

# AFFECTIVE DIMENSIONS OF CODE-SWITCHING IN EFL LEARNING: A QUANTITATIVE STUDY AMONG SAUDI LEARNERS

## DIMENSÕES AFETIVAS DO CODE-SWITCHING NO APRENDIZADO DE EFL: UM ESTUDO QUANTITATIVO ENTRE ALUNOS SAUDITAS

**Ahmad Kasser Mleiki**  
College of Languages and  
Humanities Qassim University  
(QU), Buraidah, Qassim  
Region, Saudi Arabia  
[mleiki@qu.edu.sa](mailto:mleiki@qu.edu.sa)  
[dramleiki@gmail.com](mailto:dramleiki@gmail.com)

**Received:** 12 Feb 2025  
**Accepted:** 24 Mar 2025  
**Published:** 16 May 2025

**Corresponding author:**  
[mleiki@qu.edu.sa](mailto:mleiki@qu.edu.sa)



anxiety environments and leveraging students' motivational drivers to enhance classroom engagement.

**Keywords:** Language anxiety. Motivation. Enjoyment. Saudi EFL learners. Emotional factors in Second Language Acquisition (SLA).

**Resumo:** Este estudo explora as dimensões emocionais do aprendizado de inglês entre alunos de inglês como língua estrangeira de universidades sauditas, concentrando-se em três variáveis afetivas principais: ansiedade, motivação e prazer com a língua estrangeira. Usando um questionário estruturado de 24 itens aplicado a 120 alunos por meio do Google Forms, a pesquisa empregou estatísticas descritivas para analisar as respostas emocionais dos alunos. Os resultados revelaram um cenário emocional complexo caracterizado por ansiedade moderadamente alta ( $M = 3,62$ ), alta motivação ( $M = 4,05$ ) e prazer moderadamente alto ( $M = 3,76$ ). Embora a ansiedade tenha sido mais predominante durante as tarefas de fala, a motivação foi impulsionada principalmente por aspirações acadêmicas e de carreira. O prazer também estava presente, especialmente quando os alunos obtiveram sucesso nas atividades em sala de aula. Os resultados destacam a coexistência de emoções facilitadoras e dificultadoras e ressaltam a importância de uma pedagogia sensível aos afetos. As implicações para o ensino de inglês como língua estrangeira na Arábia Saudita incluem a

criação de ambientes de baixa ansiedade e o aproveitamento dos fatores motivacionais dos alunos para aumentar o envolvimento em sala de aula.

**Palavras-chave:** Ansiedade no idioma. Motivação. Prazer. Alunos sauditas de EFL. Fatores emocionais na aquisição de segundo idioma (SLA).

## 1. Introduction

Emotions play a pivotal role in second language acquisition, shaping how learners engage with and persist in language learning tasks. Early theories in applied linguistics recognized that affective factors can significantly facilitate or hinder learning; for instance, Krashen's (1982) *Affective Filter Hypothesis* posits that negative emotions like anxiety can “filter out” language input, impeding acquisition. In contrast, positive emotions may create a conducive mental state for learning. As English has become a high-stakes subject in contexts like Saudi Arabia—central for academic success and career development—learners' emotional experiences merit close attention. University students in Saudi Arabia often approach English as a foreign language (EFL) with a mix of excitement and trepidation, highlighting the complex emotional landscape of their learning experiences. Understanding key emotional factors such as language anxiety, motivation, and enjoyment is therefore crucial for both theoretical and pedagogical reasons. These factors are grounded in major second language learning theories and have been the focus of a growing body of empirical research worldwide.

