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Foreign Language Enjoyment and Subjective Happiness in Spanish Adult Learners

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ABSTRACT

Background. Research interest in FLE and its associated factors has increased in recent years, especially regarding learner-internal factors. Happiness could potentially be one of the predictors of FLE.

Purpose. This study aimed to investigate the link between foreign language enjoyment (FLE) and a measure of subjective happiness (SH).

Methods. A total of 594 adult foreign language learners aged 16 to 72 participated in the study. Ten items extracted from the FLE scale and the SH scale translated and validated into Spanish were used to gather the data.

Results. With a significant 3.6% shared variance between FLE and SH, the study found that participants with higher scores on FLE have higher scores on SH. However, the percentage of shared variance found is considerably higher for different subgroups (e.g., 6.7% for the older adolescent group and 10% for mature and senior adults). The results suggest that the relationship between personality variables and FLE may differ depending on learner-internal factors such as age, gender, competence level and foreign language.

Implications. The study opens a new line of research into the interaction between FLE and happiness, and factors affecting it with a sample that, due to the wide range of participant ages and the number of participants beyond their twenties, is more representative of the adult foreign language learner population than is usually the case in studies of FLE.

KEYWORDS:

foreign language enjoyment, FLE, foreign language enjoyment scale, happiness, subjective happiness scale, adult learners

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INTRODUCTION

Interest in the role of positive emotions in foreign language (FL) learning and the personal, social and contextual factors associated with them has experienced a considerable growth in the past eight years (e.g., Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Gabryś-Barker & Gałajda, 2016; Dewaele et al., 2019; Li, 2019; MacIntyre et al., 2016, 2019; Oxford, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c). One of the constructs that is receiving more research attention in this area is that of foreign language enjoyment (FLE). The study of FLE was initiated by Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) and it is grounded on Fredrickson's (e.g., 2001, 2003) influential broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. According to this theory, positive emotions, such as joy, interest or love, expand learners'

thought-action repertoires and increase their long-term physical, intellectual, social and psychological resources (Fredrickson, 2001).

According to Li (2019), three main trends in the research regarding FLE can currently be identified: its characterization and measurement, the link between FLE and a number of learner-internal, learner-external and teacher-centered variables (learners' personality traits, external contexts, and the teacher's role among others), the relationship between FLE, foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA) and FL and achievement. Our study is a contribution to the second strand as it investigates the link between FLE and a central topic in positive psychology, happiness (MacIntyre, 2016), and, more precisely, subjective,



self-perceived happiness, which has so far remained unexplored.

Our desire to contribute to the research into the relationship between FLE and other non-language related, positive emotions, motivated this article. Drawing on the distinction in the psychological literature between hedonic enjoyment and eudaimonia as alternative conceptions of happiness (Ryan & Deci, 2001), it seems plausible that general happiness is associated to a tendency to enjoy life experiences, including learning a language, and/or to the realization of one's unique individual potentials, which could also encompass language learning. Alongside expanding the investigation to a wider population of FL learners, this strand of research allows us to establish the shared variance between FLE and other positive emotions and hence, the specificity of FLE as a construct.

More precisely, our investigation aimed to explore the link between FLE and SH. More specifically, the following research questions were addressed: (1) RQ1 What is the relationship between FLE and SH in adult FL learners? (2) RQ2 Does the relationship between them vary according to age, gender, FL, and self-reported level of competence in the FL?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Positive Psychology in Language Learning

Positive psychology (PosPsy) is the area of psychology that focuses on "the conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of people, groups, and institutions" (Gable & Haidt, 2005, p. 104) and on the aspects of human life that lead to happiness, fulfilment, and flourishing (Linley et al., 2006). The study of PosPsy has significantly expanded since Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi's (2000) seminal publication laid the foundations of this movement on three main pillars: "positive subjective experience, positive individual traits, and positive institutions" (p. 5). Fredrickson's broaden-and-build theory (2001, 2003, 2004) established the theoretical Background: positive emotions lessen the effects of negative emotions while promoting resilience, new experiences and efficient learning.

MacIntyre et al. (2019) hold that topics covered by research in the field of PosPsy, such as optimism, happiness and resilience, are of fundamental importance in language learning, which, as a long-term process, requires "perseverance, optimism and resilience, among other qualities" (p. 1). Positive emotions have been argued not only to strengthen learners' awareness of language input, which allows them to absorb it better, but also increase their resilience in challenging contexts while boosting social cohesion through the encouragement of exploration and play. Negative emotions, in contrast, have been claimed to have the opposite effect, as they restrict learners' access to such input (Dewaele et al., 2018; MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012).

