborative activities enhances both fluency and accuracy while fostering emotional resilience (Aydin, 2025). This theoretical background highlights that FLE among children is theoretically grounded and plays a vital role in linking emotional well-being with linguistic, cognitive, and social development.

## Previous Studies

While the importance of affective factors in foreign language learning has been increasingly emphasized in recent years, studies focusing on young learners remain limited in number, and positive emotions are often overlooked (Aydin & Akkaya, 2025). Among those studies, Jin et al. (2023) investigated the enjoyment levels of Chinese students in grades 3 to 6 during the EFL learning process, as well as student- and teacher-related factors influencing these emotions. In this mixed-methods study, which employed a questionnaire developed by Jiang and Dewaele (2019) and a qualitative design through open-ended questions, it was found that FLE was at a moderate to high level. The strongest predictors of enjoyment were attitudes towards the target language and the teacher, as well as perceived competence in the target language. It was also concluded that the FLE level tended to decrease with age, while no significant gender differences were found. Similarly, a study conducted by Tsang and Dewaele (2024) focused on the relationships among anxiety, boredom, and enjoyment levels. The study, which included 111 primary school EFL learners and performed path analysis, concluded that only FLE significantly and positively predicted both engagement and proficiency. In a subsequent study involving 110 young learners, Tsang and Lee (2023) found that the effect of enjoyment on speaking proficiency was not direct but rather mediated by speaking motivation, identifying enjoyment as a key factor that triggers motivation in the EFL learning process. In a qualitative study, Tsang and Davis (2024) examined young learners' perceptions of enjoyment in various classroom activities. The results showed that interactive activities, such as games and videos, were perceived as enjoyable, whereas traditional tasks, like writing and dictation, were considered boring.

## Overview of the Current Study

Several reasons guided the current study. As previously emphasized, learning a foreign language at a young age contributes to children's linguistic, cognitive, social, and psychological development. However, despite these benefits, young learners may also face challenges in these areas during the learning process. These challenges may lead to anxiety, distraction, demotivation, and a negative perception of learning a new language. Thus, there is a need to explore the supportive role of positive emotions, particularly FLE, among children. However, it is also evident that research mainly focuses on cognitive processes and negative emotions. Moreover, studies on FLE mainly focus on adult learners, while a fairly limited number of studies concentrate on FLE among children. The studies that focused on young learners also have certain limitations. For instance, the studies have largely examined FLE in localized contexts such as China and Japan, while no study exists regarding FLE among children in the Turkish EFL learning context. Given that cultural values, classroom practices, and educational traditions shape learners' emotional experiences, examining the Turkish context offers a distinct perspective that may differ from those in Asian settings. Moreover, while current research focuses on the relationships among enjoyment, teacher, and task characteristics using a limited number of participants, little data is obtained regarding age, gender, and grade differences in FLE among learners with low proficiency. More importantly, there is an inconsistency regarding the demographic differences within the scope of FLE. With these concerns in mind, the current study aims to find the levels of FLE among children who learn English as a foreign language and examine whether FLE levels differ in accordance with age, gender, and grade. To achieve this, the study asks two research questions:



- What is the level of foreign language enjoyment among children?
- Does the level of foreign language enjoyment differ by age, gender, and grade?

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Context

The study, which aims to determine the level of FLE among young EFL learners and to examine whether FLE levels vary according to age, gender, and grade level, adopts an analytic approach, as it focuses explicitly on FLE rather than addressing a holistic perspective. Next, the study adopts a deductive purpose, as it involves two predefined questions that interrogate the distribution of FLE and differences in FLE levels across age, gender, and grade. Considering the analytic and deductive framework of the study, a descriptive research design is preferred to measure the levels of FLE and to examine the differences related to the aforementioned demographic variables (Seliger & Shohamy, 1989). To ensure the systematic collection of empirical data, the FLLES-C, a validated measurement instrument, is preferred. In conclusion, this research design is most suitable because it enables a systematic examination of large-scale data and provides a clear picture of how enjoyment varies across demographic groups, without manipulating variables.

