

Article**Foreign Language Enjoyment and Self-Efficacy across Academic Progression: Evidence from Second- and Fourth-Year ELT Students**

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Abstract

Grounded in positive psychology, this study investigates the relationship between foreign language enjoyment (FLE) and self-efficacy among undergraduate students in an English Language Teaching (ELT) program in Türkiye. Although both constructs have been widely examined in second language acquisition research, their interplay within teacher education contexts remains underexplored. The study aimed to (i) examine the association between FLE and self-efficacy, (ii) compare these constructs across academic year levels, (iii) test the predictive role of enjoyment in shaping self-efficacy, and (iv) examine whether academic year moderates the relationship between FLE and self-efficacy. Participants were 143 ELT undergraduates (75 second-year, 68 fourth-year) who completed the Foreign Language Self-Efficacy Scale and the Short Form of the Foreign Language Enjoyment Scale. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlations, independent-samples t-tests, and regression analyses. Results indicated that students reported moderately high levels of both enjoyment and self-efficacy, with fourth-year students scoring higher than their second-year peers. Correlation analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between the two constructs, suggesting that students who experienced greater enjoyment also reported stronger efficacy beliefs. Regression results further showed that enjoyment significantly predicted self-efficacy, with teacher-related enjoyment emerging as the strongest subdimension predictor. The predictive effect of FLE on self-efficacy was more pronounced among fourth-year students, highlighting developmental progression across academic stages. These findings highlight the importance of fostering enjoyment in ELT programs as a means of strengthening learners' confidence and supporting their academic and professional growth.

Keywords

Foreign language enjoyment, self-efficacy, positive psychology, ELT undergraduates, teacher education

Introduction

The last decade has seen a shift in second language acquisition (SLA) research towards the direction of positive psychology-inspired approaches, which in turn focus on the strengths that allow the learners to blossom in lieu of the difficulties presented in language acquisition (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015; MacIntyre & Mercer, 2014). Within this framework, affective and cognitive constructs like Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) and foreign language self-efficacy have become valuable indicators of learners' motivational patterns, engagement levels, and achievement. Both constructs prove highly relevant in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) setting in which persistence and resilience become determinants of the learner's success.

The definition of FLE describes positive emotional experiences that students undergo through interactions with teachers and peers and their learning activities (Botes et al., 2021; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). Studies confirm that individuals maintain their work activities and build resilience through enjoyment because it enhances their mental concentration while reducing their feelings of anxiety and boredom (Dewaele et al., 2018; Zhao & Wang, 2025). The study by Li (2025) demonstrates that teacher enthusiasm creates better student enjoyment, and Guo and Qiu (2022) demonstrate how teacher immediacy through verbal and non-verbal communication enhances student enjoyment and confidence. The social aspect of enjoyment benefits from peer collaboration and positive classroom environments, which contribute to higher student participation and better academic performance (Al-Dosari et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2024).

According to Bandura's (1997) social cognitive theory, self-efficacy describes learners' belief in their capacity to perform language-related tasks. Research shows that people with high self-efficacy demonstrate better communication skills, maintain their effort in difficult work, and use effective strategies (Kim & Cha, 2017; Zheng et al., 2017). The development of pre-service teachers depends heavily on self-efficacy because it influences their academic achievement and future instructional quality (Genç et al., 2016; Şener & Erol, 2017). The study by Yang and Lian (2023) shows that self-efficacy forms a complex bond with enjoyment, which determines student achievement.

A growing body of research establishes the relationship between these two elements. Oyama (2022) demonstrated that students who enjoy learning will both stay engaged in their studies and achieve better vocabulary results. The research by Zhao and Wang (2025) demonstrates that student achievement emerges from the interaction between enjoyment levels and boredom levels. Control-value theory has further explained how positive emotions, when combined with strong efficacy beliefs, create reinforcing cycles of engagement and persistence (Zou et al., 2025). EFL students experience increased confidence when they enjoy their learning process, and students who have strong self-efficacy gain better results from enjoyable classroom activities.

