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A correlational analysis of classroom enjoyment and learning motivation among Iranian EFL learners

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Abstract

Recent studies in second and foreign language acquisition have increasingly examined learners' emotional experiences during the language-learning process. There is still limited research on the role of enjoyment in sustaining motivation among learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). This research compared classroom enjoyment and learning motivation from 135 Iranian EFL students in private language schools located within the city of Tehran. Convenience sampling was used to select students for this study. Two surveys were used to gather data: one measuring motivation, as established by Roohani (2001), and the second measuring classroom enjoyment, as established by Stevens et al. (2000). Positive and statistically significant relationships were found to exist between classroom enjoyment and learning motivation (Spearman's $\rho = 0.25$, $p < 0.01$). The findings may help identify how peer relationships and classroom climate contribute to students' enjoyment and motivation based on the findings from this study. Based upon this study, it will provide information to all interested parties as to how to create a more motivating and engaging classroom for EFL students through improved classroom experience.

Keywords: affective factors, classroom enjoyment, English as a foreign language, Iranian learners, motivation

1. Introduction

The emotions involved with foreign or second language acquisition form a critical layer of understanding in language education and have received a great deal of attention in terms of theoretical

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and empirical studies in Applied Linguistics. Language acquisition has traditionally been regarded as a cognitive and/or linguistic process; however, in recent times, it has become clear that language acquisition also holds a strong relationship with the learner's affective experience (Ashraf, 2019; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2016; Horwitz, 2001; Wang & Wang, 2024). Emotions arise from classroom events, social interactions, and task demands, and they often co-occur with distinct characteristics (Boudreau et al, 2018). Depending on their nature, these emotional states can either facilitate or hinder the learning process. Negative emotions such as anxiety have been shown to interfere with learner participation and performance, while positive emotions such as enjoyment have demonstrated a positive influence on engagement and persistence (Dewaele & Alfawzan, 2018). Growing awareness of the role of emotions in language learning has encouraged the development of more humanistic and learner-centered approaches to language learning, as well as the need to understand the emotional experiences of learners to improve the teaching of foreign languages.

Among negative emotions, Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) has received the greatest attention in second and foreign language research. According to Horwitz et al.(1986) and MacIntyre and Gardner (1989), FLA refers to the feelings of tension, apprehension, or fear that individuals perceive when trying to use or learn a language other than their own. When viewed as an anxiety state in one specific context, FLA has an observable effect on the learner's ability to process information, their willingness to learn, and their ability to perform. Learners experiencing FLA often report self-doubt, negative self-talk, and difficulty concentrating during language learning activities (Brantmeier, 2005; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991; Tobias, 1979). Researchers have documented a negative relationship between FLA and various indicators of performance in many types of SL/FL learning situations, including speaking ability, listening comprehension, reading rate, and writing quality (Brown, 2000; Chang & Chang, 2008; Liu & Liu, 2018; Liu, 2009). The pervasive effect of anxiety demonstrated by these studies supports the need for teachers of SL/FL to consider the emotional state of their students when developing and implementing effective learning strategies and experiences for these students.

Although previous research emphasized negative emotions, recent work has turned toward examining positive emotions in language learning when they learn a second language and how these positive emotions can enhance participants' language acquisition experiences. In particular, researchers have examined Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE), which was proposed by Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) as one way to create an emotionally supportive and motivating environment in the foreign language classroom. FLE describes students' emotional state while performing foreign language tasks and includes feelings of happiness, satisfaction, and engagement. The findings from these studies indicate that enjoyment enhances many aspects of the language acquisition process, including broadening students' attention spans, promoting persistence in completing tasks, strengthening social ties among classmates, and increasing investment in communicative activities (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2016; Dewaele et al., 2018; Gopang et al., 2017; Zarrinabadi et al., 2024). Evidence indicates that FLE can mitigate anxiety and also serve as an independent predictor of positive language-learning outcomes related to language acquisition, including willingness to communicate, use of strategies, and perceived progress on the way to becoming proficient in a foreign language.

While there is a growing body of empirical research regarding the relationships between foreign language enjoyment (FLE) and foreign language anxiety (FLA), there are still many gaps in the existing literature. First, there are very few studies regarding the FLE-FLA relationship among Iranian EFL learners or from the Middle East. Much of the research to date has focused on adult learners learning a foreign language, particularly in East-Asian or European regions. Second, most studies examining the relationship between FLE and FLA have merely looked at how both emotions are experienced together. However, there is limited research examining how FLE interacts with psychological constructs such as motivation. On the contrary, there have been extensive examinations of motivation amongst Iranian EFL learners; however, little research has focused on the emotional basis for motivation. The emotional experiences of learners (most notably enjoyment), as well as their motivation for learning, are an important yet under-researched subset of emotional experience and motivation.

