

Motivation, Emotion, and Systemic Factors in Second Language Acquisition: A Narrative Review

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ABSTRACT: This narrative review synthesizes empirical and theoretical insights on how emotions—such as enjoyment and anxiety—shape language learning. Literature was collected from Scopus, PubMed, Google Scholar, and ERIC using keywords related to emotions, motivation, and affective dynamics in SLA. Positive emotions were found to enhance motivation, cognitive engagement, and communicative competence, while negative emotions, particularly anxiety, constrained attention and memory. Motivation emerged as a mediator linking emotions to achievement, and teacher–student interactions and peer support were identified as key drivers of emotional well-being. Cross-cultural evidence shows that systemic and cultural contexts significantly shape emotional experiences, while technology and affect-sensitive tools reduce anxiety and increase engagement. Policies that integrate socio-emotional learning, teacher training, and culturally responsive practices are essential. Future research should adopt longitudinal and mixed-method approaches to capture the dynamic interplay of emotions in SLA.

Keywords: Second Language Acquisition, Foreign Language Anxiety, Foreign Language Enjoyment, Affective Factors In Language Learning, Motivation In SLA, Teacher–Student Interaction, Affect-Sensitive Technology.



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INTRODUCTION

The acquisition of a second language (SLA) has traditionally been investigated through cognitive, sociolinguistic, and pedagogical frameworks. However, in recent decades, there has been an increasing recognition of the pivotal role of emotions in shaping learners' language trajectories. Emotions such as anxiety, enjoyment, and engagement are no longer considered peripheral but central to understanding the mechanisms through which learners acquire, process, and produce a new language. This affective dimension has become particularly salient as empirical research continues to highlight its influence on learner outcomes, ranging from willingness to communicate to sustained motivation and ultimate proficiency (Wang & MacIntyre, 2021; Yu, 2025; Gao & Fan, 2024). Anxiety, for example, has been consistently linked to reduced performance in language tasks due to its detrimental effects on cognitive processing and attentional resources, while positive emotions, such as enjoyment and engagement, have been shown to enhance motivation, resilience, and communicative competence (Wang et al., 2023; Wu et al., 2022; Jing-ping, 2021).

The emergence of Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) as a distinct construct underscores the paradigm shift towards valuing the affective domain in SLA. FLE has been identified as a counterbalancing force against the negative effects of anxiety and has been associated with enhanced cognitive engagement, increased self-efficacy, and greater willingness to participate in communicative activities (Yu, 2025; Jing-ping, 2021). The interplay between positive and negative emotions, therefore, constitutes a dynamic system that significantly contributes to learning outcomes. Research has shown that learners who report higher enjoyment levels are more likely to sustain effort and persistence in language learning, suggesting that affective factors are integral to understanding the complexities of SLA (Feng & Hong, 2022; Wang et al., 2023).

Global and regional evidence further substantiates the importance of affective factors in SLA success. Large-scale quantitative studies demonstrate that learners with higher enjoyment levels consistently achieve stronger proficiency scores (Bai et al., 2024; Fang & Tang, 2021). Cross-cultural investigations reinforce these findings, illustrating that emotional regulation and positive classroom climates are correlated with improved outcomes across diverse educational contexts (Zheng & Zhou, 2022; MacIntyre & Wang, 2021). In addition, demographic variables such as gender, age, and educational background have been shown to influence learners' affective experiences, thereby reinforcing the necessity for differentiated instructional strategies that account for emotional diversity (Fraschini & Tao, 2023; Wang et al., 2023).

The practical implications of these findings are evident in contemporary pedagogical practices. Educational researchers and practitioners advocate for integrating cooperative learning and emotion regulation strategies into classroom practice to foster a positive emotional climate. Such interventions not only improve linguistic outcomes but also enhance learner well-being, aligning language acquisition with holistic educational goals (Zheng & Zhou, 2022; Aydın & Tekin, 2023). This alignment is increasingly recognized as essential for cultivating motivation and engagement, particularly in contexts where language learning is compulsory or perceived as challenging. By embedding emotional considerations into pedagogy, educators can promote both academic success and emotional resilience among learners.