Despite these advancements, the relationship between these constructs has not received sufficient study within the unique psychological landscape of ELT undergraduates in Türkiye. Unlike general language learners in ESL or high-immersion settings, these pre-service teachers navigate a high-stakes teacher-training curriculum where linguistic mastery is a professional requirement rather than just an academic goal (Genç et al., 2016; Merç 2015). Furthermore, the Turkish EFL context, characterized by limited immersion opportunities, presents a distinct environment where the interaction between affect and cognition may function differently than in elective-learning settings (Yeşilçınar & Erdemir, 2023). Students in later stages of their degree may develop stronger linguistic competence and greater pedagogical experience, potentially leading to higher levels of both enjoyment and self-efficacy (Ishida et al., 2024; Wu, 2024). Comparing second- and fourth-year ELT students thus offers a unique opportunity to examine how these constructs are situated across the teacher education trajectory.

In addition to examining direct associations, the present study also considers whether academic stage may shape the strength of the relationship between enjoyment and self-efficacy. Drawing on Control-Value Theory (Pekrun, 2006), which emphasizes the dynamic interplay between affect and perceived control over time, it is plausible that as students accumulate mastery experiences and pedagogical exposure, enjoyment may become more strongly aligned with

efficacy beliefs. Therefore, academic year is conceptualized not only as a grouping variable but also as a potential moderator of the FLE-self-efficacy relationship.

Building on this context, the current research pursues four main objectives: (i) to explore the association between FLE and self-efficacy among Turkish ELT undergraduates, (ii) compare these variables across second- and fourth-year students, (iii) test the predictive role of enjoyment in shaping self-efficacy, and (iv) examine whether academic year moderates the relationship between FLE and self-efficacy. Based on these aims, the study poses the following research questions.

1. What is the relationship between FLE and self-efficacy among ELT undergraduates in Türkiye?
2. Do second-year and fourth-year ELT students differ significantly in their levels of FLE and self-efficacy?
3. To what extent does FLE predict self-efficacy in this population?
4. Does academic year moderate the relationship between FLE and self-efficacy?

This study contributes to the field of SLA by extending established frameworks such as Control-Value Theory into the context of teacher education. First, it moves beyond simple correlation and direct prediction by testing whether academic stage moderates the functional relationship between enjoyment and self-efficacy. Second, it foregrounds the dual identity of ELT students as both language learners and future practitioners, situating affective variables within a professional training framework. Finally, by examining the relative contribution of teacher-related enjoyment, the study offers pedagogical insights relevant to TESOL teacher education in non-Anglophone contexts.

Literature Review

Positive Psychology and SLA

The emergence of positive psychology has significantly shifted the focus of second language acquisition research from a preoccupation with learner deficits toward an exploration of the psychological resources that facilitate language development. Earlier work largely emphasized negative affective variables such as anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986), which often portrayed learners through a deficit lens. Positive psychology, by contrast, highlights learners' strengths, focusing "towards the positive sides of individuals' experiences" (Oxford, 2016a, p. 12).

Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) established positive psychology as the scientific field which examines human flourishing and this approach has led to a "positive renaissance" in SLA research according to MacIntyre and Gregersen (2012). The research in this field has studied how emotions like enjoyment, hope, resilience, and grit affect students to keep going and succeed (Dewaele et al., 2018; Botes et al., 2020). The EMPATHICS model developed by Oxford (2016b) established a complete system that shows how nine connected elements, like emotions, motivation, perseverance, and self-related factors including self-efficacy, work together to promote learner development. Oxford (2016a) highlighted the requirement for more studies that would analyze the connections between these constructs in various contexts.

The following research revealed that positive emotions function to counteract negative emotions, which produces improved communication outcomes. The study by Dewaele et al. (2025) demonstrates that enjoyment functions as a positive element which decreases anxiety and boredom to boost learner involvement and spoken language ability. Similarly, self-efficacy has emerged as a central self-factor regulating learners' confidence, willingness to

communicate, and strategy use (Zheng et al., 2017; Kim & Cha, 2017). The research shows that affective and cognitive strengths significantly contribute to second language acquisition processes. In this context, the present study focuses on two interrelated constructs, FLE and *self-efficacy*, to better understand their interaction and development in ELT programs in Türkiye.

