



RESEARCH ARTICLE

TRACING ENJOYMENT AND ANXIETY IN THE EFL CLASSROOM OVER TIME

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Abstract

Recent research in second and foreign language education emphasizes that emotions are dynamic, context-dependent processes instead of fixed learner traits. This qualitative study investigates how Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) and Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) develop, interact, and fluctuate over time within an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. The study involved 4 learners who participated over 5 weeks. Data were gathered through weekly structured narrative frames and a focus group interview, enabling monitoring of each learner's emotional journey across repeated classroom experiences. A thematic analysis was used to identify patterns of emotional fluctuations, triggers, and adaptive changes. Findings showed that learners' emotions were context-dependent and adaptable. Pair and group activities promoted enjoyment and reduced anxiety, while whole-class speaking and unpredictability typically heightened anxiety. Enjoyment and anxiety often co-occurred, and moderate anxiety in supportive settings sometimes improved performance. By providing longitudinal qualitative insights into the dynamic interplay of FLE and FLA, this study contributes to the growing body of emotion research in language education.

Keywords: Anxiety, enjoyment, emotional change, learner emotions

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ARAŞTIRMA MAKALESİ

YABANCI DİL OLARAK İNGİLİZCE SINIFINDA KEYİF VE KAYGININ ZAMAN İÇİNDE İZLENMESİ

Öz

Son yıllarda ikinci ve yabancı dil eğitime yönelik araştırmalar, duyguların sabit öğrenen özellikleri olmaktan ziyade dinamik ve bağlama duyarlı süreçler olduğunu vurgulamaktadır. Bu nitel çalışma, Yabancı Dil Keyfi (FLE) ve Yabancı Dil Kaygısının (FLA) bir İngilizceyi Yabancı Dil olarak öğrenme (EFL) sınıfında zaman içinde nasıl geliştiğini, etkileşime girdiğini ve değişim gösterdiğini incelemektedir. Çalışma, 5 hafta boyunca sürece katılan 4 öğrenci ile gerçekleştirilmiştir. Veriler, haftalık yapılandırılmış anlatı formları ve bir odak grup görüşmesi aracılığıyla toplanmış; böylece öğrencilerin tekrar eden sınıf deneyimleri boyunca duygusal süreçleri izlenebilmiştir. Verilerin analizinde tematik analiz kullanılmış ve duygusal değişimler, tetikleyiciler ve uyum süreçlerine ilişkin örüntüler belirlenmiştir. Bulgular, öğrenen duygularının bağlama bağlı ve değişken olduğunu göstermektedir. İkili ve grup çalışmaları keyfi artırırken kaygıyı azaltmış; tüm sınıf önünde konuşma ve belirsizlik durumları ise genellikle kaygıyı artırmıştır. Keyif ve kaygının sıklıkla birlikte ortaya çıktığı, destekleyici ortamlarda orta düzeyde kaygının performansı olumlu yönde etkileyebildiği görülmüştür. Bu çalışma, FLE ve FLA arasındaki dinamik etkileşime ilişkin boylamsal nitel bulgular sunarak dil eğitiminde duygu araştırmalarına katkı sağlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Duygusal değişim, kaygı, keyif, öğrenen duyguları

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INTRODUCTION

Research on second and foreign language learning shows that students experience a wide range of emotions, including enjoyment, anxiety, boredom, and pride, throughout their learning journey (Dewaele et al., 2025; Khajavy & Lüftenegger, 2025; Li, 2025; Zhao & Wang, 2025). These feelings are not just secondary but play a key role in the learning process, heavily impacting students' engagement, motivation, and overall success (Dewaele et al., 2025; Dewaele & Botes, 2025; Li & Wei, 2023; Pavelescu, 2023; Tsang & Dewaele, 2024). Therefore, understanding students' emotional experiences is now an essential part of language teaching and research.

Traditionally, research on learner emotions has mainly focused on negative feelings, especially FLA. Studies indicate that anxiety can hinder learners' performance, reduce their willingness to communicate, and negatively impact both immediate task results and long-term achievement (MacIntyre, 2017). However, with the emergence of positive psychology in second language acquisition, scholars have increasingly examined positive emotions, particularly FLE (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). It is recognized that enjoyment is not merely the absence of anxiety; it often coexists with negative emotions and can even help mitigate their impact, offering a more comprehensive understanding of learners' affective experiences (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014).