Despite growing acknowledgment of emotions in SLA, several challenges hinder their systematic integration into research and practice. A primary obstacle lies in the complexity of measuring emotions. Emotions are inherently subjective and fluctuate across individuals, cultures, and contexts, making them difficult to quantify with precision (Feng & Hong, 2022; Reilly, 2021). Moreover, teachers often lack formal training in emotional intelligence or strategies for regulating classroom emotions, which creates a gap between theoretical understanding and practical application (Derakhshan & Zare, 2023). This gap contributes to curricula and teaching practices that remain predominantly cognitive in orientation, thereby neglecting the affective dimension critical to holistic language education (Aydın & Tekin, 2023).

A further challenge arises from the limited empirical clarity regarding the relationships between specific emotional states and language learning outcomes. Although foreign language anxiety (FLA) has been extensively studied, its counterpart—foreign language enjoyment (FLE)—remains relatively underexplored (Yu, 2025). The dynamic fluctuations of emotions throughout the

learning process and their long-term impacts on achievement are not yet fully understood. Addressing this gap requires robust longitudinal studies capable of capturing the evolving interplay between emotions, cognition, and behavior (Wang et al., 2024). Without such evidence, pedagogical interventions risk being anecdotal rather than evidence-based.

Another significant issue relates to the underexplored role of individual differences in shaping emotional responses to language learning. Personality traits, cultural orientations, and institutional contexts may all affect how learners experience and manage emotions, yet systematic research in these areas remains sparse (Wang et al., 2023). The limited exploration of these variables reduces the capacity of SLA research to offer tailored pedagogical insights. Consequently, while affective dimensions are increasingly recognized, their integration into applied linguistic education often lacks methodological rigor and remains fragmented (Feng & Hong, 2022; Stegall, 2021).

These gaps in knowledge underscore the need for future research that employs robust methodological frameworks to capture the dynamic and multifaceted nature of emotions in SLA. A mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative measures with qualitative insights offers the potential to illuminate how emotions fluctuate over time and interact with instructional contexts (Wang et al., 2024). Such approaches would allow for the development of pedagogies that are both sensitive to emotional dimensions and empirically grounded, ultimately fostering more effective and sustainable language acquisition.

The present review aims to provide a comprehensive synthesis of the role of affective factors in SLA. Specifically, it seeks to analyze how emotions such as anxiety and enjoyment influence learners' motivation, engagement, and outcomes. By examining prior studies, this review endeavors to identify patterns, gaps, and points of convergence in the literature. It also aims to highlight the theoretical and practical implications of emotional factors in SLA, contributing to both research development and pedagogical innovation (Dewaele et al., 2019; Jing-ping, 2021).

The scope of this review encompasses a range of educational contexts, including primary, secondary, and higher education, as well as online learning environments. Particular attention is given to populations such as adolescents and adult learners, who have been the focus of much of the empirical research to date (Wang et al., 2023; Su, 2022). At the same time, emerging studies on children, including those with special educational needs, reveal additional dimensions of emotional involvement in language learning (Ke & Zhou, 2025; Li & Xu, 2019). The review also considers underrepresented cultural contexts, acknowledging the need for more cross-cultural investigations to broaden understanding of how emotions operate in diverse educational settings (MacIntyre & Wang, 2021; Li, 2022; Dolgunsöz, 2019). By doing so, this review aims to establish a foundation for future research and pedagogical practices that more fully integrate the emotional dimensions of second language acquisition.

METHOD

The methodology for this narrative review was designed to ensure a comprehensive and rigorous exploration of the role of emotions in second language acquisition (SLA). The process of literature collection was structured to identify and synthesize empirical studies, theoretical contributions, and systematic reviews that specifically examined affective factors in language learning. To achieve this, multiple databases were consulted, each selected for its relevance and scope in covering research across linguistics, psychology, education, and applied linguistics. The databases included Scopus, PubMed, Google Scholar, and ERIC. Scopus was chosen for its extensive coverage of international journals and conference proceedings, particularly in the fields of education and psychology. PubMed, although traditionally aligned with medical and psychological research, provided valuable insights into cognitive and affective processes that intersect with language learning. Google Scholar was employed for its breadth of coverage across disciplines, ensuring that interdisciplinary perspectives were captured. ERIC was included for its specialized focus on educational research, offering access to studies and reports that directly address teaching practices, classroom dynamics, and pedagogical implications of affective factors in SLA.