Language Anxiety – the feeling of tension and apprehension specifically associated with second language contexts – has long been recognized as a powerful determinant of learning outcomes. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) conceptualized foreign language anxiety as a *situation-specific* form of anxiety unique to language learning, encompassing communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. They observed that even otherwise confident students can be paralyzed when required to communicate in a foreign tongue. Decades of research have since confirmed that language anxiety is pervasive and typically detrimental to performance. Anxious learners often exhibit avoidance behaviors, participate less in class, and have lower attainment in vocabulary and speaking skills. MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) found that even modest levels of anxiety can impair cognitive processing of language, making it harder for learners to demonstrate the knowledge they have. In a comprehensive review, MacIntyre (1999) went so far as to describe anxiety as “*the strongest predictor of success or failure*” in language learning, underscoring

its profound impact. Empirical studies consistently report a negative correlation between anxiety and achievement (e.g., Horwitz, 2001; Alrabai, 2014). In the Saudi EFL context, in particular, researchers have noted *moderate to high levels of classroom anxiety* among university students, with oral communication being a primary stressor (Alrabai, 2014). Such findings align with global observations that speaking in a second language is often the most anxiety-provoking aspect of learning (Aida, 1994). High anxiety not only hampers immediate performance but can also dampen students' enthusiasm and willingness to continue learning over time.

Motivation, on the other hand, is widely seen as the engine driving language learning success. Whereas anxiety can stifle a learner, strong motivation can sustain engagement even through difficulties. In the field's foundational work, Gardner and Lambert (1972) distinguished between *integrative* motivation (desire to learn a language to connect with its people and culture) and *instrumental* motivation (learning for practical goals like career or education). Gardner's socio-educational model of SLA later elaborated that motivated learners with positive attitudes toward the L2 community tend to invest more effort and achieve higher proficiency (Gardner, 1985). Many Saudi EFL learners historically have leaned toward instrumental motives for English—viewing it as a gateway to professional advancement and academic opportunities—though integrative orientations (such as identifying with global English-speaking culture) are also emerging with globalization. Motivation in language learning is multifaceted: it involves not only the *orientation* or reasons for learning, but also learners' *intensity* of effort and their *persistence* in the face of challenges. Contemporary frameworks like Dörnyei's (2009) *L2 Motivational Self System* further highlight the role of learners' personal vision in driving motivation. Dörnyei argues that imagining one's "ideal L2 self" (e.g., as a fluent English-speaking professional) can generate strong emotional incentives to learn, effectively linking motivation with positive affect and identity. This perspective dovetails with theories of self-determination, where intrinsically motivated learners—those who find inherent enjoyment or personal value in language learning—tend to show greater perseverance than those driven solely by external pressures (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Notably, motivation and anxiety often interact in complex ways. Excessive anxiety can undermine motivation, as learners lose confidence in their abilities, while conversely, motivated learners often develop coping strategies to manage anxiety. In Saudi Arabia, lack of motivation has been identified as one factor contributing to generally low EFL achievement levels (Alrabai, 2016). Thus, fostering a motivational climate is seen as key to

improving learners' outcomes. Prior research in Gulf countries suggests that when learners perceive English as relevant to their personal goals and receive supportive encouragement, their anxiety decreases and their performance improves (Al-Othman & Shuqair, 2013). Together, these insights affirm that motivation is not only a cognitive driver but also deeply entwined with emotional experiences.

In recent years, there has been a paradigm shift towards examining enjoyment and other positive emotions in the language learning process, complementing the traditional focus on negative affect like anxiety. Inspired by the broader *Positive Psychology* movement (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), scholars have begun exploring how joy, interest, and pride in language learning can broaden learners' engagement. Fredrickson's (2001) *Broaden-and-Build Theory* of positive emotions provides a theoretical lens: positive emotions are thought to *broaden* an individual's momentary mindset and *build* enduring personal resources. In a language classroom, this implies that when students experience enjoyment—such as satisfaction after communicating successfully or excitement about mastering a new expression—they may become more open to participation, more creative in using the language, and more resilient in the face of mistakes. The construct of *Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE)* was introduced by Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014), who argued that enjoyment is not merely the absence of anxiety but a distinct experience with its own facilitating effects on learning. In their large-scale study of 1,746 learners, Dewaele and MacIntyre developed a quantitative measure of FLE and found that most learners reported considerable enjoyment in language classes, often stemming from positive interactions with teachers and peers and a sense of accomplishment in using the L2. Intriguingly, they also found that enjoyment and anxiety, though negatively correlated, can co-exist: a student might feel anxious about mistakes yet still greatly enjoy class activities. Subsequent research has reinforced the importance of FLE. For example, Bensalem (2021) surveyed Saudi EFL undergraduates and observed that students generally experienced high levels of enjoyment alongside moderate anxiety, with a significant *inverse relationship* between the two emotions. This suggests that creating an enjoyable classroom environment could be a powerful way to alleviate anxiety among Saudi learners. Moreover, positive emotional experiences in the EFL classroom have been linked to higher willingness to communicate, greater use of the target language, and long-term persistence in learning (Dewaele et al., 2018). The rise of interest in enjoyment represents a broader recognition that successful language learning is not just about minimizing negatives, but also about actively promoting positive emotional engagement.

