

Exploring the Language Education Enjoyment Scale and Its Impact on Learner Engagement

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ABSTRACT

This study explores learners' emotional experiences in Korean language education, focusing on positive emotions. It examines the application of the Foreign Language Enjoyment Scale (FLES) and how the survey itself can foster positive feelings. A survey was conducted with 291 Korean learners from Japan, Thailand, Vietnam, Myanmar, and Taiwan, using a Korean-adapted 21-item FLES. Participants responded on a 5-point Likert scale. Data analysis included descriptive statistics and raincloud plots. Most participants reported experiencing positive emotions during Korean language learning, particularly in relation to teacher support, kindness, and encouragement. The overall enjoyment scores ranged from 3.5 to 4.5. Many participants also enjoyed the survey process, suggesting that the survey itself contributed to positive emotional experiences. This study highlights the importance of positive emotions in language learning, particularly through teacher support. It suggests that reflecting on positive experiences can enhance learners' emotional engagement. The findings also reinforce the value of positive emotion research and FLES development in language education, while also presenting important considerations for the creation of related scales.

Keywords Foreign Language Enjoyment Scale (FLES), positive emotions, Korean language learning, survey, teacher support, language education, emotional experience

INTRODUCTION

For some individuals, life fails to provide significant positive emotions. For many, it has long been dominated by negative emotions such as depression, anxiety, restlessness, worry, and distress, becoming a persistent aspect of their everyday reality. The absence of joy is not an isolated experience; it affects a wide range of individuals. The atmosphere surrounding these individuals is often filled with a sense of gloom and despair. On cloudy, rainy, or windy days, feelings of sadness intensify, and energy levels decrease. These emotions extend beyond waking hours, with individuals sometimes having nightmares or abruptly being startled from sleep, drenched in cold sweat.

In this context, one might question how individuals with such emotional experiences may feel when engaging in writing tasks. Research indicates that expressing negative emotions often perpetuates negative thoughts, exacerbating the emotional distress. According to prior studies, when negative emotions

dominate, positive emotions tend to diminish.¹ Conversely, cultivating positive emotions is shown to reduce the intensity of negative emotions. There are two primary strategies for mitigating negative emotions. One approach involves enhancing life satisfaction through positive experiences, achieving success, and engaging with supportive and uplifting individuals. While such events contribute to maintaining a positive and joyful life, they are not consistently present. Daily life rarely consists solely of positive moments, and negative circumstances frequently arise that can dampen one's emotional state.

Another approach to alleviating negative emotions is the intentional recall and expression of positive thoughts and feelings. Engaging in activities such as reading enriching literature, composing uplifting content, speaking affirming words, and participating in positive conversations can be instrumental in this process. Interaction with kind-hearted individuals, in particular, provides an opportunity for meaningful positive exchanges. Furthermore, appreciating simple yet significant experiences, such as the warmth of the morning sun or the act of mindful breathing, can contribute to emotional well-being. It is vital to share not only moments of adversity but also those of joy.

Historically, psychological research on emotions has

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focused predominantly on pathological conditions, identifying the underlying causes of emotional disorders and emphasizing treatment approaches.² Terms such as trauma³, bullying, hikikomori⁴ and autism⁵ have become central to diagnosing and understanding various societal issues. More recently, however, there has been a growing shift toward exploring positive emotions, including joy, happiness, and well-being, as fundamental aspects of human experience. Positive psychology has emerged as a complementary response to the traditional focus on negative emotions in psychological research. Rather than abandoning the study of negative emotions, positive psychology seeks to broaden the scope of emotional research by incorporating the positive dimensions of human emotions, thereby facilitating a more comprehensive understanding of emotional well-being.

Language Education and the Enjoyment Scale

In language education, traditional research has primarily focused on learners' negative emotions, particularly anxiety. These studies have largely examined the factors that induce anxiety in learners and how it interferes with the learning process, while relatively little attention has been given to those students who engage in learning with positive emotions.⁶ To support this line of research, anxiety scales for learners were developed and used in surveys⁷, which led to various research outcomes. These studies contributed to identifying psychological factors that challenge learners and their underlying causes, helping to address learning difficulties. However, the emphasis on negative emotions, such as anxiety, worry, and restlessness, during the development of these scales may have led to the assumption that negative thinking is the primary obstacle. This is not a difficult inference to make.

There is now a growing need to shift the focus in language education toward learners' positive emotions. Alongside anxiety scales, it is essential to develop various tools to measure learners' enjoyment. These scales could help investigate whether learning is enjoyable, how studying benefits learners' lives, and what positive emotions they experience during the process. They can also provide insight into whether teachers are perceived as kind and engaging, whether good relationships exist between students and teachers, and whether students feel the teacher's care and affection. Furthermore, such scales can be used to explore whether students enjoy participating in class activities, interact well with their peers, and recall pleasant memories of the experience.