As research on emotion within applied linguistics has advanced, there has been a shift towards adopting a broader, more positive psychology-informed view that acknowledges the complex and dynamic nature of emotional experiences in language education (e.g., Elahi Shirvan & Talebzadeh, 2018; Elahi Shirvan et al., 2024; Kruk et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2024; Yetkin & Özer-Altinkaya, 2025). These emotions change depending on the task, classroom interactions, and teaching environment, and are influenced by learners' personal traits and contextual factors such as teaching style and task design (Pawlak et al., 2022). This evolving view emphasizes the importance of examining not just the specific emotions learners experience but also how, why, and in what ways these emotions develop, interact, and fluctuate over time.

Collectively, these developments highlight the importance of research that takes a comprehensive, detailed view of learners' emotions, considering both positive and negative feelings and how they interact within authentic learning environments. Investigating language learners' emotional experiences can yield important insights into the emotional aspects of language learning and help shape teaching methods that foster supportive, engaging, and effective language classrooms.

Foreign Language Enjoyment

In recent years, research has expanded from a predominant focus on negative emotions, particularly anxiety, to a more comprehensive perspective that recognizes the significant role of positive emotions in language education. This broadened approach has been heavily influenced by the development of Positive Psychology (MacIntyre & Mercer, 2014), which emphasizes positive human functioning and well-being. Within this framework, the concept of FLE (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014) has emerged as a crucial construct, capturing learners' positive emotional experiences during various language learning activities and highlighting the beneficial impact of enjoyment on language learning success.

Empirical research consistently shows that FLE has a positive influence on various language-learning outcomes. For example, Jin (2024) provides strong evidence that higher enjoyment levels are associated with greater learner engagement, which in turn promotes more active participation in language tasks. Additionally, greater enjoyment correlates with a higher willingness to communicate, as shown by Zhang et al. (2024), and with measurable gains in overall language performance (Dewaele et al., 2025; Gao, 2026; Wang et al., 2024). Enjoyment also helps expand learners' cognitive and behavioral skills, in line with Fredrickson's (2001) broaden-and-build theory, which encourages learners to take risks, experiment with language, and build long-term linguistic and emotional resources.

Given the strong link between positive emotional experiences and effective language learning, researchers have increasingly examined the sources of FLE in classroom contexts. Teacher-related factors, such as enthusiasm (Dewaele & Li, 2021), the use of the target language in the classroom (Li, 2025), and the use of innovative activities (Li et al., 2018), have been identified as strong predictors of FLE. In addition to these factors, social dynamics within the classroom, such as positive peer relationships (Li et al., 2018) and a low-threat environment (Jin et al., 2025), further contribute to students' enjoyment by fostering a sense of belonging, trust, and psychological safety.

Recent research has also emphasized the dynamic and fluctuating nature of FLE (Elahi Shirvan & Taherian, 2021; Kruk et al., 2025), suggesting that enjoyment levels can vary across tasks, lessons, and interactional moments. Similarly, recent studies have investigated factors shaping moment-to-moment changes in FLE, including learner- and teacher-related factors (e.g., Boudreau et al., 2018; Elahi Shirvan & Talebzadeh, 2018). Such findings highlight that enjoyment is not a stable trait but a dynamically evolving experience that unfolds over time and across learning contexts, underscoring the importance of designing flexible and emotionally responsive classroom practices. Overall, the growing body of research underscores FLE as a central, dynamic emotional factor that not only enhances learners' engagement and performance but also underscores the critical role of classroom practices and teacher support in fostering emotionally rich and effective language-learning environments.

Foreign Language Anxiety

FLA has been widely regarded as a vital affective component influencing the process of learning a second or foreign language. Initially, Horwitz et al. (1986) characterized FLA as a specific type of situational anxiety triggered by the particular challenges and expectations inherent in language acquisition, especially within classroom environments. They identified three core elements of FLA: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. This foundational model established anxiety as a significant obstacle to successful language learning, prompting a wealth of research into its origins, manifestations, and impacts. Subsequent studies have highlighted multiple sources of FLA, underscoring its multidimensional nature. Variables such as individual personality traits (Pan & Zhang, 2023), limited language proficiency (Özer-Altinkaya & Yetkin, 2025), peer influence, and engaging in challenging classroom activities (Jiang & Dewaele, 2019) have all been shown to exacerbate language-related anxiety.