The search strategy was guided by a set of carefully constructed keywords designed to capture the multidimensional nature of emotions in SLA. Keywords included terms such as “emotion in SLA,” “affective factors in language learning,” “foreign language anxiety,” “foreign language enjoyment,” “motivation in second language acquisition,” “emotional regulation in language learning,” “teacher emotions in language education,” “positive psychology in SLA,” “emotion dynamics in language acquisition,” and “anxiety and performance in SLA.” These keywords were used individually and in combination to maximize retrieval of relevant studies. Boolean operators such as AND and OR were applied to refine searches, and quotation marks were employed to capture exact phrases, thereby ensuring both breadth and precision. This strategy was informed by previous research that emphasized the importance of affective variables in academic achievement, as illustrated by Starkey-Perret et al. (2017), and by more recent work exploring the dual roles of anxiety and enjoyment in shaping language learning experiences (Alenazi & Bensalem, 2024).

Once the initial pool of studies was retrieved, inclusion and exclusion criteria were established to ensure that only the most relevant literature was incorporated. Inclusion criteria consisted of studies published in peer-reviewed journals, written in English, and directly focused on the relationship between emotional factors and SLA. Both empirical studies, such as randomized controlled trials, cohort studies, and case studies, as well as narrative reviews and theoretical analyses, were considered eligible. Studies that examined related constructs such as motivation, emotional regulation, and teacher emotions were also included, provided that they explicitly connected these constructs to SLA outcomes. Exclusion criteria eliminated articles that were not peer-reviewed, not available in full text, or that addressed emotions in unrelated contexts without a clear focus on SLA. Opinion pieces, editorials, and non-academic sources were also excluded to maintain the academic rigor of the review.

The types of research included in this review reflected the diverse approaches scholars have taken to investigate emotions in SLA. Randomized controlled trials offered insights into causal

relationships between affective interventions and learning outcomes. Cohort studies provided longitudinal perspectives on how emotions evolve during the process of language acquisition. Case studies contributed detailed explorations of individual or classroom experiences, shedding light on the nuanced ways emotions influence learning. Narrative and systematic reviews were also included to integrate broader patterns across multiple studies. Collectively, these different research designs offered complementary perspectives, enabling a richer understanding of the complex dynamics of emotions in SLA.

The selection process for the literature followed a systematic screening protocol. Initial searches yielded a broad set of articles, which were then subjected to a two-stage screening process. In the first stage, titles and abstracts were reviewed to determine preliminary relevance. Articles that clearly addressed emotions in SLA or related affective constructs were retained, while those outside the scope were discarded. In the second stage, full texts of the retained articles were examined in detail to assess alignment with the inclusion criteria. During this stage, particular attention was paid to the operationalization of emotional constructs, the methodological rigor of the studies, and the clarity of their connection to SLA outcomes. This dual-stage process ensured that only studies with strong relevance and academic quality were included in the review.

In addition to relevance, studies were evaluated based on their methodological soundness. Criteria included the appropriateness of research design, sample size, validity and reliability of measurement instruments, and robustness of data analysis techniques. For example, studies that employed validated scales for measuring foreign language anxiety or enjoyment were prioritized, as were those that used mixed-method approaches to capture both quantitative and qualitative dimensions of emotional experiences. This careful evaluation allowed the review to balance breadth with depth, synthesizing findings from a wide array of contexts while maintaining a high standard of evidence.

The final body of literature incorporated in this review represented a diverse array of contexts, populations, and methodologies. Studies ranged from experimental investigations of emotion regulation interventions in classroom settings to large-scale surveys examining cross-cultural differences in emotional experiences of language learners. By integrating these varied perspectives, the methodology ensured that the review was both comprehensive and nuanced. It also allowed for comparisons across demographic variables such as age, gender, and educational background, thereby highlighting the heterogeneity of affective experiences in SLA.