### Participants

The study sample consisted of 667 children enrolled in primary schools. Of the participants, 307 were female (46.0%), whereas 360 were male students (54%). Their ages ranged from eight to 11, with a mean score of 9.17 and a standard deviation of 0.89. The participants were distributed across three grade levels: second grade ( $N = 210$ , 31.5%), third grade ( $N = 263$ , 39.4%), and fourth grade ( $N = 194$ , 29.1%). The students received two hours of foreign language instruction per week as part of their regular curriculum in public schools from the second to the fourth grade. The rationale behind the participant selection was that English classes officially began at the second-grade level and continued throughout primary, secondary, and higher education. This early stage of EFL learning appears to be critical in shaping learners' emotional engagement with learning a new language. Therefore, focusing on children within this range enabled a more accurate understanding of their enjoyment of foreign language learning during the foundational years of language acquisition.

### Tools

Two tools were preferred in the current study. First, a background questionnaire was used to collect demographic information regarding the participants' age, gender, and grade level. The questionnaire enabled the classification of participants into subgroups for subsequent analysis of differences in FLE levels. As an additional note, instead of asking their ages, birth years, and birthdays were requested to ensure accurate age data, as children sometimes overstated their age (Aydin et al., 2021). Second, the FLES-C, developed by Aydin and Akkaya (2025), was used to measure the levels of FLE among young learners in the context of EFL learning. The scale, which was supported by a one-factor solution and comprised five items, included smiley faces representing five levels of enjoyment, from "very unhappy" to "very happy". The internal consistency of the scale, as measured by Cronbach's alpha, was .80, with a percentage of variance accounted for of 52.12%. The values indicated that FLES-C was both a valid and reliable instrument for assessing FLE among children. As a note, it should also be added that the five-item scale seemed appropriate, given the limited attention span among children and the adequate coverage of the construct, as well as its ease of response for young learners.

### Procedure

Before conducting the study, ethical approval was obtained from the ethics committee of a state university. As the participants were children, informed consent was obtained from their parents. Then, both the children and their parents were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary



nature of participation, and the procedures in place to ensure anonymity, confidentiality, and secure data storage. The research process was structured to ensure that children participated in a classroom environment without facing any physical, emotional, or psychological risks. Participants were clearly informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without consequence. An instruction guide was prepared for the teacher who administered the scale, including explanations about the items and demographic items. The teacher read items aloud when necessary and assisted the children in marking their responses. All stages of the study, including administration and data collection, were conducted in Turkish, the participants' native language.

## Analysis

The data collected were analyzed using SPSS 21.0 software. First, descriptive statistics were calculated to summarize the demographic characteristics of the participants, including the mean age scores and the frequencies of gender and grade. Second, reliability and validity analyses were conducted for the FLES-C. Within this scope, the internal consistency of the scale, as measured by Cronbach's alpha, was .81, indicating good reliability (Seliger & Shohamy, 1989). Additionally, the analysis revealed that 56.75% of the total variance was accounted for, confirming the validity of the data. Third, descriptive statistics regarding the items, including mean and total scores, were computed, along with the standard deviation and standard error. Finally, to examine differences in FLE scores, ANOVA followed by Tamhane's post hoc test was used for age and grade levels, while independent samples t-test was conducted to analyze gender-based differences.

## FINDINGS

### The Level of Foreign Language Enjoyment

The values in Table 1 indicate that the overall level of FLE among children is high, as evidenced by a total score of 19.07 out of 20 and a mean score of 3.81 out of 5.00. Considering the items, children enjoyed learning a foreign language ( $\bar{x} = 3.85$ ) and had fun while studying it ( $\bar{x} = 3.73$ ). Similarly, the item on spending quality time while learning a foreign language received a mean score of  $\bar{x} = 3.75$ . The highest level of agreement was observed for the statement, "Learning new things while studying a foreign language excites me" ( $\bar{x} = 4.09$ ). Last, the mean score for enjoying time with friends who spoke a foreign language was  $\bar{x} = 3.64$ . At this stage, only descriptive statistics were presented; effect sizes were not applicable, as they were reported alongside the inferential analyses instead.

**Table 1. The level of FLE among children (N = 667)**

Items	Numbers and percentages					Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
	1	2	3	4	5			
I enjoy learning a foreign language.	n	56	29	123	207	252	3.85	1.21
	%	8.4	4.3	18.4	31.0	37.8		
I have a lot of fun while studying a foreign language.	n	59	45	137	199	227	3.73	1.24
	%	8.8	6.7	20.5	29.8	34.0		
I spend quality time while learning a foreign language.	n	48	51	144	201	223	3.75	1.20
	%	7.2	7.6	21.6	30.1	33.4		
Learning new things while studying a foreign language excites me.	n	37	38	96	153	343	4.09	1.17
	%	5.5	5.7	14.4	22.9	51.4		
I enjoy spending time with my friends who speak a foreign language.	n	72	57	150	146	242	3.64	1.33
	%	10.8	8.5	22.5	21.9	36.3		
					Mean score	3.81	.93	.04
					Total score	19.07	4.63	.18