Extensive research has further revealed that language anxiety is inherently dynamic and multifaceted. Studies (Boudreau et al., 2018; Elahi Shirvan & Talebzadeh, 2018, 2021) have confirmed that FLA is not a static phenomenon; rather, it fluctuates over time and varies across specific situational and environmental contexts. These investigations demonstrate that the factors underlying and influencing FLA are not fixed but continuously evolve as learners gain new experiences, adapt to different classroom environments, and improve their language skills over time.

Recent studies have also examined how FLA relates to other emotional states in learners, particularly positive emotions such as FLE. Results indicate that anxiety and enjoyment are separate yet interacting emotions that can occur simultaneously during learning (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). Given the negative link between FLE and FLA (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2019; Fang & Tang, 2021), scholars suggest that, rather than simply trying to eliminate anxiety, improving enjoyment could be an effective way to counteract negative effects and encourage ongoing engagement and success. Recognizing this broader emotional landscape emphasizes the importance of pedagogical strategies that aim not only to decrease anxiety but also to foster positive emotional engagement and motivation.

In conclusion, the scholarly literature positions FLA as a complex, evolving, and highly context-dependent emotional experience that significantly shapes learners' engagement, motivation, and

overall achievement in foreign language learning. Gaining a comprehensive understanding of the sources, fluctuations, and contextual factors associated with FLA is crucial for teachers to design emotionally supportive and effective classroom environments. Such environments can facilitate more effective, enjoyable, and sustainable language-learning experiences for students across diverse educational settings.

Emotions in Language Learning from a Dynamic Perspective

Recent research has increasingly conceptualized emotions as dynamic, context-sensitive, and emergent phenomena rather than stable learner traits (Elahi Shirvan et al., 2024; Kruk et al., 2025). Drawing on Complex Dynamic Systems Theory (CDST, Cameron & Larsen-Freeman, 2007; de Bot et al., 2007), researchers argue that emotions such as enjoyment, anxiety, and boredom fluctuate over time (Wang et al., 2024). Additionally, from a dynamic perspective, emotions are understood as processes that evolve moment by moment and vary not only between learners but also within the same learner across different learning situations (Yetkin & Özer-Altinkaya, 2025). Methodologically, adopting a dynamic perspective has prompted researchers to move beyond one-shot questionnaires and toward process-oriented designs that capture emotional change over time. Studies employing repeated measures, narrative approaches, and qualitative methods have demonstrated that learners' emotional experiences can shift even within a single lesson (Chen, 2023; Pan & Zhang, 2023; Pietluch, 2026), underscoring the need for detailed data-collection tools. These approaches support the demand for more ecologically valid research that accurately captures the emotional experiences of language learners.

Overall, viewing emotions through a dynamic lens offers a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of language learning as an emotionally complex and evolving process (He et al., 2021). It enables researchers to examine not only the specific emotions learners experience but also how these emotions develop and fluctuate over time, the contexts in which they occur, and the underlying reasons driving these emotional changes.

Current study

Despite the significant growth in research on emotions in second and foreign language learning in recent years, most empirical studies have relied on cross-sectional designs and quantitative self-report measures. These methods tend to view learners' emotions as relatively stable states, offering a limited understanding of their dynamic and situational qualities in real classroom settings. There is a particular need for qualitative, process-oriented research that emphasizes learners' own perspectives on how emotions arise, change, and interact during language instruction.

To address this gap, the current study investigates EFL learners' emotional experiences using a dynamic qualitative approach. It specifically focuses on enjoyment and anxiety in foreign language learning. Instead of viewing these emotions as isolated or fixed, the study sees them as context-dependent and constantly changing over time, influenced by classroom activities, teaching methods, and immediate learning experiences.

By highlighting learners' lived experiences and considering emotional change as a dynamic process, this study adds to the expanding research on emotions in EFL learning. It provides detailed qualitative insights into how students experience enjoyment and anxiety in language classrooms. The findings aim to enhance both theoretical understanding and practical application by identifying pedagogical conditions that promote emotional awareness and support emotionally responsive language teaching in higher education.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative longitudinal research design (Lin, 2023) to investigate EFL learners' emotional experiences during English classes. Based on a dynamic view of emotions, it treated

enjoyment and anxiety as experiences that depend on context and change over time, rather than fixed traits. A longitudinal qualitative method was considered suitable for capturing learners' personal interpretations and their immediate emotional shifts in real classroom environments. All necessary ethical principles were followed throughout the research process.