Foreign language enjoyment

FLE refers to the positive emotional feeling in the learning setting resulting either from individual development, favorable teacher-student relationships, or relationships among students (Dewaele et al., 2018; Botes et al., 2021). FLE represents a complex, multidimensional positive emotion that stems from both individual growth and the quality of classroom social interactions. The Short Form of the Foreign Language Enjoyment Scale (S-FLES) captures three dimensions; teacher appreciation, personal enjoyment, and social enjoyment (Botes et al., 2021), depicting the multi-dimensional characteristic of this construct.

Research into FLE has underscored its role as a multifaceted positive emotion that significantly impacts the language learning experience. Learners with higher FLE indicate greater motivation, willingness to communicate, and resilience against negative affect (Dewaele et al., 2025; Zhao & Wang, 2025). Teacher-related variables appear especially influential in FLE. For example, Li (2025) showed that teacher enthusiasm strongly shapes enjoyment. Similarly, Guo and Qiu (2022) demonstrated that teacher immediacy fosters both enjoyment and confidence, and Solhi et al. (2024) found that teachers' own enjoyment can spill over to students, enhancing willingness to communicate. Social dimensions of FLE were also found to be influential in engagement. Collaborative climates and peer support contribute to stronger engagement and a sense of belonging (Al-Dosari et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2024).

FLE has also proven to be a robust predictor of achievement. Oyama (2022) indicated that FLE had predicted both vocabulary learning and engagement, and Wu (2024) revealed that enjoyment remains relatively stable over time, suggesting its resilience as a psychological resource. Drawing on control-value theory (Pekrun, 2006), several studies have argued that enjoyment functions as a positive activating emotion that maintains motivation and achievement by fostering deeper investment in language learning (Zou et al., 2025).

Self-efficacy in language learning

Self-efficacy, a core construct in Bandura's (1997) social cognitive theory, refers to individuals' beliefs in their capacity to successfully perform specific tasks. In SLA, self-efficacy has been linked to persistence, willingness to communicate, strategy use, and higher achievement (Zheng et al., 2017; Kim & Cha, 2017).

Self-efficacy serves as a primary cognitive regulator of learner persistence and performance by determining how individuals assess their own capacity to succeed in language-related tasks. Multiple sources contribute to the development of self-efficacy. Mastery experiences, such as proficiency gains, represent the most powerful influence (Kim & Cha, 2017). Social persuasions in the form of teacher feedback and peer encouragement also fortify students' beliefs (Genç et al., 2016; Şener & Erol, 2017). Furthermore, affective states further shape efficacy; for example, positive emotions like enjoyment strengthen confidence, while anxiety undermines it (Chen & Shu, 2024).

Research in EFL contexts consistently underscores the importance of self-efficacy. Turkish students with higher efficacy beliefs report higher motivational orientations and effort

consistency (Şener & Erol, 2017). Similarly, Liu and Liu (2024) reported that high-performing Chinese learners attributed their success to strong self-efficacy and self-pride. Overall, such findings give prominence to self-efficacy both as a cognitive appraisal and an affective resource that interacts with other emotional experiences.

The interrelationship between enjoyment and self-efficacy

The relationship between FLE and self-efficacy has attracted growing attention in applied linguistics. Theoretical frameworks such as Control-Value Theory propose that enjoyment and self-efficacy are dynamically interconnected rather than independent constructs. Learners who perceive greater control over learning tasks are more likely to experience enjoyment, and these positive emotional experiences may, in turn, be associated with stronger efficacy beliefs and sustained engagement (Shehzad et al., 2022; Yang & Lian, 2023). Empirical studies support this reciprocal alignment. For example, Oyama (2022) found that enjoyment was linked to engagement and vocabulary development through enhanced self-beliefs, while Zhao and Wang (2025) demonstrated that enjoyment interacts with boredom in shaping achievement trajectories.