### FLE Levels Regarding Age, Gender, And Grade

The findings in Table 2 indicate that the overall level of FLE differs slightly by age, with total scores ranging from 18.54 to 19.43 and mean scores between 3.71 and 3.89; however, these differences were not statistically significant ( $p = .26$ ). For instance, For example, FLE related to language learning activities showed mean scores from 3.73 to 4.09 depending on age, without a significant difference ( $p = .23$ ). Similarly, fun experienced during the learning process varied slightly, with means between 3.56 and 3.88, yet the difference remained statistically insignificant ( $p = .07$ ). The perception of spending quality time while learning also showed a slight mean range from 3.62 to 3.80 across age groups, with no significant difference ( $p = .83$ ). On the other hand, excitement about discovering new things while learning indicated a significant difference across ages, with mean scores ranging from 3.83 to 4.29 ( $p = .00$ ). Last, FLE derived from interacting with peers who spoke a foreign language showed minimal variation by age, with mean scores between 3.58 and 3.71, and no significant difference ( $p = .74$ ). In conclusion, the overall mean FLE score did not differ significantly across ages ( $F(3, 663) = 1.35$ ,  $p = .26$ ,  $\eta^2 = .006$ , Cohen's  $f = 0.08$ ).

**Table 2. FLE levels by age (N = 667) (ANOVA)**

Items	Age	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	F	Sig.
I enjoy learning a foreign language.	8	173	3.92	1.26	.10	1.44	.23
	9	252	3.86	1.24	.08		
	10	197	3.73	1.19	.09		
	11	45	4.09	.93	.13		
I have a lot of fun while studying a foreign language.	8	173	3.88	1.25	.10	2.35	.07
	9	252	3.79	1.26	.08		
	10	197	3.56	1.22	.09		
	11	45	3.64	1.17	.17		
I spend quality time while learning a foreign language.	8	173	3.76	1.17	.09	.29	.83
	9	252	3.73	1.24	.08		
	10	197	3.80	1.16	.08		
	11	45	3.62	1.30	.19		
Learning new things while studying a foreign language excites me.	8	173	4.29	1.08	.08	5.27	.00
	9	252	4.15	1.14	.07		
	10	197	3.83	1.25	.09		
	11	45	4.07	1.21	.18		
I enjoy spending time with my friends who speak a foreign language.	8	173	3.58	1.33	.10	.41	.74
	9	252	3.71	1.34	.08		
	10	197	3.62	1.34	.10		
	11	45	3.60	1.32	.20		
Mean score	8	173	3.89	.84	.06	1.35	.26
	9	252	3.85	.95	.06		
	10	197	3.71	.96	.07		
	11	45	3.80	.93	.14		
Total score	8	173	19.43	4.20	.32	1.35	.26
	9	252	19.25	4.75	.30		
	10	197	18.54	4.81	.34		
	11	45	19.02	4.66	.70		

As illustrated in Table 3, the post hoc analysis using Tamhane's test revealed that the significant difference observed in excitement about learning new things is explicitly associated with comparisons between specific age groups. Children aged eight reported significantly higher enjoyment than those aged 10 (mean difference = 0.46,  $p = .00$ ) and nine (mean difference = 0.32,  $p = .03$ ). In other words, 10-year-olds scored significantly lower than both eight-year-olds (mean difference = -0.46,  $p = .00$ ) and nine-year-olds (mean difference = -0.32,  $p = .03$ ).



**Table 3. Tamhane's Post Hoc Test for differences in FLE across age groups**

Dependent Variable	(I) Age	(J) Age	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Learning new things while studying a foreign language excites me.	8	10	.46*	.12	.00
	9	10	.32*	.11	.03
	10	8	-.46*	.12	.00
		9	-.32*	.11	.03