Antecedents of the Construct of Foreign Language Enjoyment

Prior to the advent of the construct of FLE in an article by Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014), several authors studied enjoyment in the field of general psychology and education (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Goetz et al., 2006; Hartley, 2006) and FL learning (Arnold, 2011; Gregersen et al., 2014; MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012).

In the general education context, enjoyment and emotional well-being are considered to increase academic achievement and to be essential in the learning process (Goetz et al., 2006). Emotional well-being and enjoyment are closely related constructs. The 15th principle of psychology for teaching and learning of the American Psychological Association (2015) states that emotional well-being is key to the successful functioning of the lesson and influences academic performance. It is also important to the development of social skills, interpersonal relationships and mental health. According to Gregersen et al. (2014), enjoyment determines learners' engagement and success to a certain extent, by regulating their emotion management in frustrating and challenging situations. It helps them to build resources, relationships, and strength when facing difficulties.

The concept of enjoyment in FL learning was also examined prior to the introduction of the term FLE by Dewaele and MacIntyre in 2014. Hartley (2006) explained that learners sometimes experience emotional reward, or enjoyment, during their learning process, which encourages them to complete their tasks. The process of FL learning implicates two sources of enjoyment: development of interpersonal relationships and progress towards a goal (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Learners enjoy tasks in which they actively seek knowledge, feel autonomous, and use their own tools to make progress in the FL (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012).

Teachers, classroom environment, and peers are factors that can facilitate enjoyment (Arnold, 2011). In her study, students appreciated teachers who were positive, well-organized, humorous, respectful of students, and praised them for their achievements. Peers play another key role in facilitating enjoyment. Arnold (2011) explained that the smaller the group, the more likely it is to form close bonds, to have a positive relaxed atmosphere, and, consequently, to use the FL more frequently. Arnold (2011) also observed that real accomplishment is the best route to self-esteem and FLE.

Similarly, Csikszentmihalyi (1990) had previously revealed that learners find the feeling that their effort towards a goal is recognized highly enjoyable and categorized the sources of enjoyment into learner-internal or learner-external ones. Learner-internal sources examine students' ability to focus, to be involved without other worries, to control their actions, to forget about their concerns, and to have an altered perception of time. Learner-external sources are related to the

goals, completion, and feedback of the tasks. Among the learner-external sources, researchers have studied the consequences of teacher-centered variables (e.g., Arnold, 2011).

Foreign Language Enjoyment

Research on emotions in foreign and second language acquisition has traditionally focused on negative emotions and, more precisely, on language anxiety (e.g., Aida, 1994; Gkonou et al., 2017; Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002; Gregersen, 2003; Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989). In recent years, however, there has been a wave of studies into positive emotions in language learning, particularly FLE, which derives from the application of the tenets of PosPsy to the field (Dewaele et al., 2019; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014, 2016; Gregersen et al., 2014).

Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) coined the term foreign language enjoyment (FLE). They characterized it as an emotion capable of triggering positive outcomes in the FL learning process and defined it “as a complex emotion, capturing interacting components of challenge and perceived ability that reflect the human drive for success in the face of a difficult task” (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2016, p. 216). They suggested that if an enjoyable context is created, FL learning is facilitated and that “specific positive events can shape the development of enjoyment in the FL” (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014, p. 263). For example, FL learners enjoyed activities related to their interests and concerns that allowed them to express themselves.

Boudreau et al. (2018) identified an additional dimension in the construct of enjoyment when, drawing on Csikszentmihalyi (2008), they described the distinction between enjoyment and pleasure:

Enjoyment is the emotion that is felt when one not only meets their needs but also surpasses them to accomplish something unexpected or surprising (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008). If pleasure can occur simply by performing an activity or completing an action, enjoyment takes on additional dimensions such as an intellectual focus, heightened attention, and optimal challenge. (p. 153)

For these authors, enjoyment is concerned with progression and challenging limits. From this perspective, a complex relationship between positive and negative emotions is created, where some degree of anxiety is not necessarily an obstacle to FLE.

In terms of measurement, Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) developed a 21-item foreign language enjoyment scale (FLES) to assess students' FLE. The FLES laid the foundations for other measuring tools. In 2016, Dewaele and MacIntyre published their 14-item shortened version of the FLE, which comprised a social and a private dimension. FLE-social included learner-external factors such as teachers, peers, and classroom environment where

as FLE-private encompassed learner-internal variables derived from a sense of accomplishment. Dewaele and Dewaele (2017) further reduced the FLES into 10 items and 3 scopes: FLE-private, FLE-social and teacher-controlled versus peer-controlled positive emotions. Li et al. (2018) modified the 14-item FLE Scale (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2016) and validated an 11-item FLE Scale. Their scale was divided into FLE-private, FLE-teacher, and FLE-atmosphere. More recently, Botes et al. (2021) validated a 9-item short form of the FLE scale with the three underlying factors of Teacher Appreciation, Personal Enjoyment, and Social Enjoyment.