This methodological approach was further strengthened by its iterative nature. As new themes emerged during the review process, additional targeted searches were conducted using refined keywords to capture emerging strands of research. For instance, when patterns related to teacher emotions and their influence on classroom climate were identified, supplementary searches using terms such as “teacher emotions in language education” were undertaken. Similarly, the growing focus on positive psychology in SLA prompted further searches on “foreign language enjoyment” and “emotion dynamics in language acquisition.” This iterative refinement ensured that the review remained current and sensitive to developments in the field.

In conclusion, the methodology of this narrative review combined systematic database searches, carefully defined inclusion and exclusion criteria, and rigorous evaluation of methodological quality to synthesize research on the role of emotions in SLA. By leveraging multiple databases, employing a broad yet precise set of keywords, and incorporating diverse research designs, this approach captured the complexity of emotional factors in language learning. The systematic yet flexible process allowed for a comprehensive review that integrates both established findings and emerging perspectives, thereby providing a robust foundation for analyzing the impact of affective factors on second language acquisition.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this narrative review are organized thematically to capture the central role of affective factors in second language acquisition (SLA). The results are presented across five major themes identified in the literature: the relationship between emotions, cognition, and motivation; the influence of teacher–student interaction and classroom emotional climate; the contribution of positive emotions such as enjoyment and peer support; the impact of language anxiety; and the role of technology and affective learning systems. Each theme is supported by empirical evidence and comparative perspectives across different cultural and educational contexts.

The relationship between emotions, cognition, and motivation has been extensively studied, with research consistently demonstrating the reciprocal connections among these constructs. Positive emotions such as enjoyment enhance learners' willingness to engage cognitively, thereby reinforcing memory, concentration, and problem-solving abilities. Conversely, negative emotions such as anxiety have been shown to disrupt cognitive processes, reducing the cognitive resources available for language learning (Wang & MacIntyre, 2021; Jing-ping, 2021). Empirical studies indicate that anxious learners often experience impaired performance in language tasks due to the burden of intrusive thoughts and fear of negative evaluation, which undermines concentration and working memory (Wang & MacIntyre, 2021). In contrast, learners experiencing enjoyment demonstrate greater self-confidence, which facilitates more effective engagement with linguistic tasks and leads to improved outcomes (Wu et al., 2022).

Motivation is identified as a critical mediator between emotion and learning achievement. Research by Wang et al. (2023) reveals that learners' emotional experiences strongly influence their motivational levels, which in turn drive their academic performance. Yu (2025) also highlights the dynamic interplay between foreign language anxiety (FLA) and foreign language enjoyment (FLE), both of which interact with motivation to shape SLA outcomes. Interventions that bolster motivation, such as self-regulation strategies and supportive classroom practices, have been found to mitigate the negative impact of anxiety while enhancing the positive effects of enjoyment, thus positioning motivation as a central mechanism linking affective experiences with academic success (Yu, 2025).

Teacher–student interactions and classroom emotional climate represent another crucial factor influencing affective experiences in SLA. Studies indicate that students' perceptions of their teachers' emotions directly affect their own affective states and engagement (Hong & Liu, 2025).

Supportive and empathetic teacher behaviors reduce classroom anxiety and foster positive emotions, creating an environment conducive to language acquisition. In classrooms where teachers express enthusiasm and provide emotional support, students are more likely to participate actively, experience enjoyment, and display resilience in overcoming learning challenges (Jing-ping, 2021). Comparative studies have further highlighted the importance of classroom climate across cultural contexts. Dewaele and Li (2021), for example, found that teacher enthusiasm and student emotions in Chinese EFL classrooms were strongly associated with enhanced engagement, underscoring the global significance of fostering positive classroom climates while also recognizing that cultural expectations mediate these dynamics.

