

How to Promote High-school Students' Foreign Language Enjoyment in Reading Class

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Abstract

Scholarly attention for Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) has sharply increased in recent years for its role in facilitating language learning as well as promoting language learners' well-being. FLE is closely related to learners' language proficiency. However, there is few studies about some specific language skills, especially reading skills. Therefore, this study mainly discussed the importance of FLE for reading, influencing factors of FLE, and the measures taken to promote high-school students' FLE in reading class. Through literature research method, the study found out that there is a positive correlation between FLE and reading proficiency. FLE is affected by multiple factors such as individual learners and external environment. It can take measures from teaching content, teaching activity and teaching skill and device to promote FLE in reading class. The measures mainly include: providing diversify reading materials, incorporating games and competitions, celebrating reading achievements, integration of technology and creating a positive learning environment. The research finding can provide beneficial insights for teachers to construct a positive foreign language classroom environment.

Keywords

Foreign Language Enjoyment; Reading Class; Measures.

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

Stimulated by Positive Psychology, there has been a growing research interest in positive emotions experienced by foreign language learners (Oxford, 2015). Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014), have argued in favor of a more holistic view of emotions in which positive emotions are not merely viewed as mirror images of negative emotions.

Studies on positive emotions are necessary and deserve more attention because they not only facilitate foreign language learning by bringing some cognitive and motivational benefits, but also promote well-being (Dewaele and MacIntyre, 2014, Fredrickson, 2013). The second reason is more practical, as a better understanding in the relationship between positive emotions and foreign language learning could allow foreign language teachers to become more effective (Dewaele, 2013).

Foreign language enjoyment (FLE) is a concept that resonates with the emerging field of Positive Psychology and more specifically the Broaden-and-Build Theory (Fredrickson, 2001). It shares with other positive emotions the ability to broaden individual's momentary repertoires of thoughts and actions and build their psychological resiliency and personal resources (Fredrickson, 2001, Oxford, 2015). FLE boosts foreign language learning as it encourages learners to play and be creative and to explore an unfamiliar linguistic and cultural world (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2016).

1.2. Purpose and Significance of the Study

There are various factors that can influence students' Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE), but teachers are the main external factors (Dewaele et al. 2018; Dewaele & MacIntyre 2019; Jiang & Dewaele 2019). Therefore, this study's purpose is finding measures to promote students' FLE in reading class. It used literature research to explore and analyze the current situation of Chinese High-school Students' Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) from multiple perspectives of theory and practice. Hence, this study can provide some suggestions for improving students' reading proficiency.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Definition of Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE)

Researchers have different opinions on the definition of enjoyment. Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) defined enjoyment by distinguishing it from pleasure. Enjoyment can be defined as "good feelings coming from breaking through homeostatic limits and stretching beyond oneself to accomplish something new or even unexpected, especially in face of some difficult tasks". Ainley and Hidi (2014) states that enjoyment refers to "the sense of satisfaction and reward generated from the activity and/or the outcome of the activity" Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) pointed out that enjoyment attained while learning a foreign language, called foreign language enjoyment (FLE), facilitates the process of language learning by broadening learners' perspectives and promoting their cognitive abilities.

The above opinions all agree that enjoyment is a positive emotion and involves satisfaction. Therefore, in this study, FLE refers to satisfaction, pleasure, and sense of accomplishment participating in foreign language learning. In Chinese context, most senior high school students learn English as foreign language in schools. Therefore, this study focuses on learners' enjoyment in English reading class.

2.2. Theoretical Basis

2.2.1. The Broaden-and-build Theory

The broaden-and-build theory, a fundamental theory of Positive Psychology proposed by Fredrickson (2001), is adopted as the theoretical framework of the present study. According to this theory, positive emotions can "broaden people's momentary thought-action repertoires and build their enduring personal resources, ranging from physical and intellectual resources to social and psychological resources" (Fredrickson, 2001, p.218), while negative emotions have the opposite narrowing effects. It also states that positive emotions are capable of undoing the lingering influence of negative emotions. Specifically in the realm of second language acquisition, MacIntyre & Gregersen (2012) claimed that positive emotions help to open up learners' perspectives, facilitate their ability to absorb and construct language resources as well as improve their mental resilience and well-being in the long run.

2.2.2. The Affective Filter Hypothesis

Krashen sees the learner's emotional state or attitude as an adjustable filter that freely passes, impedes, or blocks input necessary to acquisition. Emotions refer to motivation, confidence, and anxiety. The stronger the motivation, the stronger the self-confidence, and the lower the anxiety, that is, the lower the emotional filtering, which is more conducive to the development of second language ability; On the contrary, high emotional filtering not only hinders learners from obtaining input, but also hinders their understanding of existing input. In other words, in order to acquire a second language, the learner must be emotionally open to the second language.

2.3. Previous Studies

Damasio (1994) and Fredrickson (2004) argued that learning is beyond affective factors and involves a multitude of factors such as communication, rapport, and identity. Having focused on emotion theory and earlier studies on affective factors in Foreign language learning, Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) introduced positive concepts into educational psychology. They asserted that it is necessary for language teaching/learning practitioners to consider well-being, hope, empathy, mindfulness, communicative skills, etc., to make a balance in the literature (Snyder and Lopez, 2009; Macintyre et al., 2019).

Scholars have classified and integrated the influencing factors, and the variables involved are complex and diverse. FLE is affected by multiple factors such as individual learners (such as age, gender) and external environment (teacher, classroom environment, social and cultural background) (Dewaele et al., 2018; Jiang & Dewaele, 2019).