Synthesizing these perspectives, the emotional landscape of English learning emerges as a dynamic interplay of negative and positive factors. *Language anxiety*, *motivation*, and *enjoyment* are interrelated in complex ways: a highly anxious student may withdraw and lose motivational drive, whereas a highly motivated student might interpret challenges more positively and even derive enjoyment from surmounting them. Conversely, a joyful learning experience—one where a student laughs, feels proud, or is deeply interested—can reinforce motivation and buffer against stress. Major theoretical frameworks in applied linguistics increasingly acknowledge this interplay. Gardner’s model positioned anxiety as both a cause and consequence of achievement in a feedback loop with motivation (Gardner, 1985; Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993). Dörnyei’s work highlights emotional imagery as integral to motivated learning behavior (Dörnyei, 2009). Meanwhile, positive psychology frameworks emphasize that *well-being and positive classroom climates* contribute to better learning outcomes (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). Empirical evidence in the Saudi EFL context similarly points to the need for a holistic understanding: for instance, Saudi students who report greater enjoyment in English classes tend to also report lower anxiety and stronger persistence, suggesting that interventions targeting one emotional aspect may influence the others (Arabai, 2016; Bensalem, 2021).

Despite the advances in understanding affective factors, there remains a research gap in examining these emotions *together* within specific cultural and educational contexts. In the Middle East, and Saudi Arabia in particular, much research has looked at anxiety or motivation in isolation (Al-Saraj, 2014; Arabai, 2014), but fewer studies have quantitatively explored the full spectrum of learners’ emotional experiences, including recent constructs like enjoyment. The present study aims to fill this gap by investigating the emotional landscape of Saudi university EFL learners through the combined lens of language anxiety, motivation, and enjoyment. By drawing on established theories and building on prior empirical findings, this quantitative study seeks to identify the patterns and interrelationships of these key emotional factors in Saudi learners’ English language learning experiences. Ultimately, a deeper insight into how Saudi EFL learners feel – their anxieties, drives, and joys – will not only enrich the theoretical discourse on emotion in second language learning, but also inform educators and policymakers looking to foster more effective and emotionally supportive English learning environments.

## 2. Literature Review

Emotions significantly influence the trajectory and success of second language acquisition (SLA). Among the myriad affective variables, language anxiety, motivation, and enjoyment are particularly prominent in shaping learners' engagement, performance, and long-term commitment to language learning. These emotional dimensions have been widely explored across global EFL contexts and are increasingly gaining attention in Middle Eastern educational settings, particularly in Saudi Arabia, where English is a foreign language taught in schools and universities under growing academic and professional expectations.

Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) has been extensively studied since Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) introduced it as a distinct construct. FLA encompasses communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety—all of which contribute to learners' emotional discomfort when engaging in language-related tasks. Their widely used Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) has been employed globally to measure learners' anxiety levels. Research consistently shows that high FLA correlates negatively with oral performance, test outcomes, and classroom participation (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994; Liu & Jackson, 2008). This relationship is not merely correlational but often causal: anxiety disrupts cognitive processing by diverting attention away from the task (MacIntyre, 1999).

In the context of Saudi Arabia, a number of studies have found that language anxiety is a significant barrier to English proficiency. Al-Saraj (2014) documented high levels of oral communication anxiety among Saudi university students, which were intensified by cultural norms emphasizing perfectionism and fear of public embarrassment. Similarly, Alrabai (2014) reported that EFL learners in Saudi universities often experience classroom anxiety due to teacher-centered instruction, limited speaking opportunities, and high-stakes evaluation practices. Gender differences have also been noted, with female students typically reporting slightly higher anxiety levels, potentially due to socio-cultural expectations around public speech and error correction (Bensalem, 2021). Despite these findings, anxiety has remained an under-addressed issue in the Saudi EFL curriculum, often treated as a learner deficiency rather than a systemic challenge requiring pedagogical intervention.