Setting and participants

The study took place at a private English school in Türkiye. Classes occurred weekly, focusing on speaking, listening, reading, and writing through organized activities. Participants perceived the private school context as relatively less stressful, which may have contributed to their willingness to express their feelings more openly during classroom activities. The school was chosen for its flexible schedule and smaller class sizes, which fostered a supportive environment where students felt more comfortable sharing emotions than in traditional classrooms. Participants, motivated learners who voluntarily joined the additional English sessions, may have felt more open to discussing their feelings during the activities. They ranged in age from 27 to 40 and were all at A2 level in English, according to the CEFR.

All participants were briefed on the study's purpose and assured of anonymity, with no impact on their course evaluation. Participation was voluntary. To safeguard confidentiality, students were asked not to use their real names but instead to create a self-chosen nickname. This allowed the researcher to monitor weekly changes in emotional experiences while preserving anonymity. Data were collected after obtaining the necessary ethical approval. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection.

Instruments and Data Collection Procedure

Learners' emotional experiences were primarily recorded through a structured narrative frame at the end of each weekly lesson. During each English class, participants individually filled out a narrative framework using their chosen nicknames. Allowing participants to choose their own nicknames facilitated linking responses across different weeks while ensuring their anonymity.

Narrative frames were filled out immediately after the lesson, while students remained in the classroom, allowing for real-time emotional reporting instead of relying on memory. Narrative frames combine structured prompts with open-ended responses, facilitating participants' reflection on various aspects of their experiences while preserving their own wording and meaning. This balance of structure and flexibility enables systematic cross-week comparisons without sacrificing the richness of individual emotional trajectories. The prompts asked participants to describe their initial emotions, emotional changes during the lesson, their most intense emotion, moments of enjoyment and anxiety, and their emotional state at the end. They were also encouraged to explain why they felt that way, which helped identify contextual emotional triggers.

Using the same narrative framework over five weeks facilitated the analysis of temporal changes in emotional experiences. Repeated reflections enabled the tracking of fluctuations, emerging patterns, and shifts in how learners understood and situated their emotions throughout the period. In this manner, the narrative frameworks yielded longitudinal qualitative data suitable for examining the dynamic interplay between enjoyment and anxiety in the classroom.

To better understand learners' emotional experiences and contextualize the patterns seen in the weekly forms, focus group interviews were conducted at the end of each week. Each focus group included the same participants over five weeks to maintain consistency in tracking emotions over time. These interviews examined participants' perceptions of enjoyment, anxiety in English classes, as well as the classroom practices and learning situations that influenced these emotions.

Conducting focus group interviews weekly allowed for the exploration of emotional experiences close to their occurrence, reducing retrospective bias and supporting the examination of

emotional development over time. The focus group approach was chosen to foster interaction and shared reflection among learners. Each session lasted approximately 45–50 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Data were collected over five consecutive weeks. The integration of weekly narrative frames and focus group interviews created a longitudinal qualitative dataset, enabling systematic examination of emotional change and continuity over time.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using a reflexive thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) guidelines, emphasizing temporal changes, fluctuations, and interactions, and interpreted through CDST. This aligns with the study's emphasis on emotional development over time rather than fixed categories. The process began with multiple readings of all weekly narrative frameworks and focus group transcripts to achieve thorough familiarity with the dataset. Time was included as an analytical factor to examine how learners' enjoyment and anxiety evolved and interacted during the five weeks. This method enabled comparison of emotional experiences both within and across weeks, rather than considering each data point as independent. All data were then systematically organized in chronological order for each participant using self-selected nicknames, enabling longitudinal tracking of individual emotional experiences across the five weeks.

In the second stage, initial codes were inductively generated across the dataset, focusing on meaningful segments related to enjoyment, anxiety, emotional triggers, perceived causes, emotional shifts, and changes in self-perception, aiming to identify themes without pre-existing frameworks (Thomas, 2006). Particular attention was given to temporal expressions (e.g., "at first," "later," "compared to last week"), which were used to identify emotional change and continuity.

Following initial coding, each participant's weekly entries were analyzed sequentially to identify emotional trajectories, turning points, recurring triggers, and moments of reorganization. This step enabled the recognition of dynamic patterns such as increasing stability, ongoing fluctuations, or sudden disruptions.

Subsequently, codes were clustered into broader themes representing common classroom influences, co-occurring emotions, and dynamic processes. These themes were refined through iterative comparison of narrative and focus group data to ensure coherence and depth.