A positive relationship between FLE and FL achievement has been confirmed (Dewaele & Alfawzan, 2018; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Dewaele et al., 2017; Li, 2019). FLE has been found to be a predictor of different types of academic achievement such as general second language (L2) performance (Dewaele & Alfawzan, 2018; Jin & Zhang, 2021) and L2 speech performance (Saito et al., 2018).

As Li (2019) discusses, one of the three main strands of the research into FLE is the link between FLE and a range of learner-internal, learner-external and teacher-centered variables. Research into the role of personality factors in second and FL learning has a long tradition. According to Dörnyei (2005), personality factors are “heavily implicated in the learning process in general and in SLA in particular” (p. 29) and considered to act as “powerful modifying variables” (p. 24) which “shape the way people respond to their learning environment” (p. 30). Due to the relative novelty of the concept, research into the relationship between FLE and personality traits or states is still in its infancy. However, the number of recent publications clearly indicates that it has already become a highly attractive research area. In a study with Chinese high school students, Li (2019) and Li and Xu (2019) found a significant relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and FLE, indicating that students who were more emotionally intelligent tended to experience more enjoyment in their English classes. Li (2019) also found that EI affected the students' FLE positively and significantly. Similarly, Resnik and Dewaele (2020) also found that higher levels of trait EI were linked to higher levels of FLE. Dewaele and MacIntyre (2019) explored the link between FLE and teacher-related variables (such as attitude towards the teacher and his/her friendliness) and five personality traits shown to be relevant to multicultural success: cultural empathy, open-mindedness, social initiative, emotional stability, and flexibility (van der Zee et al., 2013). Cultural empathy was the strongest psychological predictor with a small contribution from social initiative. Personality traits predicted 10% of the variance in FLE, as opposed to over 30% in FLCA. Finally, FLE was found to mediate the relationship between grit and FL performance. Classroom environment (CE) was found to moderate the relationship between grit and FLE in a study conducted by Wei et al. (2019) with middle-school students aged 11-16 years in China. Findings

indicated that a positive CE combined with grit results in a significant increase in learners' FLE and FL performance whereas these measures did not increase significantly in a negative CE. This means that a comfortable CE may be essential for positive personality traits to trigger FLE as the impact of grit on FL performance and FLE was significantly higher in a positive environment.

Previous studies (Dewaele & Alfawzan, 2018; Dewaele & Dewaele, 2017; Dewaele et al., 2019; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014, 2019; Dewaele et al., 2016; Dewaele, Özdemir, et al., 2019; Dewaele et al., 2018; Jiang & Dewaele, 2019; Li et al., 2019) found that learners' variables such as age, gender, competence level and attitude towards the FL were correlated with FLE. It is worth noticing that, to the best of our knowledge, only one study has compared the levels of FLE of different FLs (Dewaele & Proietti Ergün, 2020). Several researchers found that FLE increases in older groups (Dewaele & Dewaele, 2017; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014, 2019; Dewaele, Özdemir et al., 2019; Dewaele et al., 2018). Regarding gender, females were found to experience more FLE in most studies (Dewaele & Dewaele, 2017; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Dewaele et al., 2016; Dewaele et al., 2018). However, other studies found no significant difference between males and females (Dewaele & Dewaele, 2017; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2019; Dewaele, Özdemir et al., 2019). Based on previous research (Dewaele & Alfawzan, 2018; Dewaele & Dewaele, 2017; Dewaele et al., 2019; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014, 2019; Dewaele et al., 2018; Jiang & Dewaele, 2019; Li et al., 2019), it is reasonable to assume that higher levels of competence will bring about higher FLE. Nonetheless, Dewaele, Özdemir et al. (2019) found that the learners' competence level was not a significant predictor of FLE. Concerning FLE for different FLs, Dewaele and Proietti Ergün (2020) found no significant difference between English and Italian as FLs in Turkey for FLE. Additionally, some authors have stated the importance of the attitude towards the FL on the FLE students experience (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2019; Dewaele et al., 2016; Dewaele, Özdemir et al., 2019; Dewaele et al., 2018; Jiang & Dewaele, 2019). To conclude, based on previous FLE research results, it seems plausible that our data also vary across age, gender, competence level and foreign language.