Beyond direct associations, recent research situates enjoyment and self-efficacy within broader affective-cognitive networks. Studies grounded in control-value perspectives indicate that these constructs jointly relate to engagement, grit, and communicative outcomes (Jin, 2024; Zou et al., 2025). For instance, Zolfaghari et al. (2025) showed that teaching enjoyment combined with grit supported loving pedagogy, while Lee (2022) found that enjoyment and grit together predicted willingness to communicate. These findings suggest that enjoyment and efficacy beliefs function as interdependent components within a larger motivational system rather than isolated predictors.

Cross-cultural evidence also highlights this relationship. Dewaele and MacIntyre (2016) showed that enjoyment enhances learners' efficacy and engagement, while anxiety diminishes them. More recently, Dewaele and Li (2021) found that enjoyment consistently outweighs anxiety in predicting positive outcomes, suggesting that fostering enjoyment can indirectly strengthen self-efficacy. However, most of this evidence comes from Asian or European contexts (Oyama, 2022; Zou et al., 2025), leaving Turkish ELT undergraduates relatively underexplored. Given their dual identity as language learners and future practitioners, these students navigate a unique space where their own affective experiences, such as enjoyment, directly inform their emerging professional self-efficacy. Examining this interaction within the Turkish ELT context is therefore critical for understanding how teacher education programs can foster both linguistic and professional resilience.

Developmental differences across years

Academic progression provides a critical lens for understanding how affective and cognitive variables are reshaped as learners gain more linguistic and pedagogical experience through their academic programs. Senior students, with greater linguistic competence and pedagogical exposure, may demonstrate higher levels of enjoyment and self-efficacy than their junior counterparts (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Wu, 2024; Ishida et al., 2024). For example, longitudinal studies show that positive emotions like enjoyment remain stable yet may deepen with greater experience (e.g., Wu, 2024), while motivational constructs such as the ideal L2 self and self-efficacy tend to strengthen through accumulated success and external influences (e.g., Ishida et al., 2024).

Despite these insights, comparative studies within ELT programs remain limited. Wang et al. (2021) note the scarcity of longitudinal and year-level comparisons in SLA, especially in non-Anglophone contexts. By comparing second- and fourth-year ELT students, the present study aims to capture developmental differences that may reveal how enjoyment and self-efficacy evolve across the teacher education trajectory in Türkiye.

Methodology

Research design

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional design to examine the relationship between FLE and *foreign language self-efficacy* among undergraduates in an ELT program. The design also enabled comparisons between second- and fourth-year students, providing insights into potential developmental differences.

Participants

The participants were 143 undergraduate students enrolled in a four-year ELT program at a public university in Türkiye. The curriculum for the second-year cohort ($N=75$) primarily focuses on advanced language proficiency and introductory pedagogical theory, while the fourth-year cohort ($N=68$) is engaged in advanced teaching methods and practical school experience (practicum). This distinction allows for a comparison across different academic stages within the teacher education trajectory. Recruitment was based on convenience sampling from intact classes during scheduled sessions. Participation was voluntary, no incentives were offered, and all students provided written informed consent. The relatively balanced distribution across year groups allowed meaningful group comparisons.

The participants had to be full-time undergraduate students officially enrolled in the ELT program, registered as either second-year or fourth-year students at the time of data collection, and actively attending courses conducted primarily in English. These criteria ensured that all participants had substantial exposure to EFL instruction and shared a comparable academic and professional orientation as prospective English language teachers.

The study received ethical approval from the Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli University Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee (Approval No. 2025.11.386, Date 31.10.2025) and was conducted in line with institutional and national research ethics guidelines.

Instruments

Foreign Language Self-Efficacy Scale (FLSES). Adapted from Piniel and Csizér (2013), the FLSES consists of nine items assessing learners' perceived ability across speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree), with higher scores reflecting stronger self-efficacy beliefs. Previous research has reported satisfactory reliability ($\alpha > .80$; Piniel & Csizér, 2013). In the present study, internal consistency was good ($\alpha = .83$).