In the final stage, themes and trajectories were interpreted through a complex dynamic systems perspective, focusing on variability, non-linearity, and contextual sensitivity. This perspective provided a lens for examining patterns of change in learners' emotional experiences over time. To ensure validity, themes from weekly narrative frames and focus group data were triangulated to find commonalities and differences. This method helped interpret emotional experiences by connecting individual reflections with broader patterns observed throughout the dataset.

To validate the robustness of the findings, the complete dataset—including initial codes and thematic connections—was reviewed by an external expert. Multiple consultations took place to resolve discrepancies in coding and interpretation. This collaborative process fostered transparency and ensured that the findings were firmly grounded in the data, minimizing potential researcher bias.

Ethics Statement

Research and publication ethics were followed. This study received ethical approval from the Ethics Committee of Niğde Ömer Halisdemir University Rectorate (Date: February 5, 2026; Number: 2026/1-40).

FINDINGS

The findings are presented as individual emotional trajectories, illustrating how enjoyment and anxiety developed, interacted, and changed over the five weeks. For each case, emotional sources and affordances are examined to show how learners' emotional systems adaptively respond to classroom conditions. In this study, data sources are abbreviated as Narrative Frames (NF) and Focus Group interviews (FG).

Participant 1 (Arthur)

At the beginning of the investigation (Week 1), Arthur experienced a high-intensity anxiety mainly triggered by public speaking and concerns about peer evaluation. He viewed his performance through a "deficit lens," in which the fear of negative evaluation primarily limited his willingness to communicate (WTC). His narrative reflects strong social-evaluative pressure:

"At the beginning of the class, I felt very anxious because I was afraid of saying something wrong in front of everyone." (NF, Week 1)

The use of the intensifier "very" and the emphasis on "in front of everyone" underscore a heightened sensitivity to social exposure. During this phase, anxiety led to excessive self-monitoring and avoidance behaviors, which limited his WTC. Instead of enhancing performance, it focused his attention on possible mistakes.

"Sometimes I prefer not to raise my hand because I don't want to make a mistake." (FG, Week 1)

By Week 3, his emotions showed greater fluctuations than in earlier weeks. Although anxiety persisted, its impact was reduced by the social benefits of pair work.

"I was still nervous, but during pair work I felt more comfortable because it was not the whole class." (NF, Week 3)

The phrase "still nervous, but..." indicates that while anxiety remained, its intensity shifted. Saying "not the whole class" implies that speaking in front of fewer students lessens the pressure. In pair work, anxiety became more manageable and less overwhelming. This smaller, safer setting enabled Arthur to participate more actively. Instead of just trying to avoid mistakes, he started engaging more in communication. The emotional change was not merely a decrease in anxiety, but a move toward a more balanced state. This shift becomes visible when he noted:

"In pair work, I don't feel that stressed because the teacher is not focusing only on me." (FG, Week 3)

Reduced direct teacher attention also mitigated anxiety. The teacher's role became less central in the interaction, thereby facilitating Arthur's engagement with decreased anxiety. The following quote demonstrates this shift:

"When the teacher corrects me gently, I don't feel as bad as before." (FG, Week 4)

This indicates a change not just in the situation but also in how feedback is perceived. It started to be seen as a helpful guide rather than a threat.

By Week 5, Arthur's emotional journey indicated a clear change. Rather than simply decreasing, his reports showed he was starting to see anxiety as more controlled and sometimes even helpful for participating in class activities.

"A little nervousness actually helps me focus." (FG, Week 5)

Several factors contributed to this change. Firstly, repeated speaking exercises reduced the unpredictability that initially increased anxiety; as the tasks became more familiar, uncertainty decreased, which lowered the fear response. Arthur reflected on this growing familiarity:

"Now I know what to expect in speaking activities, so I don't panic like before." (FG, Week 4)

Additionally, positive participation experiences seemed to enhance his confidence, as small successes—such as being understood or completing tasks smoothly—gradually altered his emotional reactions. As he explained:

"When I speak, and my partner understands me, I feel more confident." (NF, Week 5)

"Last week I answered a question correctly, and it made me feel better about speaking." (FG, Week 5)

These small successes acted as reinforcing instances, helping to adjust anxiety rather than eliminate it. Over time, these instances helped reframe nervousness as a controllable and possibly useful experience. From a dynamic perspective, Arthur's responses shifted from avoidance to increased active engagement. Over time, he showed a greater willingness to participate despite feeling anxious, and his reports indicated that enjoyment and anxiety often co-occurred, encouraging his involvement.