The role of motivation in SLA is equally critical and has been conceptualized through a number of theoretical lenses. Gardner's (1985) socio-educational model remains

foundational, distinguishing between *integrative motivation* (learning a language to identify with its speakers) and *instrumental motivation* (learning for pragmatic goals such as academic or career advancement). Gardner posited that motivated learners display higher levels of persistence, attention, and risk-taking—all of which enhance language acquisition.

Over time, alternative frameworks have emerged, notably Dörnyei's (2009) *L2 Motivational Self System*, which reframes motivation through the lens of self-concept. According to this model, learners are driven by their *Ideal L2 Self* (who they want to become) and *Ought-to L2 Self* (who they think they should become), both of which carry strong emotional undertones. These visions act as affective motivators, shaping goal-setting and behavior.

In Saudi Arabia, motivation among EFL learners tends to be predominantly instrumental, linked to the perceived necessity of English for academic success, government jobs, and international mobility (Al-Seghayer, 2014; Rahman, 2025). However, studies also indicate that this instrumental orientation is not always sufficient to sustain engagement, especially in environments where English is not actively used outside the classroom. Alrabai (2016) found that despite learners acknowledging the importance of English, low self-efficacy and limited learner autonomy significantly reduced motivation. Additionally, rigid curricula and a focus on rote memorization often fail to stimulate intrinsic motivation, a key predictor of long-term success. More recent studies have begun to explore the interaction between motivation and classroom climate, suggesting that teacher encouragement, peer interaction, and task relevance play crucial roles in maintaining motivational intensity (Al-Hoorie, 2017).

Historically, SLA research focused more on negative affective variables like anxiety and less on positive emotions. However, the emergence of Positive Psychology (PP) in applied linguistics has led to growing interest in concepts like Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE). Introduced by Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014), FLE is defined as the joy learners feel when successfully engaging with a foreign language—characterized by enthusiasm, pride, and a sense of accomplishment.

The distinction between anxiety and enjoyment is not binary. In fact, Dewaele and MacIntyre's (2016) research found that learners could experience both simultaneously. Importantly, enjoyment was shown to mitigate the negative effects of anxiety and foster greater willingness to communicate (WTC), a key factor in language acquisition. Their Foreign Language Enjoyment Scale, based on three dimensions—personal

enjoyment, teacher support, and peer support—has become a reliable tool for measuring positive emotions in SLA.

Studies within the Saudi context are beginning to reflect these global trends. Bensalem (2021) explored FLE among Saudi university learners and found that enjoyment significantly predicted learners' willingness to communicate and reduced their anxiety. The study also highlighted the importance of classroom atmosphere, noting that learners who felt respected and encouraged by their instructors were more likely to enjoy their English classes. This aligns with earlier findings by MacIntyre and Gregersen (2012), who emphasized the need for emotionally supportive classrooms that validate learners' efforts and foster emotional resilience.

Furthermore, emotional experiences are culturally mediated. In collectivist cultures like Saudi Arabia, learners may feel heightened pressure to conform and avoid errors in public, making enjoyment a more fragile construct. Yet when the learning environment promotes humor, collaborative activities, and autonomy, learners report greater enjoyment and deeper engagement (Dewaele et al., 2018). The interplay between enjoyment and motivation is particularly noteworthy: students who enjoy language learning are more likely to remain motivated, and conversely, motivated learners are more likely to derive satisfaction from the learning process.

Recent literature increasingly suggests that language anxiety, motivation, and enjoyment are deeply interconnected. Learners who are highly motivated tend to experience less anxiety and more enjoyment (Piechurska-Kuciel, 2017). Conversely, unmotivated students may become more anxious and disengaged, creating a negative emotional feedback loop. These interconnections underscore the importance of adopting a holistic approach to understanding learners' emotional landscapes.