Motivation is seen to be a major factor that determines how successful learners will be in their language acquisition process. According to classic theories, motivated learners are implicated by their increased engagement, perseverance in task completion, and extended engagement with task effort (Dörnyei, 2001; Gardner, 1985; Harter et al., 2007; Yinxing & Zhang, 2018). Due to the increased emphasis on learner participation, risk-taking, and collaboration during classroom activities, motivation has become an even greater focus of attention in communicative/learner-centred methodologies (Lessard Clouston, 1997; Wang, 2024). In relation to Iranian EFL learners, learners' motivations are largely determined by cultural influences, educational demands, and their beliefs that English is a means to an end, for instance, for occupational and educational opportunities. Learners' motivation is also fluid, as it is shaped by the atmosphere within the classroom, teacher support, peer interaction, and an individual's emotional response to success/failure. Enjoyment, as a positive emotional experience, may strengthen motivation by making learning more rewarding and by enhancing learners' sense of competence or developing an enhanced sense of belonging and ability in the classroom.

While some Iranian studies have focused on the overall predictors of motivation, there is limited understanding of how classroom enjoyment may relate to motivational potential. With the growing focus on lessening anxiety and creating supportive and engaging learning environments for students, it is essential to understand how feelings of enjoyment relate to the motivation of learners in order to develop effective pedagogy, design motivating materials, and create positive learning experiences (time spent with teachers and students).

Knowledge of the relationships existing between classroom enjoyment and motivation is important to creating classrooms with a safe emotional learning environment, as well as an intellectually challenging environment in which students have a greater chance of being able to maintain their motivation and perform better over the long term.

With only a few studies concerning the direct relationship between classroom enjoyment and EFL learners' motivation, the purpose of the current study is to address this gap in the literature. The primary purpose of the study is to examine the relationship between classroom enjoyment and learners' motivation in the Iranian EFL context for learning a foreign language among intermediate-level learners of English as a second language studying at private institutions within Iran. By exploring the concept of enjoyment within the classroom as an affective experience and motivation as the force

driving the learners' foreign language acquisition efforts, this research will also enhance our knowledge about emotional and motivational factors involved with the acquisition of foreign language skills in Iranian settings and provide educational professionals, researchers and policy makers access to valuable data to develop and cultivate enjoyable and motivating EFL-learning situations.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Classroom Enjoyment

For some years, researchers examining second and foreign language acquisition have focused almost exclusively on foreign language anxiety (FLA). The literature base surrounding Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) has developed considerably to date, with much of the work examining how various factors such as the learner's emotional state at the time of foreign language learning (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Donovan & MacIntyre, 2004; Liu, 2018b), the learner's sex (Kitano, 2001; Matsuda & Gobel, 2004), how long the learner lived and learned the language in the target country (Thompson & Lee, 2013), the level of language proficiency the learner had achieved (Dewaele & Thirtle, 2009; Liu, 2006), and the learner's willingness to communicate with other speakers of their target language (Donovan & MacIntyre, 2004; Liu, 2017) may impact their levels of FLA. Evidence generally supports associations among these factors, although the exact mechanisms influencing anxiety reduction remain unclear. (Chang, 2008; Liu, 2018a). Other patterns stay unclear or conflict across studies. A meta-analysis by Teimouri et al. (2019) showed anxiety often rises from junior high school to university level. The authors link this increase to heavier academic demands and new settings rather than age alone. Such results point to anxiety as a shifting construct affected by cognitive, affective, and social elements (Gkonou et al., 2017).

Research focus has shifted in recent years from an exclusive emphasis on FLA toward the investigation of positive emotions. Researchers now examine positive emotions more often; foreign language enjoyment (FLE) stands out as a central topic over the last ten years. This change fits with trends in positive psychology, reduces negative feelings and matters, yet builds positive ones matters just as much for successful language learning. Developed by Dewaele and MacIntyre in 2014, the Foreign Language Enjoyment Scale (FLES), which contains 21 items, was the first scale to directly measure how much pleasure, interest, engagement, and connection to others occur when learning a foreign language. Subsequent studies conducted with the use of the FLES (Dewaele, 2017; Dewaele and Alfawzan, 2018; Dewaele & Dewaele, 2017; Dewaele et al., 2018; Sampson, 2024) showed a significant negative relationship between levels of Foreign Language enjoyment (FLE) and anxiety or fear of learning (FLA); however, both concepts are independent of one another, with very little overlap in their descriptions. In addition, learners may experience both levels of Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) and FLA at the same time; the balance between the two will depend on the nature of the foreign language learning task, the social environment in which the student is learning the foreign language, and the teacher's efforts to support the student's development of FLE. FLE predicts performance better than FLA does (Dewaele & Alfawzan, 2018); positive affect seems to support engagement and continued effort over time.

Control-Value Theory from Pekrun et al. (2006) offers the main explanation for FLE: enjoyment appears when learners feel control over tasks and see value in them. A person has the mindset and expectation that they can succeed; therefore, they are motivated to engage in a task.

Experiencing enjoyment during an activity can enhance attentional resources, self-regulation, and performance, increase their ability to control themselves, and benefit their performance. Research supports these assertions and shows that enjoyment promotes motivation, the use of different strategies, and cognitive and academic performance (Ashby et al., 1999; Pekrun et al., 2002). Enjoyment can keep someone's interest in the same activity for years or months (Hidi & Renninger, 2006), which is especially important for acquiring a language. In an L2 context, enjoyment may be both a trait and a state of a person, depending on the situation (Goetz et al., 2006; Piechurska-Kuciel, 2017). Teacher support, good peer relations, autonomy, and relevant tasks all raise FLE levels.