Dewaele (2017) believes that teacher and classroom environment variables include frequency of teachers' use of foreign languages, time spent on reading, writing, listening, and speaking in foreign language classes and predictability of foreign language classes. Interesting and innovative classroom activities, a good classroom atmosphere, teachers' positive and optimistic personality, and teachers' respect, praise, personal attention, recognition and encouragement of EFL learners can all make learners feel enjoyable (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Li et al., 2018). Jiang (2020) further studied the teacher factors and proposed that the teacher factors affect students' FLE mainly belong to five categories: teacher's classroom activity organization, teacher's personality characteristics, teacher's teaching skills, teaching content and teacher support.

3. The Importance of FLE for reading

3.1. Improving Motivation

Enjoyment fosters motivation, which is crucial for language learning. When learners enjoy studying a foreign language, they are more likely to invest time and effort into practicing their reading skills. This motivation helps them overcome challenges and persist in improving their reading abilities.

3.2. Increasing Engagement

Enjoyment enhances engagement with the language and its written materials. When learners find pleasure in reading texts in a foreign language, they are more likely to read extensively and explore a variety of genres and topics. Regular engagement with different types of texts strengthens reading comprehension skills, expands vocabulary, and improves overall reading proficiency.

3.3. Helping Contextual Understanding

Enjoying a foreign language allows learners to engage with its cultural and social aspects. By delving into the literature, news, and various types of written content, learners gain a deeper understanding of the language's cultural nuances and context. This knowledge helps improve reading comprehension by providing a broader framework for interpretation and analysis.

4. Influencing Factors of FLE

The influencing factors of foreign language enjoyment in reading can be categorized into individual learners (such as motivation, interest and prior experience) and external environment (teacher, classroom environment, social and cultural background).

For individual learners, it includes students' language proficiency, motivation, individual interests and prior experience. Firstly, intrinsic motivation plays a crucial role in promoting enjoyment in reading. Students who are intrinsically motivated to learn a foreign language are more likely to find pleasure in reading activities. Secondly, the topics and genres that align with students' personal interests are more likely to generate enjoyment. Thirdly, students with prior positive reading experiences are more likely to approach foreign language reading with enthusiasm and enjoy the process.

For external environment, it includes teachers, environment and social and cultural background. For one thing, teacher factors that affect students' FLE mainly belong to five categories: teacher's classroom activity organization, teacher's personality characteristics, teacher's teaching skills, teaching content and teacher support. Teacher factors are essential to students' FLE. For another thing, environment can influence students' FLE from access to resources, classroom atmosphere, and cultural exposure.

5. Measures Taken to Promote FLE in Reading Class

In order to promote Chinese high-school students' enjoyment of foreign language reading in class, several measures can be taken from teaching content, teaching activities and teaching skills and devices.

5.1. Rich Teaching Content

5.1.1. Providing Diversify Reading Materials

Provide a wide range of engaging and age-appropriate reading materials in foreign languages. Select a range of reading materials that cater to different interests and abilities. This could include graded readers, magazines, newspapers, novels, and online resources. And incorporate diverse topics such as sports, music, travel, and culture. Ensure the content is age-appropriate and culturally sensitive.

5.1.2. Allowing Personalized Reading Choices

Allow students to choose reading materials based on their interests and preferences. Offer recommendations based on their proficiency levels, but give them the freedom to explore various genres and styles.

5.2. Interesting Teaching Activities

5.2.1. Incorporating Games and Competitions

Introduce language learning games, quizzes, and competitions related to reading activities. These can spark enthusiasm and motivate students to improve their reading skills while having fun.

5.2.2. Celebrating Reading Achievements

Acknowledge and celebrate students' reading achievements regularly. Organize events such as book fairs, author visits, or reading challenges to recognize their efforts and create a sense of accomplishment.

5.2.3. Collaborative Projects

Engage students in collaborative projects that involve reading, such as creating group presentations, book clubs, or literary magazines. Working together enhances social interactions, boosts motivation, and deepens understanding of the texts.

5.3. Various Teaching Skill and Device

5.3.1. Integration of Technology

Utilize technology tools that allow students to access authentic foreign language materials online. Interactive websites, e-books, language learning apps, and video platforms can make reading more enjoyable and accessible for students.

5.3.2. Creating a Positive Learning Environment

Establish a safe and inclusive classroom environment where students feel comfortable expressing their thoughts and opinions without fear of judgment. Encourage open discussions and respect for diverse viewpoints. Teachers should respect and care for students, actively provide feedback on their classroom performance, so that students can feel the emotional and cognitive support of teachers, gain a sense of happiness in foreign language classrooms, and improve the effectiveness of foreign language learning.

6. Conclusion

This study mainly used literature research method. It discussed the importance of Foreign Language Enjoyment (FEL) for reading learning, then talked about influencing factors of FEL, and suggested some measures to promote the FEL in reading class from teachers' perspective. Firstly, in terms of teaching content, teachers should choose interesting and satisfying teaching content that meets students' needs, enhance the fun of foreign language learning, and thereby enhance students' classroom participation and sense of gain. Secondly, in terms of teaching activity, teachers should strive to design and organize classroom activities that have positive value and match students' foreign language abilities. Finally, in terms of teaching skill and device, teachers should use modern tools and create friendly and open atmosphere for students. This study has important teaching implications for teachers to construct a positive foreign language classroom. However, there is a long way to go for the research of FEL.

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