Happiness

Happiness, together with other positive emotions such as grit, resilience, or optimism, are among the topics reached by the expansion of research under the rubric of PosPsy (Lopez & Snyder, 2009). Additionally, happiness is regarded as one of the most important individual and collective goals in current societies and, although philosophers of all stripes have disagreed over the definition of happiness, they all concur that a good life is a happy one (Diener et al., 2003). Psychology also regards happiness as a rather elusive concept. As MacIntyre (2016) explains, when PosPsy addressed the concept of happiness, it was

concluded that it was too complex to deal with, as it was multifaceted and variously defined.

In the area of FL/L2 learning, studies into happiness and related concepts such as joy, enjoyment or well-being are a direct consequence of the arrival of the PosPsy movement to the field. In the specialized literature, happiness is typically referred to as subjective well-being. This latter concept is defined as "people's emotional and cognitive evaluations of their lives [that] includes what lay people call happiness, peace, fulfilment, and life satisfaction" (Diener et al., 2003, p. 403). One of the scholars that has most deeply engaged in the notion of well-being in the area of FL/L2 is Rebecca Oxford, who developed a framework of dimensions contributing to language learners' well-being and progress, that includes, among other components, emotion, empathy motivation, perseverance, and optimism (Oxford, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c).

In recent years, qualitative studies have been published that take into account, one way or another, the notion of happiness or associated concepts. For example, Oxford (2014) and Oxford and Cuéllar (2014) adapted a theoretical framework of well-being drawn from PosPsy - Seligman's (2011) PERMA model- to the narrative research exploring language learning experiences. The conclusions from both studies highlight the potential value of the concept of well-being for enhancing language learning. In another qualitative study, Ibrahim (2016) found that happiness originated in the informants from the perception of growth and progress, of a transformational process in which their skills, and even their image and identity, were being developed. Matsumoto (2019) investigated third age FL learners' experiences from the perspective of the notion of well-being, and, more specifically, from the concept of savoring posited by Bryant and Veroff (2012). Well-being was characterized as people's deliberate attending to and appreciation of the positive feelings and experiences that make them feel good (p. 2).

Although not specifically focused on happiness or well-being, some other studies have yielded relevant findings to understand the relationship between happiness or well-being and language learning. Resnik and Schallmoser (2019) investigated an e-Tandem experience in which Austrian university students of English were paired with students of German at UK and US universities. Data from interviews revealed that providing mutual help and feedback, perceiving improvement in their language competence and developing friendships with first language users enhanced the participants' eudaimonic happiness. This dimension of happiness, related to notions of purpose, growth and fulfilment (Ryan & Deci, 2001), refers to "quality of life derived from the development of a person's best potentials and their application in the fulfilment of personally expressive, self-concordant goals" (Waterman et al., 2010, p. 41). Happiness was also one of the emotions that Pinel and Albert (2018) identified in a qualita-

tive study that asked Hungarian university students in an English Studies BA programme to write a paragraph describing their emotional experiences concerning foreign languages and one of the four classical language skills. Finally, the study conducted by Ibrahim (2016) also throws some light upon the understanding of happiness in FL learning from the theoretical perspective of the directed motivational current (DCM) developed by Dörnyei and colleagues (Dörnyei et al., 2014; Dörnyei et al., 2015). DCM applies to “relatively long-term, sustained and heightened motivational engagement” (Ibrahim, 2016, p. 258). The theory also posits that individuals develop a sense of eudaimonic happiness as they realize that they can maintain one’s motivation and as they acquire new skills as a result of the motivational engagement associated with DCMs. Ibrahim’s qualitative study found that happiness, typically associated with enjoyment, was one of the emotions most frequently mentioned when participants described DCM experiences. Happiness was commonly linked to feelings of achievement, both in terms of learning progress and of task-level progress.

Research in the field of FL/L2 learning so far, however, has not sufficiently explored either the relationship between different emotions studied by PosPsy or the relationship between positive emotions specific to language learning and those of a more general nature, as is the case in our study. Additionally, no study has so far explored how the relationship between positive emotions varies as a function of learner variables. For example, as research has found gender differences in self-reported and physiological reactions to emotional experiences (e.g., Šolcová & Lačev, 2017), it is possible that the relation between FLE and SH in men and women may be different. Similarly, the differences in SH across ages (Lelkes, 2008) lead us to believe that the relation between SH and FLE may be influenced by age. As for competence level, Nakamura’s (2018) FL beginner interviewees mentioned happiness, joy and gratitude as the emotional aspects that improved their learning experiences. Intermediate and advanced students, however, focused on cognitive aspects. Therefore, the learners’ competence level in the FL might also affect the correlation between FLE and SH. Finally, since it has been suggested that the target language

may play an important role for emotional engagement (e.g., De Smet et al., 2018), this factor could also affect the relation between FLE and SH.