Participant 2 (Serenus)

Serenus's Week 1 responses showed higher levels of enjoyment compared to Arthur's. Her reports indicated that social interactions, especially peer collaboration, helped foster positive feelings and may have contributed to a stable emotional pattern early in the study.

"Today's class was really enjoyable because we worked in groups and I could share my ideas." (NF, Week 1)

The enjoyment here mainly stems from social interaction. Group work and the opportunity to "share my ideas" provided a sense of mutual engagement. Peer collaboration served as an emotional support mechanism, enhancing self-efficacy and maintaining engagement. The social context offered psychological safety, fostering enjoyment as the primary motivating factor. During the focus group, she explained this further:

"When we speak together, I feel more confident and interested." (FG, Week 1)

By Week 3, her responses indicated fluctuations in her enjoyment during a lesson. When participation opportunities were scarce, she reported feeling less enjoyment. Conversely, activities that involved communication seemed to foster more positive emotional engagement. She noted a decrease in enjoyment during teacher-centered explanations.

"I felt bored because we mostly listened and did not speak much." (NF, Week 2)

"At first, I did not enjoy it, but after the speaking activity, I felt engaged." (NF, Week 3)

The temporal shift ("at first... but after...") suggests that her enjoyment developed over time based on the activity structure. Speaking tasks acted as prompts that re-engaged her and strengthened her positive outlook.

By Week 5, Serenus demonstrated a strong emotional balance. Her approach remained "enjoyment-driven," yet she maintained a realistic perspective on her situational anxiety, noting, *"I feel a little nervous sometimes, but when we work together, I enjoy it again."* (FG, Week 5). This suggests that collaborative interaction functioned as a regulatory mechanism, preventing anxiety from becoming dominant. Enjoyment continued as her main attractor state, reinforced by peer interaction, communication, and meaningful engagement.

Participant 3 (Lumen)

Lumen's initial responses showed a strong link between enjoyment and anxiety. Unlike Arthur and Serenus, her emotions seemed to fluctuate based on classroom activities. During the first week, she mainly felt anxious during individual speaking turns.

"When it is my turn to speak, I suddenly feel nervous." (NF, Week 1)

The word "suddenly" signifies a rapid emotional response triggered by public performance. The anxiety did not stem from being in the classroom generally, but from the moment of personal exposure. Turn-taking acted as a trigger that heightened self-awareness.

As the weeks progressed, his emotional responses appeared to become more varied across classroom situations, suggesting a more dynamic pattern of emotional experience over time. By the fourth week, Lumen demonstrated a clear differentiation of emotional responses, with anxiety related to performance and enjoyment associated with cognitive challenges. Rather than inducing anxiety, encountering challenges in this setting enhanced engagement, especially when tasks were unpredictable or varied. Conversely, tasks that were predictable or repetitive tended to diminish interest and involvement.

"If the activity is interesting, I forget that I am nervous." (FG, Week 4)

"I don't feel bored when the task is challenging, but I still feel nervous when speaking." (NF, Week 4)

These statements indicate a growing understanding of specific emotional triggers. Anxiety was associated with public speaking, whereas enjoyment was connected to significant cognitive engagement. The considerable difficulty of the task influenced Lumen's emotions.

During the five weeks, Lumen's emotional responses seemed to fluctuate based on the nature of classroom tasks. New or more difficult activities tended to cause higher anxiety, whereas familiar tasks generally resulted in more positive engagement. This indicates a shifting pattern of emotional experience over time.

Participant 4 (Nova)

At the beginning, Nova's emotions appeared relatively stable, characterized by moderate enjoyment and low anxiety. Her positive state was grounded in familiarity and perceived competence.

"I felt relaxed and interested in today's lesson. I also feel comfortable because I know my classmates well." (NF, Week 1)

"I usually don't feel very nervous because I know most of the answers." (FG, Week 1)

Her previous success and perceived competence seemed to positively influence her emotional state. Knowing that she "most of the answers" appeared to lessen her uncertainty and correlated with reduced anxiety. Her enjoyment persisted during predictable tasks and when she felt confident in her abilities. However, in Week 2, her emotional reactions changed when a spontaneous speaking activity was added.