The role of positive emotions, particularly enjoyment, and the contribution of peer support have emerged as central themes in the literature. Enjoyment fosters greater self-efficacy, enhances learners' perseverance, and promotes communicative willingness. Peer support serves as a reinforcing factor in cultivating enjoyment, as social interaction provides emotional reassurance and opportunities for collaborative learning. Pan and Yuan (2023) demonstrated that peer support positively influences learners' enjoyment of English language learning, with emotional self-efficacy acting as a mediator in this relationship. This finding underscores the importance of embedding collaborative learning structures within SLA classrooms. Cross-cultural comparisons reveal notable variations: studies in Europe and North America indicate that interactive, student-centered pedagogies enhance enjoyment, while in Asian contexts, where academic pressure is often more intense, enjoyment levels are comparatively lower despite similar instructional content (Cantas, 2024; Aydın & Tekin, 2023; Fang & Tang, 2021). These differences highlight the necessity of culturally responsive pedagogy that aligns instructional practices with learners' affective needs.

Language anxiety remains one of the most extensively studied negative emotions in SLA. It is consistently associated with reduced performance, avoidance behaviors, and diminished communicative competence. Research identifies multiple factors contributing to foreign language anxiety, including negative self-perceptions of ability, fear of negative evaluation, and uncertainty in social interactions (MacIntyre & Wang, 2021; Wu et al., 2022). Budzińska (2024) further emphasizes that unsupportive classroom environments and excessive competition exacerbate anxiety. Pedagogical practices that overemphasize evaluative tasks have also been found to heighten emotional discomfort among learners, as demonstrated by Tsiriotakis et al. (2017). Comparative global studies highlight cultural variations in anxiety experiences. Saito et al. (2018), for example, found that Japanese learners reported higher levels of foreign language anxiety than peers in the United States and the United Kingdom, attributable to cultural norms emphasizing academic performance and social conformity. Similarly, Wang et al. (2023) documented unique challenges faced by Chinese EFL learners, who reported heightened anxiety in highly competitive educational settings. These findings suggest that foreign language anxiety is shaped not only by individual psychological traits but also by broader educational and cultural systems.

Technology and affective learning systems represent an emerging dimension in SLA research. Innovative learning platforms, such as mobile tutoring systems, increasingly incorporate affective computing to detect and respond to learners' emotional states. Wu et al. (2022) demonstrated that affect-sensitive systems can analyze interaction data and emotional cues to adjust teaching materials and methods in real time, thereby promoting learner engagement and reducing anxiety.

Shi (2024) supports this finding, noting that emotion-responsive algorithms provide personalized feedback that fosters a more adaptive learning environment. Empirical evidence also indicates that the integration of technology enhances positive emotions and learning outcomes. Zheng and Zhou (2022) reported that digital tools reduce anxiety while increasing enjoyment in EFL classrooms, leading to higher academic performance. Wang et al. (2023) similarly found that learners using mobile applications reported greater satisfaction and engagement than those in traditional classrooms, directly correlating with improved linguistic outcomes. Furthermore, immersive technologies such as virtual reality and interactive mobile applications have been shown to enhance learners' motivation and enjoyment, thereby amplifying the emotional dimensions of SLA (Weng et al., 2024; Shi, 2024).

Taken together, the results highlight the profound influence of affective factors on SLA, mediated through cognitive processes, motivation, classroom dynamics, peer relationships, and technological interventions. While positive emotions enhance motivation and performance, negative emotions such as anxiety remain a significant barrier. Cross-cultural evidence reveals both universal patterns and culturally specific variations in how emotions are experienced and managed, suggesting that pedagogical practices must be tailored to contextual needs. The integration of technology into SLA represents a promising avenue for addressing affective dimensions, offering scalable solutions to enhance enjoyment and reduce anxiety. Overall, the findings underscore the necessity of recognizing and incorporating emotions into theoretical models and practical applications of second language acquisition, establishing a foundation for more effective and emotionally responsive language education.

The findings of this review corroborate earlier research that has consistently emphasized the centrality of affective factors in second language acquisition (SLA). The dual nature of emotions—positive and negative—has been widely documented as playing an instrumental role in shaping language learning outcomes. Positive emotions, such as enjoyment, have been shown to facilitate motivation, engagement, and persistence, while negative emotions, such as anxiety, undermine cognitive processing and contribute to avoidance behaviors (Wang & MacIntyre, 2021; Bai et al., 2024). This pattern is consistent with the conclusions of previous studies indicating that emotional states act as significant predictors of learners' willingness to communicate, their self-efficacy, and their capacity to sustain effort in language learning contexts (Jing-ping, 2021; Wu et al., 2022). The present synthesis reinforces these established findings by highlighting how emotions do not operate in isolation but interact dynamically with other psychological and contextual variables such as motivation, personality, and emotion regulation strategies (Li & Xu, 2019; Derakhshan & Zare, 2023).