\*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

According to the values in Table 4, female students exhibit significantly higher levels of FLE than male students across all items and overall scores. In other words, the total mean score for females was 4.11 (total score = 20.55), while it was 3.56 for male participants (total score = 17.81), with a significant mean difference of 0.55 ( $p = .00$ ). Within this scope, item-level results revealed consistent and statistically significant differences favoring female participants. For example, enjoyment in learning a foreign language was higher among females ( $\bar{x} = 4.16$ ) than males ( $\bar{x} = 3.59$ ) ( $p = .00$ ). Similarly, females had a higher level of enjoyment regarding having fun while studying a foreign language, with a mean score of 4.03 compared to 3.48 for male counterparts ( $p = .00$ ). They also reported had enjoyment in spending quality time while learning a new language, scoring 4.06, whereas male students scored 3.49 ( $p = .00$ ). A significant difference was observed in the level of excitement about learning new things, with females scoring 4.38 and male students 3.84 ( $p = .00$ ). Last, enjoyment in spending time with friends who spoke a foreign language was higher among females ( $\bar{x} = 3.93$ ) than males ( $\bar{x} = 3.40$ ) ( $p = .00$ ). Overall, the mean FLE score was significantly higher for female students ( $M = 4.11$ ,  $SD = 0.75$ ) than for male students ( $M = 3.56$ ,  $SD = 0.98$ ),  $t(658) = 8.21$ ,  $p < .001$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.62$ ).

**Table 4. FLE levels by gender (N=667) (Independent samples t-test)**

Items	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Mean Difference	F	Sig.
I enjoy learning a foreign language.	Female	307	4.16	.99	.06	.57	43.50	.00
	Male	360	3.59	1.32	.07			
I have a lot of fun while studying a foreign language.	Female	307	4.03	1.03	.06	.55	53.46	.00
	Male	360	3.48	1.35	.07			
I spend quality time while learning a foreign language.	Female	307	4.06	1.05	.06	.57	24.55	.00
	Male	360	3.49	1.26	.07			
Learning new things while studying a foreign language excites me.	Female	307	4.38	.98	.06	.53	28.40	.00
	Male	360	3.84	1.27	.07			
I enjoy spending time with my friends who speak a foreign language.	Female	307	3.93	1.19	.07	.53	19.64	.00
	Male	360	3.40	1.40	.07			
Total	Female	307	20.55	3.77	.21	2.74	24.27	.00
	Male	360	17.81	4.92	.26			
Mean	Female	307	4.11	.75	.04	.55		
	Male	360	3.56	.98	.05			

The findings in Table 5 indicate slight differences in FLE levels across grades, although most of these differences are not statistically significant. For example, total scores ranged from 18.57 in 4<sup>th</sup> grade to 19.47 in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, while mean scores ranged from 3.71 to 3.89 out of 5.00, with no significant overall difference ( $p = .14$ ). Regarding the items, FLE showed mean scores of 3.95 (2<sup>nd</sup> grade), 3.85 (3<sup>rd</sup> grade), and 3.76 (4<sup>th</sup> grade), with no significant difference ( $p = .27$ ). Similarly, their



perception of spending quality time while learning had similar means across grades, ranging from 3.70 to 3.78, with no significant difference ( $p = .75$ ). Enjoyment in spending time with friends who spoke a foreign language did not significantly differ across grades ( $p = .66$ ), with mean scores between 3.59 and 3.70. On the other hand, a statistically significant difference was observed in the fun experienced while studying a foreign language ( $p = .00$ ). Specifically, second graders had the highest level of enjoyment, with a mean score of 3.88. Third graders followed this with a mean of 3.78, while 4<sup>th</sup> graders reported the lowest level of fun, with a mean score of 3.52. A considerable difference was also found in the excitement about learning new things across grade levels ( $p = .00$ ). Second graders had the highest mean score of 4.35, followed by third graders with a score of 4.02, while fourth graders had the lowest score at 3.91. In conclusion, the mean FLE score did not differ significantly across grade levels ( $F(2, 664) = 1.96, p = .14, \eta^2 = .006$ , Cohen's  $f = .08$ ).