METHODS

Participants and Context

A total of 594 FL learners participated by convenience sampling from 17 Spanish official language schools (OLSs). OLSs are public institutions run by autonomous regional educational authorities that specialize in teaching and certifying foreign languages in Spain. The OLSs language curricula are based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001). Participants were contacted in class, by email or through social media – Twitter, Facebook and online learning platforms. Their ages ranged between 16 and 72 years ($M = 42.05$ years; $SD = 12.76$; $Mn = 44$; $Mo = 52$). Out of the 594 participants, 432 (72.72%) were women and 162 (27.27%) were men. As in the data on female/male distribution in adult, non-compulsory FL courses in OLSs (66/34) gathered by the Spanish Ministry of Education (MECD, 2016, p. 4), the female/male distribution in our sample is characterized by a vast majority of women.

Even though the participants were FL learners of six languages, almost three quarters of the sample completed the questionnaire in relation to their experiences learning English as a FL (Table 1).

Almost half the sample is university-educated (46.15% reported having a bachelor’s, master’s, or doctoral degree). The participants’ levels of educational attainment are shown in Table 2.

As to the level of competence in the FL, 19.70% ($n = 117$) of the participants reported having a certified A1 level according to the Common European Framework for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001), 15.32% ($n = 91$) an A2, 35.19% ($n = 209$) a B1 and 15.64% ($n = 94$) a B2 level. Only 13.97% ($n = 83$) of the participants claimed that it was their first year studying the FL.

Table 1

FL in relation to which the participants completed the questionnaire

Language	Frequency	Percentage
English	430	72.39
French	83	13.97
German	60	10.10
Russian	17	2.86
Italian	3	0.51
Other	1	0.17
Total	594	100

Table 2*Participants' highest level of education*

Education	Frequency	Percentage
Primary Education	14	2.36
Secondary Education	19	3.20
Vocational Training	27	4.55
Higher Secondary Education	100	16.84
Higher Vocational Training	68	11.45
Undergraduate Degree	92	15.49
Bachelor's Degree	193	32.49
Master's Degree	68	11.45
Doctoral Degree	13	2.19
Total	594	100

Instruments

The participants completed a questionnaire in Spanish that consisted of three sections: the sociodemographic section, the foreign language enjoyment scale and the subjective happiness scale.

The sociodemographic section generated the participants' information regarding gender, age, highest level of education, self-reported level of competence, chosen FL, number of FLs they were learning, and the OLS where they were enrolled.

Regarding our FLE instrument, ten items extracted from the FLE scale (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014) were used in the present study (Appendix). The items (number 3, 4, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 18 and 21 in the original scale) were selected because they captured "the reliability of the original scale without sacrificing the reliability of the measurement" (Dewaele et al., 2019, p. 7). The items included reflect both private and social sources of FLE (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2016). Internal consistency of the 10 items, as measured by Cronbach alpha coefficient, was high (.85) (internal consistency of the 21 items Dewaele and MacIntyre's 2014 study was .86). Prior to the data collection, the complete FLE scale was translated and adapted to Spanish following the ITC guidelines for translating and adapting tests (2nd Ed.) (International Test Commission, 2018). The translation process was validated in a previous pilot questionnaire run on 101 participants (AUTHORS, in press) and it was based on the cross-cultural adaptation model laid out by Chapman and Carter (1979), which involved several stages: forward translations, forward translation reconciliations, harmonization, pilot testing/cognitive debriefing, pilot testing review/review of cognitive debriefing results and proofreading. This model was implemented

in order to minimize the influence of linguistic, cultural and psychological differences on the intended populations.

The 4-item Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS) (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999) in the Spanish version translated and validated by Extremera and Fernández-Berrocal (2014) was used (Appendix). Participants are asked to react to four statements that require them either to self-rate or to compare themselves to others on a 7-point Likert numerical scale. The wording of the anchor points depends on the question. Responses are averaged for an overall score (the fourth item is reverse coded) where high scores indicate high SH. The Cronbach alpha coefficient was high (.90) (Cronbach alpha coefficient for the SHS was .81 in Extremera and Fernández-Berrocal's [2014] study).