Newer work looks past the anxiety link and tests enjoyment against wider outcomes. Liu (2022) reviewed evidence and concluded that classroom enjoyment boosts active participation. In a recent study by Zeng et al. (2023), they found that enjoyment is a predictor of grades in online language courses through motivation and engagement as mediating factors. Positive emotions may influence multiple cognitive and motivational pathways involved in goal attainment. In Ramzan et al.'s study in 2023, the researchers also found that ESL students had a greater amount of positive attitude towards learning English if they enjoyed learning English. Although these findings appear consistent across contexts, few studies have examined the specific nature of the enjoyment–motivation relationship among Iranian EFL students in Private Language Centers.

2.2. Motivation in Language Learning

Motivation is one of the strongest predictors of success in second language acquisition, as evidenced by early models of motivational theories used in L2 learning, such as Gardner's (1985) socio-educational approach, which sought to explain how two different types of motivation - integrative and instrumental - led to increased effort and greater levels of achievement. Motivation is not fixed; it is dynamic and susceptible to various influences from both within an individual and from outside sources. Motivation is an essential part of today's communicative classrooms because for students to be successful, they must engage with classmates, collaborate with others, take risks, and sustain their motivation over time. Furthermore, according to Self-Determination Theory (SDT) as proposed by Deci and Ryan (1985), Intrinsic motivation refers to engaging in an activity for its inherent interest and satisfaction, while extrinsic motivation refers to achieving some external reward for performing the task (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The intrinsic form of motivation is more likely to result in deeper processing, longer persistence, and a greater positive emotional outcome than the extrinsic. The Self-Determination Theory defines the motivational range of learners between a controlled form of motivation and an autonomous form of motivation, where the learner has learned to value the activity being performed. In EFL learning, intrinsic motivation is associated with enjoyment and curiosity, while extrinsic motivation is often linked to testing, job placement, family pressure, and social pressure.

Iranian EFL studies have demonstrated that cultural and system factors influence the factors that motivate students. Sedaghat (2001) found that students' integrative motives predicted a greater use of listening strategies than a greater use of instrumental motives. For many Iranian students, English is viewed as a means to an end (university or job placement), creating a stronger relationship with their extrinsic motivations. Motivation fluctuates in response to classroom events, teacher behaviour, peer interaction, and learners' emotional reactions to progress or setbacks, and how students react

emotionally to their progress or lack thereof. Enjoyment can serve as an emotional stimulus that increases students' persistence and level of participation.

Current studies explore ties between enjoyment and motivation. Liu (2022) stated that FLE strongly affects motivation and engagement levels. Zeng et al. (2023) confirmed enjoyment as both an emotion and a motivator that raises achievement indirectly via engagement. Ramzan et al. (2023) noted higher enjoyment linked to stronger motivation and attitudes. Connections look solid internationally, but data from Iranian EFL students remain limited.

2.3. Synthesis, Gaps, and Rationale for the Current Study

Foreign language enjoyment clearly supports engagement, persistence, and performance. Motivation substantially contributes to learners' effort and long-term achievement in language study. International work increasingly finds that enjoyment boosts motivation. Several gaps persist. Most FLE-motivation research comes from Europe or East Asia; Middle Eastern or Iranian learners receive far less attention. Iranian studies cover motivation widely, yet seldom check emotional sources such as enjoyment. International findings may not directly generalize to Iranian private institutes due to differences in instructional practices, cultural norms, and teacher–student dynamics, where teaching methods, cultural norms, and teacher-student ties differ markedly. These gaps justify a study of classroom enjoyment and motivation among Iranian EFL learners in private institutes.

3. Research Question

Based on the gaps identified in the literature, the present study addresses the following research questions:

1. What is the overall level of classroom enjoyment, as measured relative to the scale midpoint, among Iranian intermediate EFL learners
2. What is the overall level of learning motivation, relative to the scale midpoint, among Iranian intermediate EFL learners
3. Is there a significant relationship between classroom enjoyment and learning motivation among Iranian EFL learners?

4. Methodology

4.1. Design

A correlational, post hoc research design was employed. Correlational studies examine relationships between variables without manipulating them. In this study, classroom enjoyment and learning motivation were treated as naturally occurring variables among Iranian EFL learners. Also, because the information was collected after the naturally occurring variables, the research data include all the characteristics of a post hoc research design (Salkind, 2010). No experimental treatment was performed, nor was there an intervention that altered any variables, and the analysis used for this research was based solely on the participants' reported answers at one time.

Thus, the design allowed for the identification of statistical correlations, although causal inferences cannot be made from correlational data between classroom enjoyment and learning motivation, but noted that no inference of cause can be made from correlational data.

4.2. Participants

Participants were chosen through convenience sampling, which was deemed the most feasible approach based on the availability of institutional connections and an online method for collecting data. The data was collected from four private language institutes located in Tehran: Iran Oxford, Pardisan Gholhak, Pishtazan, and Allameh Ghotbe Ravandi. A total of 363 intermediate-level EFL learners initially completed the online questionnaire. These participants were all aged 17 and older. Although all participants had Farsi as their native language, Many participants also spoke additional languages or dialects such as Kurdish, Lori, and Turkish.