"I suddenly felt anxious because I was not prepared." (NF, Week 2)

The adverb "suddenly" signals a quick emotional shift. Unlike her initial calm, her anxiety grew more intense:

"When the teacher asked unexpected questions, I felt stressed." (FG, Week 2)

"I didn't have time to think, and that made me nervous." (FG, Week 2)

The lack of preparation time and unpredictability seem linked to higher anxiety levels. Her initial enjoyment appeared to decline during this activity, with anxiety becoming more noticeable in her reports. This suggested a temporary shift in her emotional experience during the task. Unlike Arthur's gradual decrease in anxiety, Nova experienced a sudden escalation during the study, accompanied by a concurrent decline in enjoyment.

"I was more nervous this week than before." (NF, Week 3)

"I couldn't enjoy the lesson because I was thinking about making mistakes." (NF, Week 3)

"Even when the activity was interesting, I was worried about answering wrong." (FG, Week 4)

This suggests a competitive relationship between anxiety and enjoyment, where heightened anxiety diminishes positive engagement.

However, by Week 5, Nova showed signs of emotional self-regulation. Anxiety remained present but was cognitively reframed:

"I still feel nervous sometimes, but I realize it is normal." (NF, Week 5)

"When I prepare a little before class, I feel more confident and enjoy it again." (FG, Week 5)

"I feel excited when I can answer correctly, even if I was nervous before." (NF, Week 5)

Preparation seemed to greatly affect Nova's emotional responses. When she was well-prepared, she generally felt more confident and found classroom activities more enjoyable. On the other hand, feeling unprepared often increased her anxiety. Over five weeks, small successes helped restore positive feelings alongside anxiety, rather than completely removing them. Nova's reactions indicated that her emotions varied: anxiety was highest at the beginning, then gradually decreased and became more stable, while her enjoyment re-emerged during more successful tasks.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This study aimed to examine how EFL learners' enjoyment and anxiety evolved and interacted over five weeks in a private language course. Adopting a dynamic perspective, the findings suggest that emotional experiences did not follow a simple linear pattern and were shaped by context-specific classroom factors.

Consistent with earlier research (e.g., Elahi Shirvan & Talebzadeh, 2018; Wang et al., 2024), learners' emotional experiences did not follow a simple upward or downward trend. Instead, emotions fluctuated in response to specific classroom conditions. For example, Arthur's emotions did not show a steady decline in anxiety over time; rather, his anxiety rose and fell depending on the demands and structure of activities. This pattern supports the view that emotions develop through continuous interaction with contextual and experiential factors, rather than functioning as fixed learner characteristics (He et al., 2021; Pietluch, 2026). Similarly, Nova's case can be interpreted through a CDST perspective. Although spontaneous speaking tasks initially disrupted her emotional balance, she gradually restored it through

preparation, reflecting adaptive reorganization within a dynamic system (de Bot et al., 2007). Taken together, these cases underscore that learners' emotions are continuously co-constructed through the interplay between individual interpretations and contextual affordances.

Building on this dynamic perspective, the study also identified specific classroom sources that triggered and shaped emotional fluctuations. Peer collaboration emerged as a particularly powerful emotional affordance. Pair and group work enhanced confidence, engagement, and enjoyment, echoing findings that classroom activities and climate strongly predict FLE (Li et al., 2018). Importantly, enjoyment did not arise solely from task success; rather, it stemmed from shared participation and a sense of psychological safety. In contrast, whole-class speaking consistently triggered anxiety. Arthur and Lumen both linked their anxiety to turn-taking and the visibility of their performance. For Arthur, pair work reduced anxiety, likely because it lessened his fear of negative evaluation. With fewer peers observing him, the perceived social threat diminished (Özer-Altinkaya & Yetkin, 2025). These findings demonstrate how the structure and scale of classroom interaction can directly shape emotional intensity.

In addition to interactional structure, predictability played a crucial regulatory role. Predictable routines and opportunities for prior preparation reduced uncertainty and supported enjoyment. When learners knew what to expect and had time to organize their thoughts, they felt greater control, which strengthened confidence and willingness to participate. Enjoyment, in these moments, was closely tied to perceived competence and readiness. Clear instructions and familiar task formats created a stable environment in which learners could concentrate on meaning rather than on managing stress. Conversely, when unpredictability increased—such as through spontaneous questioning—anxiety intensified. This aligns with research (Jiang & Dewaele, 2019) identifying teacher unpredictability and unprepared speaking as prominent anxiety triggers. Unexpected turns may increase cognitive load while simultaneously activating fear of negative evaluation, thereby heightening emotional discomfort. Together, these findings suggest that maintaining a balance between spontaneity and structured support is essential for sustaining enjoyment while minimizing anxiety.