Short Form of the Foreign Language Enjoyment Scale (S-FLES). Developed by Botes et al. (2021), this nine-item instrument measures three dimensions of FLE: *Teacher Appreciation*, *Personal Enjoyment*, and *Social Enjoyment*. Items are rated on the same 5-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating greater enjoyment. Prior studies have demonstrated strong psychometric reliability ($\alpha > .85$). In this study, the overall scale demonstrated high reliability ($\alpha = .85$), and subscale reliabilities were acceptable: Teacher Appreciation ($\alpha = .81$), Personal Enjoyment ($\alpha = .78$), and Social Enjoyment ($\alpha = .77$).

Both instruments were administered in their original English versions to maintain conceptual integrity, as the ELT student population possesses the advanced linguistic proficiency required to process the items accurately. To ensure cultural and conceptual suitability, the scales were reviewed by two independent experts in ELT and applied linguistics, who confirmed that the items were transparent and appropriate for the Turkish teacher education context without the need for linguistic modification.

Procedure

Data collection took place during regular class hours with the permission of course instructors. The purpose of the study was explained to students, and confidentiality and anonymity were assured. Paper-and-pencil questionnaires were completed in approximately 15 minutes, and all forms were collected immediately. This procedure yielded a 100% response rate.

Data analysis

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 23). Prior to analysis, the dataset was screened for missing values and outliers, and assumptions of normality and homogeneity of variance were checked. While Likert-scale data are inherently ordinal, Pearson's correlation was deemed appropriate as the item responses were aggregated into composite scores, which approximated an interval level of measurement. Assumption checks indicated that the data were approximately normally distributed with Shapiro-Wilk values exceeding .05 across all variables. Furthermore, skewness and kurtosis levels fell within the acceptable range of ± 1.5 , and variances were homogeneous according to Levene's test ($p > .05$). Given that the data met these parametric assumptions and the scales consisted of 5-point items, Pearson's r was utilized to maintain greater statistical power in examining the relationships between constructs.

Following these preliminary checks, descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) were computed to provide an overview of participants' levels of FLE and self-efficacy. Pearson correlation analyses were then conducted to examine the strength and direction of the relationship between the two constructs. To assess developmental differences, independent-samples t -tests were performed to compare second- and fourth-year students on both enjoyment and self-efficacy, and effect sizes (Cohen's d) with 95% confidence intervals were calculated. Then, simple linear regression analyses were carried out to test the predictive role of enjoyment on self-efficacy. In these models, the assumptions of linearity, homoscedasticity, and independence were checked. Standardized coefficients (β), adjusted R^2 values, and effect sizes were reported. Statistical significance was set at $p < .05$ (two-tailed), and all inferential results were complemented with effect sizes and confidence intervals to ensure a more comprehensive interpretation. We additionally ran a multiple regression entering the three S-FLES subdimensions simultaneously, and a hierarchical moderation model testing the FLE $\times$ Year interaction (predictor variables were mean-centered prior to forming the interaction); incremental variance (ΔR^2), standardized coefficients (β), 95% CIs, and collinearity diagnostics (VIF) were reported.

Results

Descriptive statistics for FLE and foreign language self-efficacy across the two cohorts are presented in Table 1. Overall, participants reported moderately high levels of both constructs. Second-year students ($N = 75$) reported a mean FLE score of $M = 3.52$, $SD = 0.60$, and a self-efficacy score of $M = 3.44$, $SD = 0.65$. Fourth-year students ($N = 68$) reported higher levels of both FLE ($M = 3.77$, $SD = 0.57$) and self-efficacy ($M = 3.73$, $SD = 0.61$). Standard deviations across groups were relatively small, indicating homogeneity of responses within each year level.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for FLE and Self-efficacy by Year

Variables	Year	N	M	SD
FLE	2	75	3.52	0.60
	4	68	3.77	0.57
Self-Efficacy	2	75	3.44	0.65
	4	68	3.73	0.61

Correlation analysis

Pearson product-moment correlations were computed to examine associations between FLE and self-efficacy. A moderate, positive correlation was found between the two constructs, $r = .45$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.31, .57], suggesting that students who reported higher enjoyment also tended to hold stronger self-efficacy beliefs.

When analyzed by subdimensions, *Teacher Appreciation* showed the strongest association with self-efficacy ($r = .43$, $p < .001$), followed by *Personal Enjoyment* ($r = .37$, $p < .001$) and *Social Enjoyment* ($r = .34$, $p < .001$). These patterns indicate that students' perceptions of supportive and enthusiastic teachers are particularly influential in shaping their confidence in language learning.