A total of 135 completed and usable questionnaires out of 363 questionnaires distributed were achieved, with a response rate of 37.2%. Out of 363 questionnaires, 228 questionnaires were removed because they were either not fully completed or had missing or incomplete answers. The final sample included 64 males and 71 females. Marital status was recorded as an additional demographic variable to explore potential socio-cultural influences on emotional and motivational experiences (married/single/other) to help assess the effects of socio-cultural issues associated with each type of marital status on emotional and motivational experiences during English Language study. There were 75 participants listed as single, 53 married, and 7 in some other way (divorced, remarried). The final sample of 135 participants met the minimum requirements for conducting non-parametric correlations with sufficient statistical power, providing sufficient statistical power to detect a moderate association between two or more variables within the study sample size.

4.3. Instruments

To assess the motivation of learners, the Motivational Questionnaire developed by Roohani (2001) was used. The Motivational Questionnaire has 20 items that assess learners' motivational orientations toward studying English in EFL contexts. Items are rated on a five-point rating scale with 1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree. The pilot study with 30 EFL learners resulted in a Cronbach's alpha of .83; This value indicates adequate internal consistency for the pilot sample.

Classroom enjoyment was assessed with Stevens et al. (2000) Classroom Enjoyment Questionnaire; this questionnaire's 10 items measure classroom activity enjoyment, peer interaction enjoyment, and instructor engagement enjoyment. The Enjoyment Questionnaire uses a five-point rating scale (1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree). The Enjoyment Questionnaire had a reliability coefficient of $\alpha = 0.86$ in the pilot study, indicating high internal reliability.

Both instruments were combined into a single online questionnaire that was made available to the participants through the Porsline platform. Experts from three universities reviewed both scale instruments for content validity and confirmed that all items are reflective of the constructs of motivation and enjoyment for EFL learners in Iran. On average, participants completed the 30-item questionnaire in approximately 11 minutes.

4.4. Data Collection

Because of COVID-19 restrictions, data collection was conducted online, and the use of physical materials was not possible. Once approval was obtained from the institute's governing body, the researcher created an online questionnaire and sent the URL to prospective subjects via WhatsApp, Telegram, and other popular messaging applications that were used frequently by the institute.

The participants were provided with information about the research study and its purpose, the voluntary nature of their participation, and the protection of the confidentiality of their data prior to filling out the questionnaires. The approximate amount of time it would take for them to complete the survey was stated in the information provided to them. Additionally, they were instructed not to put their names on the surveys and that the results of the survey would be used only for academic research purposes.

Once the participants completed the demographic information (age, gender, marital status, primary language), they answered the questions about motivation and enjoyment. When they submitted their answers, all of the responses were collected by a computer program developed by Porsline, and all the responses for those who completed the questionnaires completely were analyzed as part of the study.

Approval from the ethical review board was obtained prior to the start of the study, and the participants were informed of the following concerning the study:

- ✓ That they could withdraw at any time without repercussions, and have their responses remain anonymous
- ✓ That the data that they submitted was stored safely and would be used only for academic purposes
- ✓ That personally identifiable information would not be collected.

4.5. Data Analysis

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze the data. Throughout the analysis, descriptive as well as inferential statistics were performed.

Descriptive statistics (arithmetic means, median, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis) were calculated for each dependent variable and were used to provide basic information regarding the main effects of the dependent variables based on how much variation exists across observations within the same category. Thus, these descriptive statistics provided the basis for identifying average or typical values, and the range and skew/kurtosis of the values.

Prior to selecting inferential tests to use, it was tested whether the underlying assumptions of normal distributions apply to the dependent variables. As shown by the results regarding the skewness and kurtosis of the data and their accompanying SEs, the results indicated that the dependent variables of enjoyment and motivation significantly deviated from normal distributions (values larger than ± 1.96), which indicated that non-parametric tests were required.

The inferential statistical tests used for Questions 1 and 2 were based on the premise that the median scores for both motivation and enjoyment would differ from the neutral midpoint of the Likert scale, which is defined as a value of 3 (3rd pentile). As such, the appropriate Test was the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test, a non-parametric alternative to the one-sample t-test, which allows a determination if the median score is significantly different from the test value based on either a one-sided or two-sided hypothesis (in this instance, 3). Research Question 3 examined the relationship between learning motivation and classroom enjoyment; thus, the most appropriate non-parametric correlation coefficient was Spearman's rho, given its suitability for non-normally distributed ordinal data. Spearman's rho is utilized when the underlying assumption of normally distributed data cannot be met, and provides a

reliable estimate of the strength of a monotonically associated relationship between two continuous dependent variables.

5. Results

In this part, a description of findings based on three research questions is outlined. Descriptive statistics are provided first, followed by nonparametric inferential analysis due to violations of the assumptions regarding the distribution of the data required for parametric testing. All statistical analyses were conducted using an Alpha level of 0.05.