**Table 5. FLE levels per grade (N = 667) (ANOVA)**

Items	Grade	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	F	Sig.
I enjoy learning a foreign language.	2	210	3.95	1.26	.09	1.31	.27
	3	263	3.85	1.23	.08		
	4	194	3.76	1.14	.08		
I have a lot of fun while studying a foreign language.	2	210	3.88	1.26	.09	4.46	<b>.01</b>
	3	263	3.78	1.23	.08		
	4	194	3.52	1.21	.09		
I spend quality time while learning a foreign language.	2	210	3.70	1.21	.08	.29	.75
	3	263	3.78	1.20	.07		
	4	194	3.76	1.20	.09		
Learning new things while studying a foreign language excites me.	2	210	4.35	1.05	.07	8.30	<b>.00</b>
	3	263	4.02	1.19	.07		
	4	194	3.91	1.23	.09		
I enjoy spending time with my friends who speak a foreign language.	2	210	3.59	1.35	.09	.42	.66
	3	263	3.70	1.30	.08		
	4	194	3.62	1.37	.10		
Mean score	2	210	3.89	.85	.06	1.96	.14
	3	263	3.83	.95	.06		
	4	194	3.71	.97	.07		
Total score	2	210	19.47	4.27	.29		
	3	263	19.13	4.73	.29		
	4	194	18.57	4.83	.35		

The Tamhane's post hoc test results in Table 6 show significant differences in enjoyment levels for the two items. Regarding the fun experienced while studying a foreign language, 2<sup>nd</sup> graders had significantly higher scores than fourth graders, with a mean difference of 0.36 ( $p = .01$ ). For the excitement about learning new things, 2<sup>nd</sup> graders again scored significantly higher than both 3<sup>rd</sup> (mean difference = 0.34,  $p = .00$ ) and 4<sup>th</sup> graders (mean difference = 0.45,  $p = .00$ ).

**Table 6. Tamhane's Post Hoc Test for differences in FLE across age grades**

Dependent Variable	(I) Grade	(J) Grade	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
I have a lot of fun while studying a foreign language.	2	4	.36*	.12	<b>.01</b>
	4	2	-.36*	.12	<b>.01</b>
Learning new things while studying a foreign language excites me.	2	3	.34*	.10	<b>.00</b>
	3	4	.45*	.11	<b>.00</b>
	4	2	-.34*	.10	<b>.00</b>
	4	3	-.45*	.11	<b>.00</b>



## CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

In the study, which aimed to explore FLE levels among children and determine whether FLE levels differ according to age, gender, and grade, two main conclusions were drawn. The first conclusion is that children generally experience a high level of FLE. In other words, foreign language learning for them is engaging, fun, and meaningful, particularly when it involves discovering new things. They also perceive foreign language learning as a valuable use of their time and express positive feelings about interacting with peers who speak a foreign language. Overall, foreign language learning is a positively received and emotionally rewarding experience for children. The second conclusion is that while FLE levels differ in specific aspects, gender was the only variable consistently associated with significant differences across all dimensions of FLE. Regarding age, although overall differences in FLE levels are not observed, children aged eight and nine have slightly higher FLE levels than those aged 10. Moreover, children, particularly those aged eight, are more enthusiastic about discovering and engaging with new content in foreign language learning. Regarding gender, female students experience higher levels of FLE than male students. In other words, female students tend to have more fun, spend more quality time, feel more excited about new content, and engage more in social interactions than male students. Finally, regarding grades, overall FLE levels are similar among second-, third-, and fourth-graders. However, second graders have considerably higher levels of fun while studying a foreign language compared to fourth graders. Likewise, they experience more excitement about learning new things than both third- and fourth-graders.

These findings suggest that younger learners may benefit from the broaden-and-build function of positive emotions, as their curiosity and openness create opportunities for cognitive flexibility, playful exploration, and deeper engagement with foreign language learning. Enjoyment at this stage may also help lower the affective filter, reducing anxiety and fear of negative evaluation, which are common challenges in early foreign language classrooms. At the same time, the observed gender differences may be interpreted through the lens of the control-value theory, since girls in this cultural context may perceive greater value in academic achievement and feel a stronger sense of control in structured learning environments. In addition, the lack of grade-level differences suggests that FLE remains relatively stable across the primary years, although younger children appear to display a heightened enthusiasm for novelty and discovery. This developmental trend suggests that the role of positive emotions may gradually shift as learners progress through school, with younger children deriving enjoyment from playful curiosity and older learners possibly requiring more complex, autonomy-supportive tasks to sustain their motivation. In conclusion, it can be noted that FLE among children is not only a matter of individual differences but is also influenced by developmental stage, cultural norms, educational practices, and classroom dynamics within psychological and sociocultural contexts.