Data Analysis

Average scores on the 5-point scale were calculated for 10 items of the FLE scale. Scores ranged from 1 to the maximum 5. A one-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test revealed that the distribution was not normal ($Z = .07, p < .001$). A measure of global subjective happiness was also obtained. Scores ranged from 1 to the maximum 7. Average scores for subjective happiness were calculated. A one-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test revealed that the distribution was not normal ($Z = .09, p < .001$).

Spearman's rank correlation coefficients were calculated between the measures of FLE and those of SH. Effect sizes for r were interpreted according to Plonsky and Oswald's (2014) criteria. Confidence intervals for rho were calculated based on the Fisher r -to- z transformation. To test the significance of the difference between correlation values, the Fisher transformation was used, calculated according to Eid et al. (2011).

RESULTS

The results of the descriptive statistics can be seen in Table 3. FLE and SH were significantly correlated, although only a small positive relationship was found ($r_s = .189$, 95% CI [0.111, 0.265], $p < .001$) (Figure 1). Significant positive correlations between FLE and SH were found for both men and women, although the correlation was slightly stronger for men (Table 4). The difference between the correlation values for each group was .106. ($z = 1.193$ $p = .117$). Signifi-

cant positive correlations were found between FLE and SH for the young adults, and the mature adults and seniors groups (Table 3). In contrast, the older adolescents and the middle-aged adults groups, which were the groups with the lowest and the highest SH, respectively, showed no significant correlations. The strength of the correlations for age groups were generally weak, except for the mature adults and seniors groups, which was moderate (Table 4). Statistically significant differences were only found between the middle-aged adults and the mature

Table 3

Results of the descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics	FLE		SH	
	Mean (range: 1-5)	SD	Mean (range: 1-7)	SD
Female ($n = 432$)	4.27	0.48	5.30	1.10
Men ($n = 162$)	4.22	0.47	5.11	1.04
Older adolescents (16-19) ($n = 28$)	4.18	0.48	4.60	1.21
Young adults (20-39) ($n = 203$)	4.16	0.51	5.15	1.14
Middle-aged adults (40-49) ($n = 176$)	4.26	0.44	5.40	1.02
Mature adults and seniors (50+) ($n = 187$)	4.29	0.46	5.32	0.97
Up to A2 ($n = 291$)	4.23	0.48	5.28	1.07
B1 ($n = 209$)	4.15	0.47	5.18	1.14
B2 ($n = 94$)	4.27	0.43	5.27	1.04
English ($n = 430$)	4.22	0.48	5.23	1.08
French ($n = 83$)	4.32	0.46	5.17	1.22
German ($n = 60$)	4.22	0.48	5.37	1.02

Figure 1

The relationship between Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) and Subjective Happiness (SH)

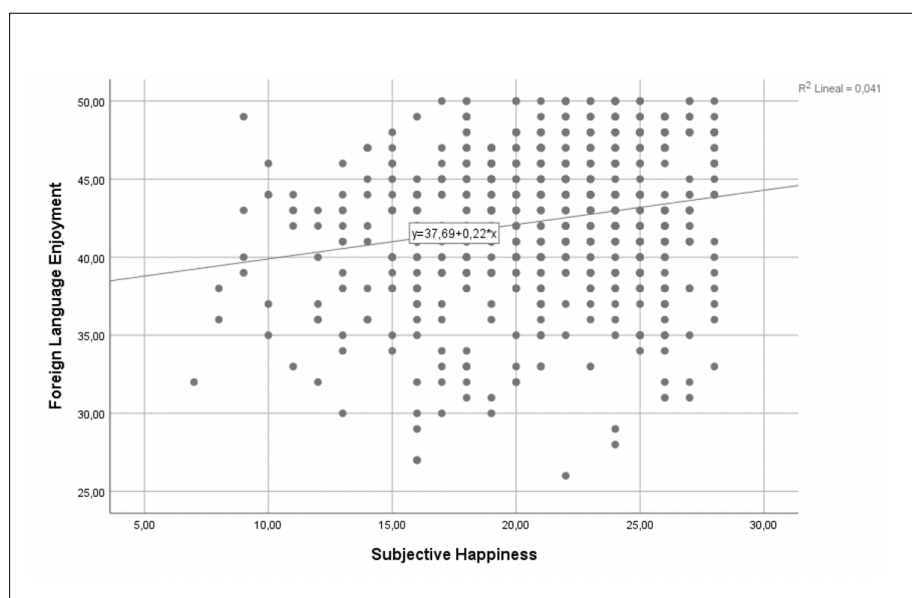


Table 4

Spearman correlation coefficient between FLE and SH, according to gender, age, self-reported level of competence and FL