The analysis examined whether learners' enjoyment scores differed from the neutral midpoint of 30 of the enjoyment questionnaire; 10 items were rated on a scale from 1-5, equating to a neutral midpoint of 30. A summary of the descriptive statistics for enjoyment scores is shown in Table 1

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Classroom Enjoyment Scores

N	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation
135	41.38	42.00	6.23

The enjoyment scores indicated via Table 1 showed substantially greater than the midpoint/average score of ($M = 41.38$) ($Mdn = 42$). The normality of enjoyment scores was evaluated before performing an inferential analysis, and the values of skewness and kurtosis, when divided by their standard errors, exceeded ± 1.96 , indicating a significant deviation from normality, which would be expected to violate assumptions of normality. Therefore, since the assumption of normality was violated, the analysis of the enjoyment scores used a non-parametric one-sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test instead of a parametric One-Sample T-test.

Table 2

Nonparametric One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test for Classroom Enjoyment Scores

Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig. (2-tailed)
The median of Attitude equals 30.0	One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test	0.000

According to the results of the test, there was a statistically significant difference in the median enjoyment scores of learners, and the midpoint Z was approximately -9.47 with an associated p-value of less than 0.001. In addition to identifying that learners' classroom enjoyment scores are statistically higher than the neutral score, this does not provide information about the relative degree of enjoyment experienced by learners; therefore, descriptive statistics should also be examined to provide context to the findings.

In the second part of the study, the second research question focused on determining whether learners' English learning motivation scores were similar to the neutral scale midpoint. The motivation questionnaire consisted of 20 items, resulting in a neutral midpoint of 60 for motivation scores (Table 3).

Table 3*Descriptive Statistics for English Learning Motivation Scores*

N	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
135	77.12	78.00	10.920	0.940

The data indicate that both the mean ($M = 77.12$) and median ($Mdn = 78.00$) scores of motivation were above the neutral score of 60, which supports the idea that the motivational levels were favorable. Similar to the enjoyment scores, the motivation data also failed the normality tests, with skewness (-6.66) and kurtosis (9.67) values falling outside of the acceptable range. Consequently, a one-sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank test was performed. Table 4 contains a summary of these results.

Table 4*Nonparametric One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test for English Learning Motivation Scores*

Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig. (2-tailed)
The median of Attitude equals 60.0	One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test	0.000

The Wilcoxon test indicated that the observed median motivation score differed significantly from the neutral midpoint of the score range, $Z = -9.62$, $p < 0.001$. Therefore, the motivation scores of learners, on average, were significantly higher than a neutral mid-point for motivation. Similar to enjoyment, this result should be interpreted as evidence of statistically significant increases over the mid-point rather than evidence of how much motivation actually exists for learners in practical or educational settings.

The third research question was to examine whether classroom enjoyment is related to learning motivation. Table 5 indicates the mean and standard deviation for the classroom enjoyment ($M = 41.38$, $SD = 6.32$) and learning motivation ($M = 77.10$, $SD = 10.92$).

Table 5*Descriptive Statistics for Classroom Enjoyment Scores (out of 50) and Learning Motivation Scores*

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error
Classroom enjoyment	135	41.38	6.23	1.002
Learning motivation	135	77.12	10.92	0.679

The normality assumption was violated for both variables; thus, the appropriate non-parametric statistical approach to analyze the data was the Spearman rank-order correlation (ρ). The scatterplot was created to ensure a monotonic relationship existed before computing the correlation. The scatterplot indicates a positive monotonic pattern between enjoyment and motivation, indicating that the association between these two variables is positive monotonic.

The results of the Spearman correlation are summarized in Table 6. A statistically significant but modest positive correlation was found between classroom enjoyment and learning motivation (Spearman's $\rho = 0.25$, $p = 0.004$). The strength of the relationships is modest. However, enjoyable experiences contribute to a student's motivation for learning; this correlation indicates that enjoyment

accounts for only a small proportion of the variance in motivation. Enjoyment should, therefore, be considered within the context of a variety of psychological, instructional, and environmental factors that affect motivation to learn.