Despite significant progress, gaps remain in the literature—especially in Saudi Arabia—regarding the integrated study of these emotional variables. Most studies focus on one variable in isolation and are often limited to small samples or single institutions. Moreover, few studies have explored how demographic variables such as gender, proficiency level, or exposure to English media influence the emotional dynamics of language learning. The present study aims to address these gaps by adopting a quantitative approach to examine the emotional experiences of Saudi EFL university students, focusing simultaneously on anxiety, motivation, and enjoyment. By doing so, it contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the affective dimensions of EFL learning in a culturally and linguistically unique context.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Participants

This study was conducted among a sample of 120 undergraduate Saudi EFL learners enrolled in various faculties—such as Business, Engineering, and Arts and Humanities—at a major public university in Saudi Arabia. The participants were selected using a convenience sampling method and comprised 70 male and 50 female students, aged between 18 and 24 years. All participants had studied English for a minimum of six years and were currently enrolled in university-level English language courses. Their sustained exposure to English instruction made them well-positioned to reflect on the emotional dimensions of their language learning experiences.

Participation in the study was entirely voluntary. Students were briefed about the objectives of the study, and informed consent was obtained prior to data collection. They were assured of full anonymity and confidentiality, and informed that their responses would be used solely for research purposes. No identifying personal data were collected, and participants could withdraw at any point during the data collection process without penalty.

#### 3.2. Instruments

To investigate the emotional variables of foreign language anxiety, motivation, and enjoyment, a structured self-report questionnaire comprising 24 items was developed. Each construct was measured using a subscale based on existing validated instruments, with minor modifications made to align with the Saudi academic and sociocultural context. All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), and the questionnaire was administered in English, supplemented by brief Arabic glosses for clarity.

The first section of the instrument included 10 items designed to assess foreign language classroom anxiety, adapted from the well-established Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986). These items examined learners' self-reported experiences of communication apprehension, test-related stress, and fear of negative evaluation. Sample items included: *"I get nervous when I have to speak English in class"* and *"I worry about making mistakes in front of others."*

The second section measured language learning motivation through 8 items derived from Dörnyei's (2009) *L2 Motivational Self System*. The items reflected three sub-constructs:

the Ideal L2 Self, the Ought-to L2 Self, and learning experience. Representative statements included: *“I want to be fluent in English to achieve my future goals”*, *“I feel pressure to learn English because of others’ expectations”*, and *“I find English class activities interesting and engaging.”*

The third section focused on foreign language enjoyment and comprised 6 items adapted from the Foreign Language Enjoyment Scale (FLES) by Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014). These items aimed to capture learners’ positive affective responses to English language learning, such as classroom satisfaction, enthusiasm, and emotional engagement. Sample items included: *“I enjoy participating in English discussions”* and *“I feel proud when I understand or use a new English word.”*

Before finalizing the questionnaire, a pilot study involving 15 Saudi EFL students was conducted to evaluate item clarity, cultural relevance, and overall comprehensibility. Based on the pilot feedback, minor linguistic and formatting revisions were made. The final 24-item instrument demonstrated both face validity and content validity and was judged appropriate for use in the Saudi university setting.

### **3.3. Procedure**

The study was conducted over a period of three weeks during the Spring 2025 academic semester. The questionnaire was created and distributed exclusively via Google Forms, using institutional email lists and online learning platforms to reach participants. A brief introductory note was attached to the form explaining the study’s purpose, ensuring that students understood their participation was voluntary, anonymous, and for academic research only.

Participants were given approximately 20 to 25 minutes to complete the form at their convenience. Responses were automatically recorded in Google Sheets and exported securely for analysis. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the university’s research ethics committee prior to data collection. No incentives were offered for participation.

### **3.4. Data Analysis**

After the data collection period, responses were exported from Google Forms to IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 26) for analysis. The study focused solely on descriptive statistics, aiming to summarize the central tendencies and response patterns across the three emotional constructs. Specifically, means, standard deviations, and frequency

distributions were calculated for each item within the anxiety, motivation, and enjoyment categories.