Group comparisons

Independent-samples *t*-tests were conducted to compare second- and fourth-year students on enjoyment and self-efficacy. Results indicated that fourth-year students scored significantly higher on both constructs. For FLE, the difference was significant, $t(141) = 2.55$, $p = .012$, $d = 0.43$, 95% CI [0.09, 0.77], with a mean difference of 0.25 points. For self-efficacy, the difference was also significant, $t(141) = 2.75$, $p = .007$, $d = 0.46$, 95% CI [0.12, 0.80], with a mean difference of 0.29 points. These findings suggest modest but meaningful developmental differences between the two groups.

Regression analysis

A simple linear regression was conducted to determine whether FLE significantly predicted self-efficacy. The overall model was significant, $F(1, 141) = 37.10$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .21$ Adj. $R^2 = .20$, with enjoyment accounting for approximately 21% of the variance in self-efficacy. Enjoyment emerged as a significant positive predictor $B = 0.49$, $SE = 0.08$, 95% CI [0.33, 0.65], $\beta = .45$, $t = 6.09$, $p < .001$, suggesting a robust statistical link where higher reported levels of enjoyment corresponded with stronger self-efficacy beliefs within the sampled population.

Table 2

Regression Analysis Predicting Self-efficacy from FLE Subdimensions

Predictor	B	SE B	95% CI for B	β	t	p
Constant	1.85	0.35	[1.16, 2.54]	—	5.29	<.001
Teacher Appreciation	0.31	0.09	[0.13, 0.49]	.29	3.45	<.001
Personal Enjoyment	0.22	0.10	[0.02, 0.42]	.18	2.20	.030
Social Enjoyment	0.11	0.09	[-0.07, 0.29]	.09	1.21	.230

A multiple regression was conducted with the three subdimensions of FLE as predictors. The model was significant, $F(3, 139) = 16.21$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .26$, Adj. $R^2 = .24$, accounting for 26% of the variance in self-efficacy. Among the predictors, Teacher Appreciation was the strongest and most consistent predictor ($B = 0.31$, $SE = 0.09$, $\beta = .29$, $t = 3.45$, $p < .001$). Personal Enjoyment also contributed significantly ($B = 0.22$, $SE = 0.10$, $\beta = .18$, $t = 2.20$, $p = .030$),

whereas Social Enjoyment did not reach statistical significance ($B = 0.11$, $SE = 0.09$, $\beta = .09$, $t = 1.21$, $p = .230$). These results suggest that teacher-related factors and learners' intrinsic satisfaction share a stronger statistical relationship with self-efficacy than peer-related enjoyment in this specific context.

Table 3

Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting Self-efficacy from FLE and Year

Predictor	B	SE B	95% CI for B	β	t	p
Constant	1.85	0.34	[1.18, 2.52]	—	5.44	<.001
Year	0.28	0.13	[0.02, 0.54]	.17	2.14	.034
FLE	0.44	0.09	[0.26, 0.62]	.40	5.02	<.001
FLE $\times$ Year	0.21	0.10	[0.01, 0.41]	.16	2.07	.041

A hierarchical regression was performed to test whether the predictive effect of FLE on self-efficacy varied by year. In Step 1, Year was entered; in Step 2, FLE was added; and in Step 3, the interaction term (FLE $\times$ Year) was included. The full model was significant, $F(3, 139) = 19.22$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .29$, Adj. $R^2 = .28$. Importantly, the interaction term was significant ($B = 0.21$, $SE = 0.10$, $\beta = .16$, $t = 2.07$, $p = .041$), indicating that the strength of the FLE-self-efficacy relationship differed by year group. The interaction added a small but significant increment in explained variance ($\Delta R^2 = .03$), and all predictors showed acceptable collinearity (VIFs < 2). A simple slopes analysis confirmed that while FLE positively predicted self-efficacy in both cohorts, the effect was stronger among fourth-year students ($\beta = .54$, $p < .001$) than among second-year students ($\beta = .37$, $p < .001$). This finding demonstrates that as students advance in their program, the association between enjoyment and self-efficacy appears more pronounced, suggesting a tighter coupling of affective and cognitive variables at later academic stages.