If the scale items are designed to trigger pleasant memories, the survey itself could encourage more positive responses from participants. Learners may recall their enjoyable moments in language learning, including fond memories of kind teachers and friendships with classmates. It is worth exploring whether using the enjoyment scale in emotion surveys could increase learners' sense of joy. If this is possible, could the negative emotions experienced in class be mitigated during the survey process? This question is a key inquiry in the current study.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

1. Setting of Survey

Research design: This study employed a survey design to explore the positive emotions experienced by learners in the process of studying Korean. The survey included 21 items adapted from the Foreign Language Enjoyment Scale (FLES) by Dewaele & MacIntyre (2014) along with open-ended questions to examine the specific situations in which learners experience enjoyment. Additionally, a qualitative approach was used to gather insights into the factors that contribute to positive emotions during Korean language learning.

Data analysis: The responses to the 21 items in the survey were rated on a scale from 1 to 5, allowing the analysis of which specific aspects or situations prompted learners to feel positive emotions. Furthermore, the open-ended responses were analyzed to identify common themes regarding the factors that contributed to enjoyment, as well as to capture learners' reflections on how answering the survey itself was a positive experience. This unexpected outcome, where learners reported that participating in the survey was enjoyable, provided valuable insights into the potential for surveys to influence emotional states.

Instrument: The primary instrument used in this study was the Foreign Language Enjoyment Scale (FLES) developed by Dewaele & MacIntyre (2014), which consists of 21 items designed to assess learners' positive emotional experiences while learning a foreign language. These items were adapted to reflect the context of learning Korean (KL) rather than a general foreign language (FL). To ensure comprehension across diverse participant groups, the original English items were translated into Japanese, Thai, Vietnamese, Myanmar, and Chinese. In addition to the 21 items, the survey also included open-ended questions that allowed respondents to freely describe the positive emotions they experienced during the learning process. The 21 items of the FLES (Foreign Language Enjoyment Scale) by Dewaele & MacIntyre (2014) are as follows⁸:

1. I can be creative / 2. I can laugh off embarrassing mistakes in the FL / 3. I don't get bored / 4. I enjoy it / 5. I feel as though I'm a different person during the FL class / 6. I learnt to express myself better in the FL / 7. I'm a worthy member of the FL class / 8. I've learnt interesting things / 9. In class, I feel proud of my accomplishments / 10. It's a positive environment / 11. It's cool to know a FL / 12. It's fun / 13. Making errors is part of the learning process / 14. The peers are nice / 15. The teacher is encouraging / 16. The teacher is friendly / 17. The teacher is supportive / 18. There is a good atmosphere / 19. We form a tight group / 20. We have common "legends", such as running jokes / 21. We laugh a lot.

Participants: The participants in this study consisted of 291 international students studying Korean, including 227 females

(78%), 57 males (19.6%), and 7 individuals identifying as a third gender (2.4%). The participants' ages were predominantly in their teens and twenties, with 116 individuals (39.9%) in their teens and 104 individuals (35.7%) in their twenties, accounting for a combined total of 75.6% of the participants. The remaining respondents were in their thirties (31 participants, 10.7%), forties, and fifties (14 participants each, 4.8%). In terms of nationality, the respondents were from Japan (92 participants, 31.6%), Thailand (57 participants, 19.6%), Vietnam (45 participants, 15.5%), Myanmar (39 participants, 13.4%), and Taiwan (21 participants, 7.2%), with small groups from China, Egypt, the United States, Belgium, Malaysia, Mexico, and the Philippines. Most of the participants (94.5%) were students, and their Korean proficiency levels were diverse: 26.1% were at a beginner level, 27.5% at a low-intermediate level, 19.9% at an intermediate level, 13.1% at a high-intermediate level, and 13.5% at an advanced level.

Study site: This study was conducted with international students learning Korean, and the survey was administered online. The survey instrument was translated into multiple languages to accommodate the diverse linguistic backgrounds of the participants, including Japanese, Thai, Vietnamese, Myanmar, and Chinese. Participants from various countries were invited to participate, allowing for a broad representation of learners of Korean as a foreign language.

Ethical considerations: Ethical considerations were paramount in this study. Participation was voluntary, and participants were fully informed of the purpose of the research and the confidentiality of their responses. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before they completed the survey. The study adhered to ethical guidelines in protecting personal data, and all responses were collected anonymously to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of the participants.