These descriptive statistics provided insights into the overall emotional trends experienced by the participants during English language learning. Mean scores offered a general indication of learners' typical emotional responses, while standard deviations revealed the degree of consistency in these responses across the sample. Frequency distributions were used to identify how often participants selected specific response options, helping to map the spread of agreement and disagreement for each item.

As the research design was exploratory in nature, no inferential statistics were applied. The primary goal was to describe learners' emotional profiles and present a foundational understanding of affective factors in the Saudi EFL university context. The findings derived from this analysis offer valuable insights that can inform future instructional strategies and research in language education.

#### **4. Results and Findings**

This section presents the results of the descriptive statistical analysis conducted on the responses from 120 Saudi university EFL learners regarding their experiences of foreign language anxiety, motivation, and enjoyment in English learning. The data were analysed using means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions for each item in the 24-item questionnaire, categorized into three thematic areas: anxiety (10 items), motivation (8 items), and enjoyment (6 items). The analysis offers insights into the overall emotional profile of the learners and highlights notable patterns in how Saudi university students perceive and experience emotional factors in English language classrooms.

##### **4.1. Foreign Language Anxiety**

The analysis of the 10 anxiety-related items revealed that foreign language classroom anxiety is a significant emotional factor among participants. The overall mean score for anxiety was 3.62 (SD = 0.84), suggesting a moderately high level of anxiety. This aligns with prior findings from similar EFL contexts, where speaking-related tasks and error correction tend to trigger nervousness and self-consciousness in learners.

Among the anxiety items, the highest mean score (M = 4.11, SD = 0.69) was observed for the item "*I get nervous when I have to speak English in class.*" This indicates that public speaking continues to be a major source of anxiety for Saudi learners, potentially

influenced by fear of negative judgment or making mistakes in front of peers. Similarly, the item *“I feel tense when I’m asked to answer a question in English without preparation”* received a high mean score of 3.94 (SD = 0.88), pointing to learners’ discomfort with spontaneous language use.

Conversely, the lowest anxiety score (M = 2.84, SD = 1.03) was recorded for the item *“I worry that other students are better at English than I am.”* This suggests that while learners experience general performance anxiety, social comparison anxiety may not be as pronounced. Frequency distribution data showed that 62% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with at least 7 out of the 10 anxiety items, underscoring the widespread emotional tension associated with classroom language use.

#### 4.2. Language Learning Motivation

The 8 motivation-related items measured learners’ orientation and attitude toward English learning. The mean score for motivation was 4.05 (SD = 0.64), reflecting a strong motivational drive among participants. This supports previous research suggesting that Saudi students perceive English as essential for academic and professional advancement.

Among all motivational items, the highest mean (M = 4.32, SD = 0.57) was for *“I want to be fluent in English to achieve my future goals.”* This highlights a strong instrumental motivation, particularly career- and education-oriented. Another high-scoring item was *“I know that English is important for success in my field of study”* (M = 4.21, SD = 0.61), affirming learners’ recognition of English as a functional necessity in their academic lives.

Items representing the Ideal L2 Self, such as *“I imagine myself speaking English confidently in international settings,”* also scored relatively high (M = 4.10, SD = 0.74), indicating a future-oriented vision of language competence. On the other hand, motivation related to external pressure, such as *“I learn English because others expect me to,”* received a lower mean (M = 3.24, SD = 0.89), suggesting that intrinsic and goal-based motivations are more influential than obligation-based ones in this sample.

Frequency analysis revealed that 78% of learners selected “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” for at least 6 of the 8 motivational items. This data supports the interpretation that learners are highly engaged with English learning, primarily due to its practical value and aspirational importance.

#### 4.3. Foreign Language Enjoyment

The enjoyment construct was measured using 6 items focused on learners’ positive emotional engagement in the classroom. The mean score for enjoyment was 3.76 (SD =

0.72), suggesting a moderately high level of enjoyment among the participants. This indicates that many Saudi learners find English classes rewarding, despite experiencing anxiety.

The item *“I enjoy participating in discussions during English class”* had a relatively high mean ( $M = 3.89$ ,  $SD = 0.70$ ), reflecting positive learner engagement when the classroom environment is supportive. Similarly, the item *“I feel proud when I understand or use a new English word”* scored  $M = 4.02$  ( $SD = 0.66$ ), showing that learners derive satisfaction from their progress in acquiring language skills.