An interesting finding was that, for Lumen, enjoyment was closely linked to cognitive challenge. Tasks that were demanding yet manageable seemed to foster a state of optimal engagement. Instead of feeling overwhelmed, she found the challenge stimulating and meaningful. This indicates that when challenge and competence are well balanced, cognitive engagement can turn potentially anxiety-inducing situations into experiences of deep involvement and pleasure. This finding aligns with research indicating that task complexity interacts dynamically with learners' emotional experiences (Chen, 2023). It suggests that when task demands are aligned with learners' perceived abilities, cognitive engagement can turn potentially anxiety-provoking situations into opportunities for deep involvement and enjoyment.

Importantly, the study further confirms that enjoyment and anxiety are not opposite ends of a single continuum (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). Instead, they frequently co-occurred. Arthur's reflection that "a little nervousness actually helps me focus" illustrates emotional differentiation rather than emotional elimination. Similarly, Lumen described moments when heightened engagement diminished her anxiety. These accounts suggest that moderate anxiety can coexist with enjoyment and may even facilitate performance in supportive environments. In this respect, the findings nuance earlier perspectives that primarily framed anxiety as detrimental (MacIntyre, 2017). Rather than seeking to eradicate anxiety entirely, emotionally responsive teaching may aim to transform harmful anxiety into manageable arousal while simultaneously cultivating enjoyment.

Finally, although all participants shared the same classroom environment, their emotional responses appeared to evolve differently over time. This pattern aligns with a CDST perspective, emphasizing individual differences within shared contexts (Cameron & Larsen-Freeman, 2007). The findings suggest that learners' emotional reactions are shaped not only by the classroom setting but also by their personal interpretations and responses.

By integrating weekly narrative frames with focus group interviews, this study tracked detailed emotional changes over five weeks. The results build on previous quantitative and idiodynamic studies by offering longitudinal qualitative insights into context-sensitive affordances and the coexistence of positive and negative emotions. Overall, the findings suggest that learners' emotional experiences changed over time and were influenced by the classroom context. Understanding these dynamic processes can provide more nuanced, learner-centered emotional support.

The findings point to several important pedagogical implications. Pair and small-group formats seem to provide emotional support, offering psychological safety and reducing the perceived threat of evaluation in public settings. Predictable routines and opportunities for preparation may further stabilize learners who are prone to performance anxiety, as familiarity and readiness enhance their sense of control. At the same time, incorporating cognitively engaging and meaningful tasks can buffer anxiety by redirecting learners' attention toward idea development and active involvement rather than self-monitoring. Finally, gentle and supportive feedback plays a crucial role in reshaping learners' perceptions of evaluation, transforming it from a source of threat into constructive guidance. Overall, as suggested in literature (Dewaele et al., 2018), rather than focusing solely on eliminating anxiety, teachers may benefit from designing emotionally responsive classrooms that actively cultivate enjoyment while allowing manageable levels of nervousness to support focus and growth.

Although this study provides detailed insights into learners' emotional journeys, it has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the five-week timeframe restricts insights into long-term emotional stability. Although fluctuations and shifts in emotional experiences were observed, the study's relatively short duration limits the extent to which longer-term patterns can be identified. Conducting longitudinal studies over a semester or an academic year could clarify whether these trajectories solidify, change, or reorganize over time. Second, the study primarily relied on self-reported data, collected through weekly narrative frameworks and focus group interviews. While these tools provided rich, participant-centered accounts, they are susceptible to social desirability biases. Future research could expand upon these findings by employing a multi-method approach, such as classroom observations, idiodynamic procedures, and real-time emotion tracking, to obtain a more comprehensive understanding. Finally, the analysis primarily focused on enjoyment and anxiety, with emotions such as boredom, frustration, and pride occurring occasionally in the data. Future research could expand the emotional spectrum to more comprehensively understand classroom emotional environments and examine interactions among different affective states.

Researcher Contribution Rate

The author confirms sole responsibility for all aspects of this study, including conceptualization, data collection, analysis, and manuscript preparation.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest in this study.

Ethics Statement

Research and publication ethics were followed. This study received ethical approval from the Ethics Committee of Niğde Ömer Halisdemir University Rectorate (Date: February 5, 2026; Number: 2026/1-40).

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