RESULTS

The survey results provided the researcher with three types of responses. First, the respondents rated the 21 items mentioned above on a scale from 1 to 5. The differences in scores allowed the researcher to identify which items and aspects elicited more positive emotions from the respondents. Second, the respondents wrote freely about the positive emotions they felt during their Korean learning process. These statements also helped the researcher understand the factors that led to positive emotions in the learners. Additionally, in the responses to the open-ended questions, learners not only described their enjoyable experiences but also stated that they found the survey itself enjoyable. This was an unexpected result, as it was surprising to find that respondents, in a potentially boring and burdensome situation of answering questions, found joy in responding to a survey about their positive emotions.

The following findings reveal that the 291 Korean language learners generally had very positive emotions regarding their learning process and content. Additionally, all 291 respondents answered the open-ended questions, and the responses included specific learning situations, factors that triggered enjoyment, as well as expressions indicating that answering the survey about "enjoyable memories" itself was enjoyable.

Table 1 presents the results of the descriptive statistics analysis for the FLE (Foreign Language Enjoyment) scale. The average scores for all items ranged between 3.5 and 4.5, indicating generally high levels of enjoyment. The skewness and kurtosis values were mostly within the range of -2 to +2, satisfying the normality requirement. Looking more closely, the items "Teacher's help (FLE-17)" and "Teacher's kindness (FLE-16)" had the highest average scores of 4.54 and 4.52, respectively, suggesting that the teacher's role is an important factor in the learner's enjoyment. In contrast, the item "Feeling like a different person (FLE-5)" had a relatively low score with an average of 2.87. Additionally, the items "Positive

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics Analysis-Responses of 291 Participants on the 21 FLES Items by Dewaele & MacIntyre (2014) (5-Point Likert Scale Used)

	Valid	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Std. Error of Skewness	Kurtosis	Std. Error of Kurtosis
FLE-1 Creativity	291	3.502	0.959	-0.513	0.143	0.065	0.285
FLE-2 Handling Difficult Situations	291	3.615	1.019	-0.670	0.143	-0.140	0.285
FLE-3 No Boredom	291	3.540	1.178	-0.573	0.143	-0.540	0.285
FLE-4 Enjoyment of Learning	291	4.210	0.752	-0.904	0.143	1.165	0.285
FLE-5 Feeling Like Someone Else	291	2.873	1.136	0.181	0.143	-0.830	0.285
FLE-6 Self-Expression	291	3.553	0.943	-0.565	0.143	0.083	0.285
FLE-7 Valuable Member	291	3.540	0.940	-0.491	0.143	0.062	0.285
FLE-8 Interesting	291	4.320	0.597	-0.548	0.143	1.008	0.285
FLE-9 Pride in Achievement	291	4.072	0.769	-0.903	0.143	1.537	0.285
FLE-10 Positive Environment	291	4.241	0.812	-1.285	0.143	2.277	0.285
FLE-11 Coolness	291	4.495	0.584	-0.871	0.143	0.921	0.285
FLE-12 Fun	291	4.296	0.655	-0.690	0.143	0.720	0.285
FLE-13 Thoughts on Mistakes	291	4.515	0.629	-1.273	0.143	2.026	0.285
FLE-14 Friendliness	291	4.464	0.655	-1.275	0.143	2.717	0.285
FLE-15 Teacher's Encouragement	291	4.464	0.655	-1.275	0.143	2.717	0.285
FLE-16 Teacher's Kindness	291	4.522	0.650	-1.485	0.143	3.297	0.285
FLE-17 Teacher's Help	291	4.540	0.644	-1.630	0.143	4.107	0.285
FLE-18 Class Atmosphere	291	4.381	0.666	-1.038	0.143	2.037	0.285
FLE-19 Peer Bonding	291	4.089	0.804	-0.564	0.143	-0.247	0.285
FLE-20 Class "Legend"	291	3.766	1.051	-0.850	0.143	0.334	0.285
FLE-21 Frequent Laughter	291	4.216	0.741	-1.035	0.143	1.780	0.285



Figure 1. Rain-Cloud Plot: Visualization of 291 Responses to the 21 FLES Items by Dewaele & MacIntyre (2014)

environment (FLE-10)" and "Positive thoughts about mistakes (FLE-13)" had skewness and kurtosis values of -1.285 and 2.277, -1.273 and 2.026, respectively, indicating a tendency for responses to focus on positive experiences for these items. These results suggest that the teacher's support and positive emotions experienced by the learners have a significant impact on foreign language learning.