	rho	95% CI	p
Female	.151	0.058, 0.241	.002
Male	.257	0.108, 0.395	.001
Older adolescents (16-19)	.259	-0.126, 0.576	.183
Young adults (20-39)	.190	0.054, 0.319	.007
Middle-aged Adults (40-49)	.039	-0.109, 0.185	.608
Mature adults and seniors (50+)	.317	0.182, 0.44	< .001
Up to A2	.220	0.108, 0.326	< .001
B1	.141	0.006, 0.271	.042
B2	.180	-0.023, 0.369	.083
English	.216	0.124, 0.304	< .001
French	.195	-0.021, 0.394	.076
German	.165	-0.092, 0.402	.210

adults and seniors (Table 5). Positive correlations were found between FLE and SH for all self-reported language competence groups. The strength of the association was weak. Correlation coefficients were statistically significant for the lowest and the middle competence level groups in the study (Table 4). No statistically significant differences were found between correlation values when comparing two language competence level groups at a time and two

FL groups (Table 5). Positive correlations between FLE and SH were found for the three most representative foreign languages in the data although the strength of the association was weak. The correlation coefficient was significant for the group of students of English alone (Table 4). When comparing the correlation values of two FL groups at a time no statistically significant differences were found (Table 5).

Table 5

Differences between correlation values (z, p) (age, self-reported competence level and FL groups)

Differences between correlation values (z, p)			
	Young adults (20-39)	Middle-aged adults (40-49)	Mature adults and seniors (50+)
Older adolescents (16-19)	.069 (0.343, .366)	.22 (1.056, .145)	-.058 (-0.298, .383)
Young adults (20-39)	-	.151 (1.477, .07)	.161 (-1.331, .092)
Middle adults (40-49)	-	-	.278 (-2.732, .003)
	Up to B1	B2	
Up to A2	.079 (0.895, .185)	.04 (0.347, .364)	
B1	-	.039 (-0.318, .375)	
	French	German	
English	.021 (0.18, .429)	.051 (0.375, .354)	
French	-	.03 (0.179, .429)	

DISCUSSION

A significant positive correlation between FLE and SH was found in the study. Our research thus identifies an association between FLE and an affective variable -that of subjective happiness- that has never been explored before. As the study adopts a cross-sectional, correlational design, causality cannot be assumed. However, life satisfaction being an indicator of the same underlying construct as happiness (Extremera & Fernández-Berrocal, 2014), it may be the case that SH affects the ca-

capacity to find pleasure with everyday life experiences, including FL learning. The directional nature of the association between FLE and SH has not been determined in our study, though, and although less plausible, reverse causality may apply. In a study by Dewaele and MacIntyre (2019), teacher-related variables accounted for more than a quarter of the variance in FLE. This means that, by boosting enjoyment in the classroom, the teacher may contribute to the learners' overall sense of happiness. In any case, further research is needed to confirm, or otherwise, these potential explanations.

Overall, FLE and SH shared 3.6% of variance. It is important to note, though, that the percentage of shared variance between FLE and SH is considerably higher than the overall shared variance in different subgroups. Thus, SH explains 6.6% of FLE in male students (versus 2.3% of FLE in female students), 6.7% in the older adolescent group and 10% in mature adults and seniors. Previous studies have also found that the relationship between FLE and other variables -including emotional variables- differ by age. For example, Dewaele and Dewaele (2017) identified changes in the predictors of FLE across age groups in a study with teenage learners, with the teacher exerting a greater effect on the FLE of older learners, and Dewaele (2021) showed that FLE was a predictor factor for FL performance in secondary school students but not in university students. It is interesting to note that, in the older adolescent group, with the lowest level of SH among the four groups, and in the middle-aged adult groups, with the highest level of SH, no significant correlations between FLE and SH were found. Although the sample size in the older adolescent group may have had an effect on significance, as the smaller the sample size the less likely a study will find a significant relationship if one exists (Kirk, 1996), these results may indicate that, below or beyond a certain level of SH, the association between this construct and FLE may be negligible. Nonetheless, only further research could confirm this speculation. Additionally, the percentage of shared variance between FLE and SH also varies by level of competence (e.g., 4.8% for up to A2 learners vs. 1.9% for B1 learners) and language (e.g., 4.6% for English as a FL learners vs. 3.8% French as a FL learners). Our study results also suggest that personality variables may relate to the learners' FLE differently depending on learner-internal factors such as age, gender, competence level and foreign language. These findings are undoubtedly worthy of further research.

