



MANAGING EMOTIONS, ANXIETY, AND RESILIENCE IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

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Article history:	Abstract:
Received: 8 th November 2025 Accepted: 6 th December 2025	Learning a language is an emotional process that is intimately related to cognitive growth. The relationship between emotion regulation, resilience, and foreign language anxiety (FLA/FLCA) in second language acquisition (SLA) and positive psychology is examined in this article. It examines how situation-specific anxiety, such as test anxiety, communication anxiety, and fear of receiving a poor grade, limits cognitive resources, lowers engagement, and impedes advancement. On the other hand, the broaden-and-build theory states that positive emotions like foreign language enjoyment (FLE) increase thought-action repertoires, develop linguistic and social resources, and maintain motivation. With its components of self-control, sociability, and empathy, resilience serves as a crucial protective factor that reduces anxiety and promotes greater success. The article emphasizes bidirectional relationships by drawing on five important empirical studies: anxiety mediates the resilience–achievement link to some extent, while mindfulness and resilience together significantly reduce anxiety. Evidence-based strategies for learners and educators are outlined, including low-stakes practice, cognitive reappraisal, mindfulness techniques, growth-mindset activities, reflective journaling, and emotionally safe classroom environments. Technology-enhanced tools and positive psychology interventions are recommended to foster FLE and long-term persistence. Systematic attention to emotional dimensions and resilience-building can transform language learning from a fear-driven process into one of confident, joyful, and effective engagement.

Keywords: foreign language anxiety, emotion regulation, resilience, positive psychology in SLA, second language acquisition, mindfulness, broaden-and-build theory, foreign language enjoyment

INTRODUCTION

Language learning is not only cognitive but deeply emotional. Learners experience excitement with new phrases, frustration during plateaus, and intense anxiety during speaking or evaluation. Unmanaged negative emotions hinder progress, while effective emotion regulation and resilience promote persistence, enjoyment, and achievement. Foreign language anxiety (FLA or FLCA) is a major barrier in SLA, yet positive emotions and resilience provide strong protection. Grounded in positive psychology, this narrative review synthesises theoretical foundations (especially the broaden-and-build theory) and recent empirical evidence on the relationships between FLA, foreign language enjoyment (FLE), resilience, and learning outcomes. The aim is to clarify key mechanisms, identify practical management strategies, and offer implications for learners and educators in diverse EFL/ESL settings.

METHOD

This study uses a narrative literature review and thematic synthesis. Studies were located through targeted searches in Google Scholar, Frontiers in Psychology, ERIC, and PubMed with keywords: “foreign language anxiety,” “foreign language enjoyment,” “resilience in SLA,” “mindfulness and language learning,” “broaden-and-build theory SLA,” and “anxiety mediation resilience achievement.” Inclusion criteria were peer-reviewed English-language articles or theoretical papers published 1986–2025 that directly addressed FLA/FLCA, FLE, resilience, mindfulness, or positive psychology in second/foreign language contexts and contained definitions, empirical results (mediation/regression), or classroom implications. Five high-impact studies were selected for in-depth synthesis based on seminal value, recency, and methodological strength. Qualitative thematic analysis grouped findings into anxiety manifestations, positive emotion



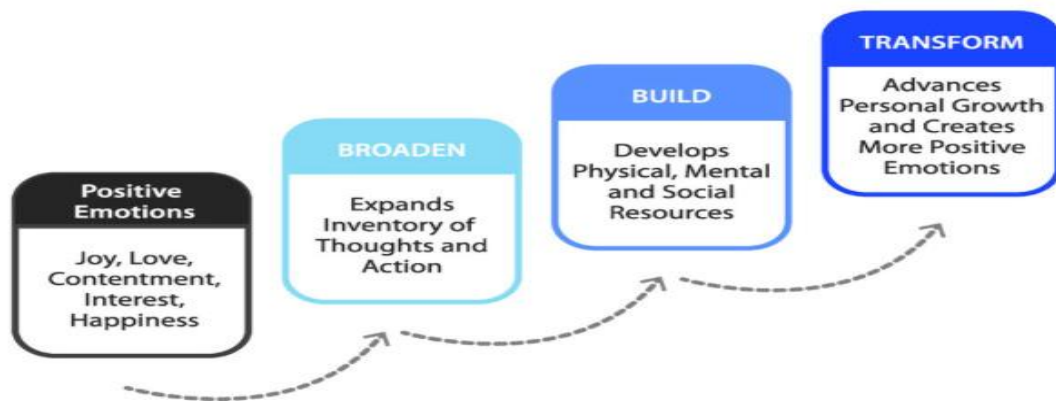
mechanisms, resilience dimensions, mediation pathways, and intervention strategies. No primary data were collected; the review integrates established theory with quantitative results from the selected studies.

RESULTS

The literature consistently describes FLA as a distinct situation-specific anxiety. Horwitz et al. (1986) identified three components—communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation—producing physical symptoms (racing

heart, sweating), cognitive blocks, and avoidance behaviours that limit input processing, participation, and achievement.

MacIntyre and Gregersen (2012) applied Fredrickson's broaden-and-build theory to SLA, showing that positive emotions such as FLE broaden learners' attention, enhance linguistic input processing, build social and linguistic resources, and increase motivation and resilience—effects opposite to anxiety's narrowing impact.