Discussion

This study set out to (a) examine the association between FLE and self-efficacy among Turkish ELT undergraduates and (b) compare second- and fourth-year students. Three broad findings emerged. First, FLE and self-efficacy were moderately and positively related, indicating that the more students enjoy their FL learning, the more efficacious they feel. Second, fourth-year students reported higher means on both constructs than second-year students. Third, FLE strongly predicted self-efficacy, with the *Teacher Appreciation* subdimension emerging as the most influential; moreover, the FLE→self-efficacy link was stronger for fourth-year than for second-year students.

The relationship between FLE and self-efficacy

The moderate association and statistically significant predictive relationship between FLE and self-efficacy can be interpreted through Control-Value Theory (Pekrun, 2006), which conceptualizes enjoyment as a positive activating emotion arising from perceived control and task value. Although the cross-sectional design precludes causal inference, the findings suggest that enjoyment and efficacy beliefs are meaningfully aligned within this population. Within this framework, enjoyment is not merely an accompanying feeling but a functional mechanism that sustains engagement and reinforces competence beliefs over time. The present findings therefore suggest that enjoyment may contribute directly to the consolidation of self-efficacy beliefs among ELT undergraduates.

While previous studies have shown that enjoyment predicts engagement and achievement (Oyama, 2022; Zhang et al., 2024; Jin, 2024) and mitigates anxiety and boredom (Dewaele et al., 2025; Zhao & Wang, 2025), the current findings extend this literature by positioning

enjoyment as a cognitive-affective input into efficacy formation in a teacher education context. This interpretation is also consistent with positive psychology perspectives in SLA, which emphasize the reciprocal strengthening of positive emotions and self-beliefs (MacIntyre & Mercer, 2014; Wang et al., 2021). From a broaden-and-build standpoint (Fredrickson, 2001), recurrent experiences of enjoyment may accumulate into durable psychological resources, including stronger efficacy beliefs. In this sense, enjoyment may precede or accompany positive academic outcomes, although longitudinal research would be required to establish temporal ordering.

Among the S-FLES subdimensions, *Teacher Appreciation* emerged as the strongest predictor of self-efficacy. This result aligns with research highlighting the pivotal role of teacher enthusiasm and immediacy in shaping learner enjoyment and engagement (Dewaele & Li, 2021; Guo & Qiu, 2022; Li, 2025; Solhi et al., 2024). However, rather than reiterating that teacher behaviors increase enjoyment, the present findings suggest a deeper mechanism: teacher-related enjoyment may function as a channel through which mastery experiences and social persuasion, identified by Bandura (1997) as primary sources of self-efficacy, are affectively reinforced (Kim & Cha, 2017; Zheng et al., 2017). In other words, pedagogical interaction appears to translate momentary enjoyment into enduring efficacy beliefs.

Personal Enjoyment also contributed significantly, whereas Social Enjoyment did not retain unique predictive power in the multivariate model. This pattern suggests that not all forms of enjoyment exert equal influence on efficacy formation. While peer-related enjoyment may foster belonging and communicative willingness (Lee, 2022; Jin, 2024), efficacy judgments in teacher education settings may depend more strongly on structured instructional feedback and perceived competence validation. This distinction contributes to a more differentiated understanding of FLE's multidimensional structure (Botes et al., 2021).

Developmental differences across year levels

Fourth-year students reported higher levels of both enjoyment and self-efficacy, and the significant FLE $\times$ Year interaction indicates that academic stage moderated the strength of their relationship. Rather than representing a simple linear increase in both constructs, this interaction suggests that the functional coupling between affect and cognition becomes stronger at later stages of teacher education. This finding refines previous developmental observations that enjoyment remains stable yet meaningful over time (Wu, 2024) and that motivational self-constructs strengthen with accumulated experience (Ishida et al., 2024).