Interestingly, the item *“I find English class fun and stimulating”* had a slightly lower score ( $M = 3.41$ ,  $SD = 0.93$ ), indicating variability in classroom experience, which may reflect differences in teaching styles or classroom dynamics. Frequency distributions showed that over 70% of participants agreed or strongly agreed with 4 or more enjoyment-related items, affirming that positive emotions play a vital role in sustaining interest in language learning.

Despite the presence of anxiety, the moderate-to-high enjoyment scores suggest that many learners are able to simultaneously experience both stress and satisfaction, echoing findings by Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) that enjoyment and anxiety can co-exist in foreign language classrooms.

A comparative overview of the three constructs revealed that motivation ( $M = 4.05$ ) was the strongest emotional driver among the participants, followed by enjoyment ( $M = 3.76$ ), and then anxiety ( $M = 3.62$ ). These results indicate that although Saudi EFL learners experience significant anxiety—especially during speaking activities—this is often counterbalanced by strong personal goals and a sense of satisfaction in learning English.

The emotional profile that emerges from this study reflects a complex but largely positive engagement with English learning. Learners are highly motivated, especially in relation to their career and academic goals, and they report deriving meaningful enjoyment from classroom learning experiences. At the same time, persistent levels of anxiety—particularly related to oral performance—suggest a need for more affect-sensitive teaching strategies.

These findings support the assertion that positive emotions such as motivation and enjoyment can coexist with anxiety, and may even buffer its negative effects when leveraged through encouraging classroom practices. Teachers in Saudi EFL contexts may benefit from designing classroom environments that foster enjoyment, offer goal-oriented

tasks, and reduce anxiety triggers—such as public speaking pressure or overly rigid correction styles.

Future research may build upon this foundational descriptive analysis by incorporating inferential tests to further examine the interplay between these emotional variables across demographic groups or language proficiency levels. Nevertheless, this descriptive overview provides a valuable baseline for understanding the emotional experiences of Saudi university EFL learners, contributing to more informed language teaching practices that prioritize learner well-being.

## 5. Discussion and Implications

The present study aimed to explore the emotional landscape of English language learning among Saudi university-level EFL learners by examining three key emotional variables: foreign language anxiety, motivation, and enjoyment. The descriptive results revealed a complex yet insightful emotional profile—moderately high anxiety ( $M = 3.62$ ), high motivation ( $M = 4.05$ ), and moderately high enjoyment ( $M = 3.76$ )—highlighting the coexistence of both facilitating and hindering affective factors within the Saudi EFL context.

The relatively high levels of foreign language anxiety, particularly concerning oral participation, align with earlier findings in similar sociolinguistic settings. As reported by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986), language anxiety often stems from fear of negative evaluation, communication apprehension, and test-related stress, all of which were echoed in this study. Saudi learners frequently expressed nervousness about speaking English in front of others, reflecting cultural norms that emphasize saving face and avoiding public mistakes (Al-Saraj, 2014). These findings also support Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis, which posits that high affective filters—such as anxiety—can inhibit the acquisition of language input, regardless of its availability.

Despite these challenges, learners exhibited strong motivational orientations, with the highest responses linked to instrumental reasons—such as achieving career goals and succeeding academically. This outcome is consistent with prior research conducted in Gulf countries, where English is viewed as a gateway to global job markets and academic advancement (Alrabai, 2014; Al-Seghayer, 2014). Dörnyei's (2009) L2 Motivational Self System helps explain this result, particularly through the “Ideal L2 Self” construct. Learners envision themselves as competent English speakers in future professional roles, which

energizes sustained effort even in the face of emotional obstacles. Notably, items linked to external obligation (i.e., the “Ought-to Self”) scored lower, indicating that learners are more driven by internalized goals than by pressure from authority figures or society.