Figure 1 visualizes the data from Table 1. Except for the FLE-5 item, the density of responses for all items is skewed to the right, showing that nearly all 291 Korean learners felt positive emotions through their learning. The FLE-5 item, "Feeling like a different person during language class," may have been difficult to understand for certain language groups or individuals with specific cultural backgrounds. However, the fact that all 291 respondents had very positive responses to the other 20 items is remarkable. The learners' positive attitudes toward Korean learning, and their positive response to participating in this survey about their positive emotions, are clearly reflected in their open-ended responses. Below are some excerpts from the responses (translated into English, with all respondent names anonymized):

- "I really enjoy Korean class. And I'm having so much fun answering this survey, which makes me recall the joyful emotions I felt in Korean class." (Vietnamese, V#45)
- "When I make mistakes in Korean class, I remember laughing with my friends, and I'm still smiling now as

I answer this survey." (Thai, Th#45)

- "I used to dislike being called on by the teacher and feeling nervous, but now I realize that every moment of the Korean class is precious." (Thai, Th#40)
- "(As I answer this survey,) I realize that the mistakes I made in class were part of the learning process." (Taiwanese, T#15)
- "Learning Korean, using it, and thinking about Korean while answering this survey—this time is all enjoyable." (Taiwanese, T#02)
- "When I think about Korean class, just watching the kind teacher speak Korean is so wonderful and enjoyable." (Japanese, J#34)
- "Thank you for allowing me to respond to this survey!" (Myanmar, My#20)

Upon reviewing the open-ended responses provided by all 291 participants, the most preferred learning activity that influenced their positive emotions was quiz activities (including Kahoot), which accounted for 5.5% of the responses. This was followed by cultural learning (learning about Korean culture and history) at 6.2%, interaction with the teacher and class preparation at 5.1%, and creating songs (writing songs in Korean) at 4.5%. Cooperation and communication activities with friends (4.1%), experiences related to traveling in Korea (successful

conversations), and other activities (stickers, classroom atmosphere, etc.) each accounted for 3.8%. Game activities (word games, team activities, etc.) accounted for 3.4%, while presentations, team projects, and discussion activities had relatively lower percentages of 2.8% and 2.1%, respectively.

Apart from the fact that Korean learners found interest in various classroom activities, particularly quiz and cultural learning activities, responses such as "Learning Korean itself is enjoyable" (12.3% of total responses) or "Even if I make mistakes, it's fun" or "I focus on the process rather than the results" (4.8%) were also evident. These findings indicate that simply linking positive emotions to academic performance is an insufficient approach. Most importantly, the fact that the learners felt joy while answering the survey itself emphasizes the need to consider creating positive surveys in studies on language learning enjoyment, especially when developing scales for such studies.⁹

DISCUSSION

To establish a scale for assessing the positive emotions of language learners, it is appropriate to include items that strongly resonate with the respondents, particularly those aspects that elicit strong reactions from the students. According to the research results mentioned earlier, students experience strong enjoyment through beneficial and fun activities, interactions with teachers, and cooperation and communication with friends. Furthermore, the fact that some students reported feeling enjoyment not only during the Korean language class itself but also during the process of answering a survey about positive emotions during the class suggests that the scale should also consider the emotions evoked by the scale itself. In other words, it is crucial to consider that the process of responding to the scale items may bring enjoyment to the respondents. High-quality education and a positive educational environment can contribute to positive emotions in learners, and if the survey is designed positively, it can also help learners feel more positive emotions.

This study utilized Dewaele & MacIntyre's (2014) FLES scale to conduct a survey aimed at measuring the positive emotions felt by learners during Korean language classes. A total of 291 Korean language learners generally reported experiencing high levels of enjoyment. The primary factors contributing to their positive emotions included quiz activities, cultural learning, and interactions with teachers. Unexpectedly, it was found that the process of responding to the survey itself also became an enjoyable experience for the respondents. This outcome was unanticipated, and it led to the realization that surveys can offer learners not just a data collection tool but also an opportunity to provide positive experiences. This aspect should be addressed as a crucial element in research on positive language learning and scale development.

Through this study, the need for developing various positive-oriented surveys is highlighted. This can involve discussing the

importance of surveys that positively assess and encourage learners' emotions and experiences. Additionally, the necessity of positive surveys should be continuously emphasized, as they play a vital role in providing better learning environments and identifying positive factors that motivate learners. Furthermore, it is important to explore whether providing feedback on the results of positive-oriented surveys can maximize positive responses. By offering survey results to learners, they may better recognize the positive aspects of their learning process, which could help them become more engaged and motivated in their studies.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author has no conflicting financial interests.

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