From a Control-Value Theory perspective (Pekrun, 2006), senior students may perceive greater control over language tasks due to accumulated mastery experiences and practicum exposure. As perceptions of control intensify, enjoyment may more readily translate into strengthened efficacy beliefs, resulting in a tighter affect-cognition linkage. This interpretation is consistent with positive psychology accounts in SLA that emphasize the co-evolution of emotional and self-related variables across learning trajectories (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012; Wang et al., 2021).

Importantly, while these differences may reflect developmental progression, they could also stem from cohort effects or structural differences within the ELT curriculum. Nevertheless, the moderation analysis moves beyond simple group comparison by demonstrating that academic year alters not only the levels of enjoyment and efficacy but also the strength of their interrelationship. This contribution addresses calls for more nuanced contextual and stage-sensitive analyses in SLA research (Wang et al., 2021).

Implications for teacher education

The findings of this study carry several important implications for ELT programs, particularly in the context of teacher education. These insights offer critical value for TESOL teacher education contexts, where the goal is to prepare practitioners who are both linguistically competent and psychologically resilient. First, the strong predictive role of teacher-related enjoyment highlights the need to prioritize professional development practices that foster immediacy, enthusiasm, and supportive feedback, as these behaviors not only enhance enjoyment but also translate directly into stronger self-efficacy beliefs. Equally important is the design of classroom tasks that provide frequent and credible mastery experiences, since such experiences link enjoyment episodes with tangible evidence of capability and growth. Programs should also pay attention to the multidimensional nature of enjoyment: while teacher appreciation and personal enjoyment emerged as the most influential predictors of self-efficacy, monitoring social enjoyment remains useful for ensuring students' sense of belonging and engagement. Moreover, observed differences between second- and fourth-year students suggest that interventions should be tailored to learners' academic stages—early in their training, broad strategies to cultivate enjoyment may be essential to sustain motivation, whereas in later stages, programs should deliberately align enjoyable learning experiences with authentic performance opportunities such as practicum teaching or public speaking tasks. By integrating these insights, ELT programs can better equip learners not only to succeed academically but also to enter their professional roles as confident, motivated, and resilient language teachers.

Conclusion

This study contributes to the growing body of research at the intersection of positive psychology and second language acquisition by examining the relationship between FLE and self-efficacy among ELT undergraduates in Türkiye. The findings highlight enjoyment appears to function as an important psychological correlate of self-efficacy rather than merely an incidental by-product of language learning. In particular, teacher-related enjoyment emerged as especially influential, underscoring the importance of pedagogical behaviors such as enthusiasm, immediacy, and supportive feedback in creating environments where learners feel both motivated and capable.

Observed differences between second- and fourth-year students further suggest that the role of enjoyment may vary across different stages of teacher education, becoming increasingly tied to learners' confidence as they reach the final phases of their pedagogical training. Taken together, these insights affirm that fostering enjoyment in language classrooms has significant implications for the development of self-efficacy, which in turn supports engagement, persistence, and achievement. By aligning instructional practices with the principles of positive psychology, ELT programs can better prepare future teachers who are not only skilled in language use but also resilient, motivated, and confident in their professional identities. While the cross-sectional nature of this study precludes definitive claims of developmental progression, these results underscore that the relationship between enjoyment and self-efficacy is not static across a four-year degree.

This cross-sectional, single-site study with convenience sampling limits causal inference and generalizability. Importantly, the differences noted between second- and fourth-year students should be interpreted as program-stage variations rather than individual developmental changes. These differences could be attributed to cohort effects, the attrition of less motivated students over time, or the differing nature of the curriculum in earlier versus later years of the ELT program. Reliance on self-report raises the possibility of common-method variance. Future work should: (a) adopt longitudinal or experience-sampling designs to capture reciprocal

dynamics; (b) test mediators (e.g., willingness to communicate, grit, strategy use) and moderators (e.g., proficiency, practicum intensity); (c) examine measurement invariance of FLSES and S-FLES across year levels; and (d) implement interventions that train teacher immediacy/enthusiasm and evaluate downstream effects on FLE→self-efficacy and achievement (cf. Guo & Qiu, 2022; Solhi et al., 2024; Zou et al., 2025).

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