The reported levels of foreign language enjoyment ( $M = 3.76$ ) suggest that positive emotions play a significant role in learners’ experiences, even when anxiety is present. Enjoyment in learning has been linked to increased engagement, classroom participation, and retention of information (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). Learners in this study expressed pride and satisfaction when using new English vocabulary or participating in class discussions, suggesting the existence of “positive emotional episodes” that could serve as affective reinforcement. These results support the Broaden-and-Build Theory proposed by Fredrickson (2001), which suggests that positive emotions like joy and interest broaden learners’ thought-action repertoires and build personal resources, including confidence and communicative competence.

The simultaneous presence of both anxiety and enjoyment may seem contradictory, but this duality has been documented in earlier work. Dewaele and MacIntyre (2016) argue that enjoyment and anxiety are independent constructs; while anxiety narrows learners’ focus, enjoyment can coexist and even provide emotional buffers that sustain motivation and participation. The moderate levels of enjoyment observed among Saudi learners thus offer a hopeful perspective: despite emotional constraints, learners are still capable of finding value and pleasure in their language learning experiences.

Several pedagogical implications arise from these findings. First, the prominence of anxiety suggests that more affect-sensitive teaching practices are needed. Teachers should foster a low-anxiety classroom climate by encouraging participation without penalizing mistakes, using positive reinforcement, and providing ample opportunities for guided oral practice. Incorporating peer collaboration and anonymous digital tools (e.g., discussion boards, breakout rooms) may also help reduce the pressure of public speaking.

Second, the strong motivational profile of learners should be leveraged through goal-oriented tasks that connect classroom content with real-world applications. Language instruction can benefit from contextualizing assignments in learners’ fields of study, using authentic materials (e.g., English news, job ads, industry videos), and facilitating reflection activities that reinforce the value of English for personal and professional success.

Third, the reported enjoyment indicates that Saudi learners are receptive to positive classroom experiences, particularly when supported by teacher encouragement and engaging materials. Teachers should vary classroom activities to include games, debates,

multimedia projects, and student-led discussions that allow learners to express creativity and build confidence. According to MacIntyre and Gregersen (2012), such emotionally enriching practices not only boost enjoyment but also increase learners' willingness to communicate (WTC).

Moreover, these findings suggest that teacher training programs in Saudi Arabia should include modules on affective strategies in language teaching, emphasizing the importance of building rapport, recognizing emotional cues, and designing emotionally balanced classroom experiences. Instructors need tools not only to manage performance-based outcomes but also to monitor and respond to students' emotional engagement.

Finally, while this study focused exclusively on descriptive trends, future research could employ inferential statistics to explore how emotional variables vary across gender, academic major, or English proficiency level. Longitudinal or mixed-method studies could further illuminate how emotions evolve over time and interact with external factors such as assessment formats, teaching methods, and technological integration.

Ultimately, this study reveals that Saudi university EFL learners experience a nuanced blend of emotional factors—marked by significant anxiety, high motivation, and meaningful enjoyment. These emotional dynamics reflect both the pressures and aspirations embedded in the Saudi educational landscape, where English proficiency is increasingly linked to academic and economic opportunity. By recognizing and addressing the emotional needs of learners, educators can create more supportive and effective language learning environments that not only facilitate linguistic competence but also enhance learners' emotional well-being.

## 6. Conclusion

This study explored the emotional dimensions of English language learning among Saudi university-level EFL learners by examining foreign language anxiety, motivation, and enjoyment. The findings reveal a nuanced emotional profile: while learners experience moderately high anxiety, particularly in speaking situations, they also demonstrate strong motivation and moderate enjoyment in learning English. These results highlight the complex interplay of positive and negative emotions in language acquisition and affirm that learners can feel both challenged and emotionally engaged.

Motivation emerged as the most prominent affective factor, driven largely by instrumental goals such as career and academic success. Enjoyment, while slightly lower,

suggests that learners find value and satisfaction in classroom experiences. However, the persistence of anxiety underscores the need for affect-aware teaching strategies that reduce fear and foster a more supportive learning environment.

Overall, this study emphasizes the importance of addressing learners' emotional needs alongside linguistic goals. Teachers, curriculum designers, and policymakers must consider the affective factors influencing EFL learners in Saudi Arabia to promote more effective and emotionally balanced learning experiences. Future research should further investigate these dynamics using longitudinal and mixed-method approaches to better understand how emotional factors evolve across the language learning journey.

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