Figure 1

Scatter Plot for Correlation between Classroom Enjoyment and Learning Motivation

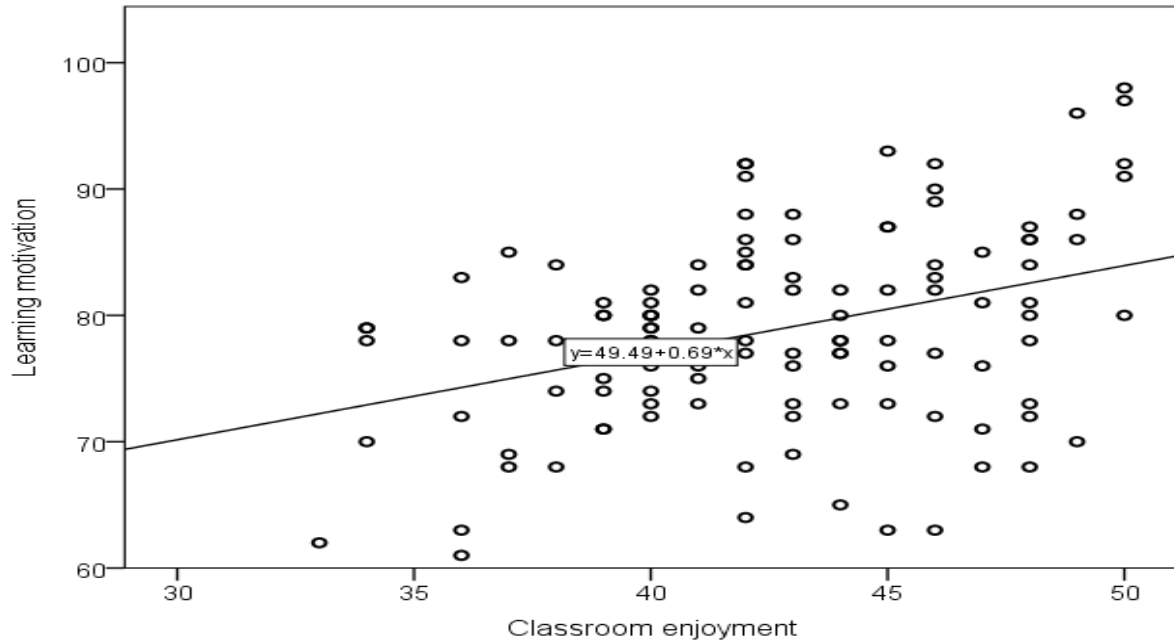


Table 6

Spearman's Correlation between Classroom Enjoyment and Learning Motivation

		Learning motivation
Classroom enjoyment Group	Correlation Coefficient	0.248
Spearman's rho	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.004
	N	135

6. Discussion

This research focused on (a) the level of students' enjoyment while in class, (b) their motivation to learn English, and (c) the relationship between enjoyment in class and motivation to learn. The study contributes to a different perspective on learner motivation and enjoyment by gathering data from an underrepresented group of learners, namely, Iranian learners studying English as a foreign language (EFL) in private language institutes. These learners generally experience a fast-paced learning environment, an exam-oriented curriculum, and complicated sociocultural expectations. The study contributes to the limited body of research exploring positive aspects of language acquisition among Iranian EFL learners, thus contributes to the current wave of research within applied linguistics that endeavours to balance existing research focused on learners' anxiety.

When analyzing the results of the first research question, the data showed that students had higher enjoyment scores in their classrooms than at the neutral midpoint. Thus, overall, the students viewed their EFL classrooms as being generally enjoyable. However, it should be noted that while this particular study did not investigate the individual categories of enjoyment found in FLE, the current

findings were consistent with previously defined meanings of enjoyment (Jin & Zhang, 2018; Li et al., 2018). The definition of private and social are two categories used to describe FLE where Private enjoyment refers to individual feelings of interest, satisfaction, and achievement in learning a foreign language, including feelings of interest, satisfaction, and a sense of achievement in learning a foreign language (FL) as well as how social enjoyment effects a student's ability to build positive relationships in the classroom with other students and teachers. Therefore, the elevated enjoyment levels suggest that both private and social enjoyment may contribute to positive affective classroom environments in Iranian EFL classrooms. Moreover, other studies report on the influence of social support from teachers and peers and the value of meaningful learning tasks in regards to promoting FLE and enjoyment in multiple educational environments.

The second research question evaluated the level of motivation amongst the learners. The results revealed that Motivation scores were considerably higher than the neutral midpoint of the scale. Though, the instruments did not use to separate motivational types (such as intrinsic versus extrinsic, integrative versus instrumental), the overall motivational profile indicates that Iranian EFL learners typically have very strong reasons for studying English, similar to past research and findings (Sedaghat, 2001). That is, English allows Iranian learners to access better educational and employment options in Iran and, at the same time, helps them connect with a larger global network and tap into available global resources. Additionally, given the elevated levels of both enjoyment and motivation, the two constructs may be mutually reinforcing rather than independent when gaining that motivation. This connection between motivation and happiness was also found in research on other positive psychology and second language acquisition studies.

The third research question examined whether learners' enjoyment and motivation were linked together. The results of the Spearman correlation analysis indicated an association between enjoyment and motivation in students, with a ρ value of 0.25, which was modest to small. This suggests that students who enjoyed learning were also more likely to have higher levels of motivation. However, the size of the correlation indicates that enjoyment would only account for a small proportion of the variance of motivation.

This finding is consistent with current models of motivation for second language acquisition (L2), which propose that motivation has many dimensions and can be dynamic or subject to other influences, including cognitive factors (e.g., the learner's perception of the relevance of the material being studied), affective factors (e.g., the learner's feelings about the learning environment and their motivation), sociocultural factors (e.g., the learner's experiences in a given culture), and contextual factors (e.g., the context in which the student is learning). These theoretical frameworks indicate that learners' enjoyment may assist in enhancing their motivation for learning by creating more meaning for learners and reducing their levels of psychological resistance, increasing their ability to engage with the material.

The positive correlation of modest strength identified here supports recent studies indicating that positive emotion can have a positive orientation towards L2 acquisition, but that this influence must be put in the context of the overall relationship between positive emotion and the entire system of L2 acquisition (no one part alone determines all motivation). For example, Liu (2022) argues that positive student emotions may enhance motivation through the development of psychological resilience, the enhancement of students' emotional involvement, and the generation of a positive

classroom climate. Likewise, Dewaele and Li (2020) note that positive experiences in the classroom result in a widening of the learners' attentional span and foster a long-term commitment to language learning.