Motivation emerges as a mediating construct that connects the effects of emotions with academic outcomes. The reviewed evidence supports the argument that positive emotional states stimulate intrinsic motivation, which subsequently enhances learners' cognitive investment and overall performance. Conversely, heightened foreign language anxiety (FLA) reduces motivational intensity, thereby diminishing engagement and achievement (Yu, 2025). Studies integrating models of motivation with affective constructs demonstrate that interventions focusing on sustaining motivation can mitigate the negative consequences of anxiety while amplifying the benefits of enjoyment (Wang et al., 2023). These results align with the growing consensus in SLA research

that calls for a holistic perspective which integrates affective, motivational, and cognitive dimensions to better explain learner variability and outcomes (Aydın & Tekin, 2023).

The systemic factors underlying SLA contexts also play a critical role in reinforcing or constraining the influence of affective variables. Educational policies and curricular frameworks are particularly influential in shaping how emotions are experienced and managed within classrooms. Systems that prioritize standardized testing and academic performance often inadvertently suppress the space available for emotional exploration, thereby intensifying learner anxiety and reducing opportunities for positive affective experiences (Wang et al., 2023; Aydın & Tekin, 2023). Conversely, curricula that incorporate socio-emotional learning elements and collaborative practices foster environments that promote emotional regulation, reduce anxiety, and enhance enjoyment. Cultural values further complicate these systemic effects. For instance, collectivist societies may impose pressures that heighten learners' fear of negative evaluation, while more individualistic cultures tend to value self-expression and emotional openness, which can mitigate the adverse effects of anxiety and encourage greater learner autonomy (Alenazi & Bensalem, 2024; Tabari & Wang, 2021). Thus, systemic factors must be recognized as both enablers and inhibitors of emotional integration in SLA pedagogy.

Teacher–student relationships and classroom emotional climates constitute another systemic dimension that mediates affective experiences in SLA. Evidence suggests that the degree of emotional support and enthusiasm expressed by teachers directly shapes learners' affective states and engagement (Hong & Liu, 2025; Dewaele & Li, 2021). When teachers cultivate positive classroom climates characterized by empathy, encouragement, and interactive learning, students are more likely to experience enjoyment and resilience in the face of challenges. In contrast, classrooms emphasizing rigid performance evaluations or punitive responses tend to exacerbate anxiety and undermine learners' willingness to participate (Tsiriotakis et al., 2017). This underscores the importance of training teachers not only in linguistic pedagogy but also in emotional competence and classroom management strategies that foster affective well-being.

Comparative perspectives across cultural and educational contexts provide additional insights into the systemic nature of affective factors in SLA. Studies in East Asian contexts often report higher levels of foreign language anxiety compared to Western counterparts, reflecting cultural expectations of academic excellence and conformity (Saito et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2023). In contrast, European and American contexts, which frequently employ interactive and learner-centered pedagogies, tend to generate greater levels of enjoyment and reduced anxiety (Cantas, 2024; Fang & Tang, 2021). These differences highlight the necessity for culturally responsive pedagogy that aligns affective interventions with local cultural norms and educational values. Failure to account for such differences risks implementing strategies that are misaligned with learners' social and emotional realities.

The role of technology in mediating affective dimensions of SLA represents a promising yet underexplored frontier. Emerging evidence demonstrates that affect-sensitive learning systems can detect and respond to learners' emotional states in real time, providing tailored feedback that enhances motivation and reduces anxiety (Wu et al., 2022; Shi, 2024). These findings indicate that technology not only supports cognitive and linguistic development but also actively contributes to shaping learners' emotional experiences. Furthermore, immersive technologies such as virtual

reality and interactive mobile platforms have been shown to foster engagement and enjoyment, thereby reinforcing their potential as affective tools in SLA (Zheng & Zhou, 2022; Weng et al., 2024). However, the integration of such technologies raises questions about accessibility, scalability, and the ethical use of emotional data, which require further scholarly and policy attention.