Some limitations need to be acknowledged when interpreting results. First, participants come from a specific formal context, the OLS, a Spanish public institution which provides foreign language teaching to students aged 16 and above. Adult FL learners from other geographical or educational backgrounds, informal adult FL learners or learners studying a FL at private institutions are not represented in the data and they may have a different experience of FLE. Studies including other populations should be conducted in order to verify or refute these results. Secondly, not only further quantitative research that infers causality, but also mixed and qualitative approaches are needed to investigate the associations between FLE and other factors, including SH. And, finally, studies are also needed on how SH and other factors interact and jointly affect FLE. These limitations notwithstanding, our study opens a new line of investigation into affective and individual factors related to FLE by exploring the association with one more general personal affective factor that had remained so far unexplored. It contributes to clarifying the interconnections between FLE and other general psychological factors and, simultaneously, to establishing its specificity. Finally, the wide range of participant ages and the number of participants beyond their

twenties make the sample more representative of the population of adult FL learners than is usually the case in studies of FLE.

CONCLUSION

The present study has examined the association between enjoyment and subjective happiness in Spanish adult FL learners and how this association varies according to age, gender, FL, and level of competence in the FL, which had never been investigated. By so doing, this study contributes to the line of research seeking to identify the relationship between personality variables and FLE. Additionally, it contributes to broadening the understanding of how different learner-internal factors impinge on the relationship between FLE and happiness in a sample that is more representative of the adult population of FL learners than is typically the case in studies of FLE due to the wide range of participant ages and the amount of participants over the age of twenty.

In our study, we found a statistically significant positive correlation between FLE and SH. Although, given the characteristics of the study, a causal relationship and the direction of causality cannot be assumed, we have suggested that happiness may have an impact on one's ability to enjoy life's pleasures, including FL learning. Additionally, the limited shared variance between FLE and SH indicates the distinctiveness of the former concept while also elucidating its relationships with other broad psychological factors. Furthermore, different patterns of correlations between FLE and SH were also found across gender, age, and language competence level groups. This evidence suggests that the relationship between FLE and SH may operate differently across groups of FL learners. Although further research is needed to confirm or refute our findings in different FL learner populations and contexts, to determine the significance of the findings, and to establish the causality of the relationship between FLE and SH, our investigation contributes to expanding the study of Positive Psychology in the field of FL by exploring its association with happiness and the learner factors that affect this relationship.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

None declared ■

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Elvira Barrios: conceived and designed the analysis, designed the method and its analysis, contributed data or analysis tools, performed the analysis, wrote the paper.

Irene Acosta-Manzano: designed the method and its analysis, contributed data or analysis tools, performed the analysis, wrote the paper.

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APPENDIX

Escala de disfrute en el aprendizaje de una lengua extranjera

The foreign language enjoyment scale (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014) was translated by AUTHOR 1 and AUTHOR 2.

¿En qué medida está de acuerdo con las siguientes afirmaciones? Responde conforme a la siguiente escala: Muy de acuerdo / De acuerdo / Indeciso/a / En desacuerdo / Muy en desacuerdo

1. No me aburro en la clase de lengua extranjera.
2. Disfruto la clase de lengua extranjera.
3. Soy un miembro valorado de la clase de lengua extranjera.
4. En la clase de lengua extranjera, me siento orgulloso/a de mis logros.
5. En la clase de lengua extranjera hay un ambiente positivo.
6. Me resulta atractiva la idea de hablar una lengua extranjera.
7. La clase de lengua extranjera es divertida.
8. Mis compañeros y compañeras son agradables.
9. Hay buen ambiente en la clase de lengua extranjera.
10. En la clase de lengua extranjera nos reímos mucho.

Escala de felicidad subjetiva

The subjective happiness scale (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999) was translated and validated by Extremera and Fernández-Berrocal (2014).

1. En general, me considero una persona...
1 = No muy feliz / 2 / 3 / 4 / 5 / 6 / 7 = Muy feliz
2. Comparado con la mayoría de la gente que me rodea, me considero...
1 = Menos feliz / 2 / 3 / 4 / 5 / 6 / 7 = Más feliz
3. Algunas personas suelen ser muy felices. Disfrutan la vida a pesar de lo que ocurra, afrontando la mayoría de las cosas. ¿En qué medida se considera una persona así?
1 = Nada en absoluto / 2 / 3 / 4 / 5 / 6 / 7 = En gran medida
4. Algunas personas suelen ser muy poco felices. Aunque no están deprimidas, no parecen tan felices como ellas quisieran. ¿En qué medida se considera una persona así?
1 = Nada en absoluto / 2 / 3 / 4 / 5 / 6 / 7 = En gran medida