The current results are consistent with the results of other international studies that indicate that students who experience positive emotions in class typically demonstrate a greater likelihood of having positive dispositions toward learning, including engagement, willingness to communicate, and positive attitudes about learning (Ramzan et al., 2023; Zeng et al., 2023). A key difference from previous studies is that academic outcomes (e.g., willingness to communicate) were not measured alongside enjoyment in this study (e.g., willingness to communicate) alongside enjoyment to identify potential correlations; therefore, while this study cannot make any inferences regarding performance, the modest correlation of enjoyment identified in this research must remain within the context of a broader system of affective and motivational processes.

It should also be noted that the correlational and ex post facto design does not allow us to make causal claims — enjoyment and motivation were related. However, Causal interpretations cannot be made regarding whether enjoyment leads to higher motivation or vice versa. Alternatively, highly motivated learners may view in-class activities positively, or that both enjoyment and motivation are the result of a common set of contextual factors, such as good teaching, engaging material, or a supportive peer environment. This viewpoint aligns with the perspective of researchers in the field of Positive Psychology, who see emotions and motivation as closely linked and interactive rather than as having a straightforward cause-and-effect relationship. Further, the use of longitudinal or experimental studies is needed to investigate the direction of the relationship.

Overall, it has been found that Iranian EFL learners in private language institutes have both positive levels of enjoyment and motivation, and that there is a low level of association between the two variables. Although enjoyment has some level of effect on learners' motivation orientations, the small correlation reflects the complexity of the motivational processes in multilingual educational environments.

7. Conclusion and Implications

The study examined students' classroom enjoyment, their motivation to learn English, and the relationship between these two constructs. By looking at positive experiences, this study adds to the existing literature about the importance of positive emotions in language acquisition (L2) with data from the underrepresented field of Iranian private language institutes, where the majority of instruction is focused on preparing students for examinations and, therefore, extremely time-consuming.

The data gathered from the first question of the research showed that the average scores of enjoyment by learners while in the classroom for the English language were well above the mid-point of neutral. Therefore, in general, learners experienced more enjoyment than neutrality. Although not intended in this research were the components of foreign language enjoyment (FLE), the findings of this study support the previous research indicating that FLE has both a private and social aspect and is a result of how learners view their classroom climate, teacher support, and relationships with their peers (Jin & Zhang, 2018; Li et al., 2018). Private enjoyment refers to what a learner feels inside (i.e., feelings of interest, satisfaction, and achievement) when they are learning, and social enjoyment relates to the interactions with classmates and the teacher. The elevated enjoyment scores may reflect

positive perceptions of classroom climate, teacher support, and peer interaction, although these factors were not directly measured (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Dewaele et al., 2018).

The second question examined how much learners were motivated to learn English. The average score for motivation was also significantly above the midpoint of the scale. It indicates that most participants reported positive motivation to learn English. Although this study did not differentiate between different types of motivation (intrinsic vs extrinsic, integrative vs instrumental), the overall pattern supports prior research that we have seen, which suggests that many Iranian EFL learners have high academic, professional, and social aspirations regarding English (Riazi & Mansoorian; 2008 Sedaghat, 2001). The coexistence of high enjoyment and high motivation suggests a potential association between positive emotional experiences and learners' motivation.

Whether classroom enjoyment and motivation were correlated was determined through research question number three. The Spearman correlation results indicated that there was a modest yet statistically significant positive correlation between the two constructs ($\rho = 0.25$; $p = 0.004$). Higher reported levels of enjoyment are related to higher levels of reported motivation; However, the correlation is small in magnitude. Although the correlation is small, it aligns with theoretical models suggesting that enjoyment may function as one of several contributing factors within a broader motivational system. This aligns with Second Language Learning (L2) motivational theory that sees motivation as a complex and dynamic entity influenced by numerous factors, such as learner beliefs, learner ideal self-images in L2, personal goals, teacher feedback, and classroom practices, and broader socio-cultural expectations (Dörnyei, 2001; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011).

The positive correlation from this study corresponds to the claims of Liu (2022) that classroom enjoyment enhances student motivation and engagement as well as being consistent with language education programmes based on positive psychology principles which state that positive emotions help create an environment for students to feel motivated to engage, and for them to be encouraged to continue to engage in communication activities (Dewaele & Li, 2020; MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). Studies completed in different contexts (Zeng et al., 2023; Ramzan et al., 2023) have validated this notion that enjoyment positively influences students' attitudes toward learning languages and encourages student participation in language learning activities. However, contrary to these two studies, the current study did not look at a student's academic performance or their attitudes toward academic performance, so no conclusions can be drawn regarding learners' academic performance or their attitudes toward performance, as these constructs were not measured.

It should be noted that while the correlation identified in this study correlates with higher levels of motivation, it does not imply a cause-and-effect relationship. Due to the design of the study being correlational and *ex post facto*, no causal inferences can be drawn from these results. However, it appears that enjoyment and motivation may develop concurrently, influenced by shared contextual factors in the classroom, such as classroom climate, teacher support, task design, feedback provided, and level of challenge (MacIntyre & Mercer; 2014 Pekrun, 2006). This interpretation aligns with principles of positive psychology, which highlight reciprocal interactions between affective and motivational processes, which emphasizes reciprocity and interaction between affective and motivational processes. Experience of positive emotions may broaden the learner's cognitive and behavioral repertoire and resource base, and increased motivation enables learners to fully appreciate enjoyable experiences (Fredrickson, 2013; MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012).