### Pedagogical Implications

Several pedagogical implications can be noted. First, while existing theories describe FLE as a multidimensional emotion rooted in novelty, interest, and engagement for both adolescent and adult learners (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2016; Li et al., 2018), the current findings show that children also experience FLE in ways consistent with these dimensions, including joy in discovering new content, social engagement, and meaningful classroom participation. In addition, the study identifies demographic influences, especially gender, as a significant variable regarding FLE among young EFL learners. Second, the current study aligns with previous research emphasizing the role of FLE among young learners. For instance, the present findings show that Turkish children experience high levels of FLE, supporting the view that foreign language learning is perceived as meaningful and emotionally engaging, as found by Jin et al. (2019), who report moderate to high levels of enjoyment among Chinese primary school students. In contrast to Jin et al. (2019), the present study presents significant gender differences, with female students consistently reporting higher enjoyment levels, suggesting that contextual and cultural factors influence learners' experiences of FLE. This contrast suggests that contextual and cultural factors may shape how learners experience FLE. The study also partially supports Jin et al.'s (2019) observation that FLE level decreases with age, as it shows that younger



children, especially those aged eight, display higher enjoyment than their older peers. In line with Tsang and Dewaele (2024) and Tsang and Lee (2023), the current findings confirm that FLE plays a key role in promoting engagement and motivation in EFL language learning. Moreover, the positive evaluations of enjoyable and discovery-based activities align with the findings of Tsang and Davis (2024), who note that interactive tasks are more enjoyable for young learners than traditional exercises.

In conclusion, the current study contributes to the existing literature by providing empirical evidence from the Turkish EFL context, which remains underrepresented in prior research. It also expands the understanding of FLE by demonstrating its relevance to younger learners, highlighting the influence of demographic factors such as gender, age, and grade level. Most importantly, these results reinforce that theoretical models of positive emotions remain essential for explaining how enjoyment shapes language learning among children by showing that FLE is not merely a desirable classroom outcome but a developmental mechanism that fuels motivation, resilience, and sustained engagement in culturally situated ways.

### Practical Recommendations

Several practical recommendations can be made. First, teachers should create positive learning environments that support enjoyment through engaging, playful, and discovery-based activities, making language learning meaningful and socially interactive. Teachers should also design lessons that incorporate novelty, interaction, and emotional engagement, while being attentive to individual differences, particularly those related to gender and age. Given that female students tend to experience higher enjoyment, teachers may need to develop more inclusive strategies that actively foster enjoyment for all learners, especially male students. Second, teacher trainers should prepare future educators to recognize the affective dimensions of language learning, emphasizing the importance of creating emotionally supportive and enjoyable classroom environments. To achieve these aims, teacher trainers should integrate modules on affective factors and the principles of the Positive Language Teaching Approach (Aydin, 2025), guiding pre-service teachers in designing emotionally supportive, inclusive, and engaging language learning experiences that promote positive emotions, active participation, and psychological well-being through reflective practice and learner-centered pedagogy. Third, program developers should integrate FLE-oriented goals into curricula by including tasks that stimulate curiosity, cooperation, and creativity. Fourth, material developers should prioritize content that is age-appropriate, visually rich, and adaptable to learners' diverse emotional and cognitive needs, particularly for younger learners who respond more positively to engaging content. Fifth, policymakers should support early language education policies that recognize enjoyment by embedding enjoyment-focused practices into educational frameworks. In this way, they can contribute to more sustainable, inclusive, and emotionally enriching language learning experiences for children.

### Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research

The study is not without limitations. First, the study is limited to descriptive data captured from 667 young learners aged eight to eleven from the Turkish EFL context, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to learners from different educational, cultural, or linguistic backgrounds. Second, the data collected reflected self-reported responses facilitated by teachers rather than their actual perspectives. Third, the demographic variables were confined to age, gender, and grade. Last, FLES-C, which demonstrated good reliability and validity, may limit their perceptions regarding more nuanced emotional experiences. Last, as the sample was drawn only from public schools, the findings may not fully represent learners in private or alternative educational settings.

Some recommendations for further research can be listed. First, future research should adopt qualitative, experimental, and mixed-methods studies to gain a better and deeper understanding of FLE among young EFL learners. In this way, it will be possible to validate self-reported data and provide insights into the emotional experiences of children in the EFL learning process. Second, researchers should also prefer diverse educational, cultural, and linguistic contexts to understand



differences within these contexts. Considering the limited variables of the current study, age, gender, and grade, researchers should consider additional and contextual variables, such as classroom environment, teacher behaviors, peer relationships, and instructional practices.

**Ethical Statement:** Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Istanbul Medeniyet University, Social and Human Sciences Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee (Approval No: [2025/02], Date: [25.02.2025]).

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