In terms of solutions, the literature strongly advocates for the incorporation of Positive Psychology principles into SLA pedagogy. Emphasizing the cultivation of positive emotions such as enjoyment, hope, and resilience has been found to not only improve linguistic outcomes but also promote learners' broader well-being (Wang et al., 2023; Zhou & Wang, 2024). Practical interventions include mindfulness-based approaches, game-based learning, and cooperative learning frameworks, all of which foster positive affective climates while reducing anxiety (Zhao & Wang, 2023; Xu & Zhang, 2023; Gao & Fan, 2024). Additionally, systematic training for teachers to develop emotional intelligence and classroom strategies tailored to students' affective needs is increasingly recognized as a critical component in overcoming barriers to effective language education (Derakhshan & Zare, 2023).

Despite these promising directions, several limitations within the current body of research must be acknowledged. Much of the literature relies on cross-sectional survey data, which, while valuable in identifying correlations, limits the ability to draw causal inferences regarding the relationships among emotions, motivation, and outcomes. Longitudinal and experimental designs remain underutilized but are necessary to capture the dynamic evolution of emotions throughout the language learning process (Wang et al., 2024). Additionally, the majority of research has focused on adolescent and adult populations in formal educational settings, leaving younger learners, learners with special educational needs, and informal learning contexts relatively underexplored (Ke & Zhou, 2025; Li & Xu, 2019). Cultural diversity in affective experiences is also insufficiently represented, with studies disproportionately concentrated in East Asian and Western contexts, while learners in regions such as Africa, South Asia, and the Middle East remain understudied.

Future research must address these limitations by adopting more robust methodological frameworks that integrate qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide deeper insights into the nuanced and fluctuating nature of emotions in SLA. Advances in affective computing and artificial intelligence also present opportunities to develop innovative tools for detecting, measuring, and responding to learner emotions, though these must be implemented with caution to avoid ethical concerns and unintended consequences (Verheyen et al., 2019; Cao et al., 2022; Soravia et al., 2016). Furthermore, the field would benefit from studies that examine the intersection of systemic factors—such as educational policy, cultural context, and technological infrastructure—with individual differences in affective experiences. By advancing research along these lines, scholars and practitioners can better understand the complexities of affective dimensions in SLA and develop pedagogical practices that are both evidence-based and culturally sensitive.

CONCLUSION

This narrative review demonstrates that emotions play a central role in shaping second language acquisition (SLA), operating in close interaction with cognitive processes, motivation, and systemic factors. The findings reveal that positive emotions, such as enjoyment, enhance learners' motivation, engagement, and communicative competence, while negative emotions, particularly anxiety, hinder memory, concentration, and language performance. Motivation consistently emerged as a critical mediator between emotions and outcomes, underscoring the importance of addressing affective dimensions to improve language learning effectiveness. Classroom dynamics, especially teacher–student interactions and peer support, were found to significantly influence learners' emotional experiences. Cross-cultural comparisons further highlighted that educational systems and cultural norms shape the degree to which emotions are experienced, with more supportive and interactive pedagogies fostering higher enjoyment and lower anxiety. The integration of technology, particularly affect-sensitive learning systems, presents promising avenues for creating responsive environments that enhance positive affect and reduce emotional barriers.

The urgency of integrating affective factors into SLA is evident, as existing educational policies and curricula often prioritize cognitive achievement over emotional well-being. Addressing this imbalance requires policy interventions that encourage socio-emotional learning, teacher training in emotional competence, and culturally responsive pedagogy. Additionally, future research should expand beyond well-studied populations by including younger learners, diverse cultural groups, and underexplored contexts. Employing longitudinal and mixed-method approaches will be crucial for capturing the dynamic interplay of emotions over time. By advancing understanding of affective dimensions in SLA and implementing evidence-based strategies such as fostering enjoyment, strengthening peer support, and leveraging technology, educators and policymakers can create emotionally supportive environments that lead to more equitable and effective language learning outcomes.

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