As with all empirical research, there are a number of limitations to the current research. First, because the study relied entirely on self-report questionnaires, responses may have been influenced by social desirability or inaccurate self-perceptions via questionnaires; there is a possibility that the responses of the respondents were influenced by either social desirability bias or the respondents' own misperceptions of themselves. In addition, although the researchers took measures to protect the anonymity of respondents, it is possible that some respondents still provided answers that are more desirable than what they actually believe. Secondly, the current study was conducted using convenience sampling methods from a small number of private institutes located in Tehran; therefore, the results of the study cannot be generalized to all Iranian EFL learners, particularly those attending public schools and universities or those living in other areas in Iran.

Thirdly, this study focused on only intermediate-level learners; therefore, it is likely that beginner or advanced learners may feel enjoyment or motivation differently from an intermediate-level learner due to their respective levels of English proficiency, self-confidence, and the amount of exposure they have had to English. Fourthly, due to the restrictions placed on research caused by COVID-19, this study used online questionnaires as the only means for collecting data, meaning that no interviews, classroom observations, or achievement tests were conducted. As such, the findings have lower levels of depth or triangulation. Finally, the cross-sectional design provides only a single snapshot of learners' experiences and does not capture how enjoyment or motivation may change over time; as such, there is no information to determine how enjoyment and motivation may change over time or as a result of pedagogical approaches.

Although there are limitations to this research, the results have teaching and curriculum implications for EFL teachers and program designers within private institutions in Iran and across similar contexts. The data indicate that the experience of high enjoyment and high motivation in EFL classes (which are found to be significantly above neutral) indicates that learners will receive benefits from a classroom environment that is supportive of their emotions and also stimulating. In this way, it is evident that enjoyment should not be regarded as a "bonus" but rather should be viewed as an essential element of the effective EFL teacher pedagogy (Dewaele & Li, 2020; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014).

In addition, the small but positive correlation between enjoyment and motivation suggests that points to a possible pathway through which EFL teachers could improve the level of motivation experienced by their EFL students by creating lessons that are both cognitively relevant to their EFL students and are also likely to elicit feelings of positive emotion, which in turn will foster motivation. Dörnyei's (2001) framework supports this viewpoint since it identifies four principles: (a) creating the basic foundations or conditions (such as a supportive and pleasant atmosphere) for motivating learners; (b) creating initial motivation (such as establishing the personal significance of goals for learning English); (c) maintaining and protecting learners' motivation (such as using more varied, meaningful tasks; promoting learner autonomy), and (d) supporting learners to reflect positively on their prior learning experiences (for example, by providing constructive feedback and highlighting any progress).

The findings of this study suggest that in the training of teachers, Teacher Education Programs provide opportunities, both during their initial training and in In-Service Training, to enhance teachers' knowledge of Emotional Management in their classrooms and to create an environment where positive

feelings, such as enjoyment, can be developed. For example, through Collaborative Tasks, the appropriate use of Humor, Support for the Voice of Students, and Providing Scaffolding and Challenges to achieve Success and Growth, teachers can create an atmosphere in which the Emotional Well-Being of Learners is enhanced while also increasing their Motivation to continue their studies in English for an extended time. The Study's Findings provide multiple opportunities for future Research Directions based on these findings. Suggestions for Future Research Directions would include the application of Mixed Method Designs, which combine Qualitative Data (i.e., Interviews, Focus Group Discussions, Classroom Observations) with Questionnaires, to gain a more In-Depth Understanding of how Learners experience Enjoyment and Motivation in Real Classroom Environments. Suggestions for Future Research Directions would be to include Learners at various levels of English Proficiency and from a broader range of Institutions, such as Public Schools, Universities, and Institutions in Other Cities, to extend the Extendibility of the Findings further.

The evolution of enjoyment and motivation over time will be an area of future research, as well as whether changes in enjoyment predict changes in motivation and vice versa. Additionally, we could examine how specific sub-dimensions of enjoyment (e.g., related to teacher, peers, or tasks) contribute to different types of motivation (e.g., intrinsic, extrinsic, and integrative). And finally, experimental or intervention research should examine whether using specific pedagogical practices to enhance enjoyment (e.g., project-based learning, communicative tasks, and technology-enhanced activities) increases learners' motivation and engagement.

As stated in the current study, intermediate EFL learners at private institutions in Iran have reported enjoyment and motivation levels significantly greater than the point of neutrality. More so, there is a statistically significant but small relationship between the two constructs. This research indicates the importance of providing enjoyable learning experiences and lends support to continuing efforts being made in the field of applied linguistics to put an emphasis on positive affective states as a path to productive language learning.

While enjoyment is not the only factor that determines motivation, it appears to play a critical role within the multifaceted nature of the affective-motivational system that motivates an individual to become engaged with learning English.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors have conducted the study, collected data, analyzed and interpreted the data, and written up the manuscript.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

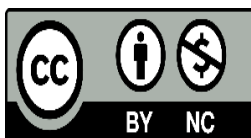
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