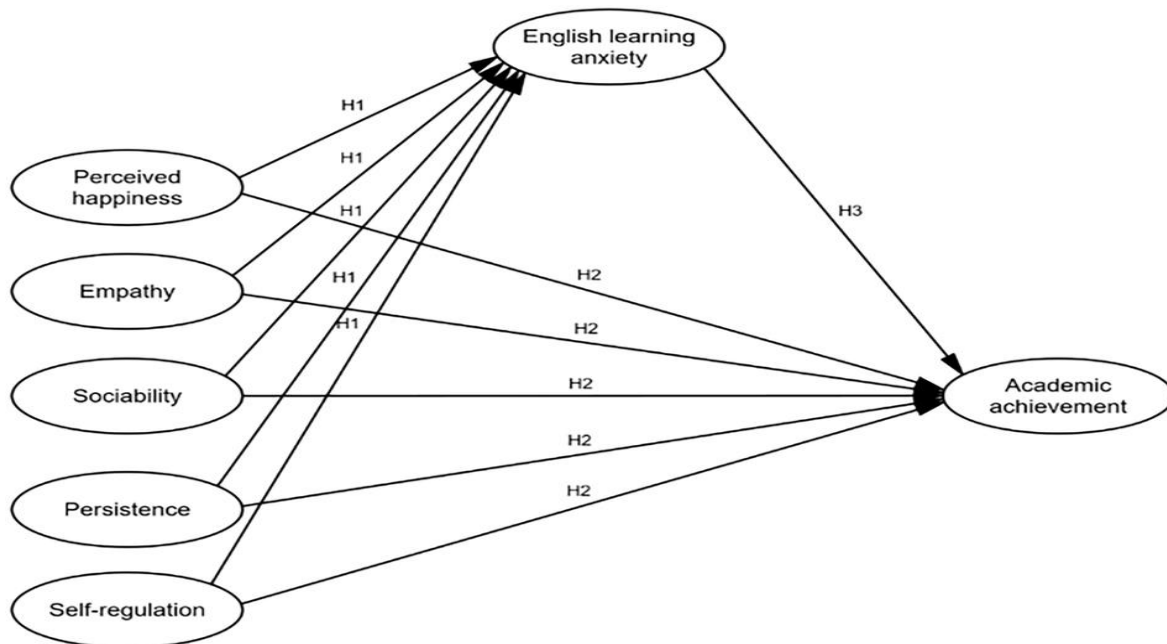
<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/broaden-build-theory-corey-s-major>

Figure 1. Fredrickson's broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions applied to foreign language learning (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012).

Shao (2020) proposed the Second Language Emotions and Positive Psychology (L2EPP) model, integrating positive emotions, individual traits (including resilience), and institutional factors to explain emotional dynamics in instructed language learning.

Shen (2022) used multiple regression with 502 Chinese EFL undergraduates and found that mindfulness and resilience together explained 15% of variance in anxiety reduction, with mindfulness showing the stronger direct effect.

Liu et al. (2025) applied structural equation modelling to 863 Chinese senior high school EFL learners. The three resilience dimensions—self-regulation, sociability, and empathy—each had (1) a direct negative effect on FLA and (2) a direct positive effect on academic achievement. FLA partially mediated the resilience–achievement relationship, with self-regulation producing the strongest indirect effect. These findings confirm robust protective, mediational, and resource-building roles for resilience and positive emotions.



<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41599-025-06123-w>

Figure 2. Hypothesized structural model of English-learning resilience dimensions, foreign language anxiety, and academic achievement (Liu et al., 2025).

DISCUSSION

The synthesis demonstrates that emotions are central, not peripheral, to SLA success. Anxiety narrows cognitive resources and impedes progress, while resilience and FLE operate through broadening, buffering, and mediation mechanisms, fully supporting the broaden-and-build theory and L2EPP model. The partial mediation found by Liu et al. (2025) is especially important: resilience actively lowers anxiety, which then accounts for substantial achievement gains. This explains why resilient learners persist through plateaus, errors, and criticism, even in stressful online or exam contexts.

Practical strategies supported by the evidence include:

- Preparation and low-stakes practice (scripting, mirror speaking, language-exchange apps) to reduce spontaneity-related anxiety and normalise errors.
- Cognitive reappraisal and positive reframing (viewing anxiety as excitement, gratitude journaling) to create upward spirals of positive emotion.
- Mindfulness and relaxation techniques (daily breathing, body scans, short meditations) to lower physiological arousal and rumination.
- Building social support and safe classrooms (pair/group work, effort-focused

feedback, humour, avoidance of public correction, growth-mindset activities).

For learners, emotions should be treated as signals: track emotional patterns with linguistic progress, combine low-anxiety input with gradual output, and prioritise enjoyable autonomous practice. For educators and institutions, emotion-aware curricula with mindfulness warm-ups, formative assessment, and resilience modules are essential to create “positive institutions” that value well-being alongside proficiency. In hybrid settings, attention to camera anxiety and breakout-room dynamics is required.

This review’s narrative style and significant dependence on Chinese EFL samples are among its drawbacks, which could restrict its generalizability. Longitudinal designs, intervention trials, and culturally varied populations should all be used in future research. In conclusion, managing emotions, anxiety, and resilience is critical for language learning to be equitable and sustainable. Learners can transition from fear-driven avoidance to confident, joyful engagement by using the evidence-based mechanisms and strategies discussed here, and educators can foster circumstances where emotions facilitate rather than impede achievement. Globally, more satisfying language-learning experiences will result from the integration of SLA and positive psychology principles.

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