Promoting Second Language Learners' Well-Being: A Positive Psychology Review of Factors, Practices, and Directions

İkinci Dil Öğrencilerinin İyi Oluş Halini Desteklemek: Etkenler, Uygulamalar ve Yönelimler Üzerine Pozitif Psikoloji Temelli Bir İnceleme

Hanwei Wu (ORCID)

1. College of Foreign Studies, Hunan Normal University, Changsha, China, Email: whf0319@zufe.edu.cn

Abstract

In today's globalized society, learning a second language (L2) has transcended its instrumental role to become a transformative competency crucial for both societal participation and personal development. While traditional second language acquisition (SLA) research has long operated within a pathology-focused paradigm—prioritizing learners' errors, cognitive limitations, and affective barriers—this approach has overlooked the constructive interplay between psychological agency and learning outcomes. The emergence of positive psychology (PP) has catalyzed a paradigm shift toward a strengths-based approach in SLA, emphasizing learners' psychological resources as catalysts for well-being and proficiency. This conceptual review systematically examines five key individual promoters of L2 learners' well-being: positive emotions (i.e., enjoyment, pride), emotion regulation, resilience, mindfulness, and flow experience. The analysis further proposes pedagogical strategies for fostering these promoters in L2 classrooms. Finally, this review critically assesses limitations in the current literature and outlines future research directions. By bridging PP with SLA, this synthesis promotes the integration of linguistic competence with holistic learner well-being.

Keywords: Second Language Acquisition, Positive Psychology, Well-being, Individual Factors

Öz

Bugünün küreselleşmiş toplumunda, ikinci dil (L2) öğrenimi, toplumsal katılım ve kişisel gelişim için hayati öneme sahip, dönüştürücü bir yetkinlik haline gelmiştir. Geleneksel ikinci dil edinimi (SLA) araştırmaları uzun süre, öğrenicilerin hataları, bilişsel sınırlamaları ve duygusal engelleri ön plana çıkararak patolojik bir paradigmada faaliyet göstermiştir; ancak bu yaklaşım, psikolojik ajans ile öğrenme sonuçları arasındaki yapıcı etkileşimi göz ardı etmiştir. Pozitif psikolojinin (PP) ortaya çıkışı, SLA'da güçlü yönlere dayalı bir yaklaşıma yönelik bir paradigma değişimini tetiklemiş ve öğrenicilerin psikolojik kaynaklarını, iyi oluş ve yeterlilik için katalizörler olarak vurgulamıştır. Bu kavramsal inceleme, L2 öğrenicilerinin iyi oluşunu destekleyen beş ana bireysel faktörü sistematik bir şekilde incelemektedir: olumlu duygular (örneğin, keyif, gurur), duygu düzenlemesi, direnç, farkındalık ve akış deneyimi. Analiz ayrıca, bu faktörleri L2 sınıflarında geliştirmeye yönelik pedagojik stratejiler önermektedir. Son olarak, bu kavramsal inceleme, mevcut literatürdeki kritik sınırlamaları tanımlamakta ve gelecekteki araştırma yönelimlerini özetlemektedir. Pozitif Psikoloji ile İkinci Dil Edinimi (SLA) alanını birleştirerek bu sentez, dilsel yeterliğin bütüncül öğrenci iyi oluşuyla bütünleştirilmesini teşvik etmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İkinci Dil Edinimi, Pozitif Psikoloji, İyi Oluş, Bireysel Faktörler

Introduction

In today's globalized world, learning a second language (L2) is essential, particularly against the backdrop of post-pandemic educational transformations and the accelerating digital learning shifts that have reshaped global pedagogical landscapes (Wu & Pan, 2025). It enhances career opportunities, providing a competitive edge in multinational corporations, foreign trade, and international organizations, while also boosting employability and career advancement. Additionally, it improves international travel experiences, removes language barriers, fosters cross-cultural understanding, and enriches life (Akther, 2022). However, traditional second language acquisition (SLA) research, which has historically been grounded in a "deficit-oriented paradigm", has often focused too narrowly on the challenges and obstacles faced by learners (Horwitz, 1986). This approach tended to emphasize linguistic errors, anxiety, and cognitive limitations, while largely neglecting the complex, multifaceted relationship between psychological agency, learner motivation, and well-being.

This paradigm underwent a fundamental transformation with the emergence of PP—a discipline pioneered by Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) that shifted focus from pathological remediation to exploration of human strengths, thereby laying the theoretical foundation for paradigm innovation in SLA (MacIntyre & Mercer, 2014). Since its formal establishment in 1998, the field has progressively reconfigured educational praxis through a transformative lens of "from pathology repair to strength-based cultivation" (Wang et al., 2021). Initial investigations centered on affective dimensions (Dewaele & Macintyre, 2014), demonstrating how positive emotions amplify learning engagement and linguistic productivity. Subsequent in-depth research further revealed that learner well-being constitutes a complex emergent system dynamically shaped by multiple interacting psychological resources (Pan et al., 2023a; Wang & Wu, 2025).

A conceptual review is a type of literature review that synthesizes existing theoretical knowledge on a specific topic to generate new insights, clarify concepts, and identify gaps in the current research (Reese, 2023). It differs from traditional systematic reviews, which often focus on empirical evidence, by delving deep into theoretical frameworks, conceptual models, and scholarly discourses (Ayala, 2018). In this study, the conceptual review methodology involves systematically examining five key individual promoters of L2 learners' well-being: positive emotions (i.e., enjoyment, pride), emotion regulation, resilience, mindfulness, and flow experience. Adopting a PP lens, it aims to systematically deconstruct core individual determinants of L2 learners' well-being through theoretical synthesis, while proposing interdisciplinary pathways for scholarly advancement. The study situates itself within the evolving landscape of language education, where globalization-driven diversification and post-pandemic pedagogical adaptations have highlighted the need for holistic approaches that address both cognitive and affective learner needs (Wu & Liu, 2025).

The study holds dual significance: Theoretically, it enriches SLA frameworks by constructing a "strength-centered" model that complements existing explanatory paradigms. By foregrounding psychological capital—including constructs like emotion regulation and resilience—it bridges the gap between traditional deficit models and contemporary well-being research. Practically, it advocates pedagogical strategies grounded in psychological capital development, catalyzing the transformation of language classrooms from knowledge-transmission arenas to cognitive-affective synergy spaces. Against the backdrop of increasing demands for lifelong learning and intercultural competence in a digitized world, investigating how positive psychological constructs can concurrently enhance L2 learners' linguistic competence and subjective well-being carries profound implications for cultivating globally competent citizens equipped with lifelong learning capacities.

Positive Psychology in Second Language Acquisition

PP emerged as a transformative force in psychology towards the end of the 20th century, fundamentally shifting the discipline's focus from a predominant concern with pathology towards understanding human strengths, virtues, and flourishing (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Seligman, 2002). This paradigmatic shift, championed notably by Seligman during his APA presidency (1998), established three core pillars (see Figure 1): cultivating positive subjective experiences, fostering positive individual traits, and building positive institutions, all aimed at enhancing well-being (Seligman, 2018). More than just a chronological progression, the integration of PP into SLA represents a profound reconceptualization of key learner dimensions. Crucially, each pillar of PP offers distinct pathways for enhancing SLA:

Positive experiences (Pillar 1): This pillar focuses on cultivating positive emotions (e.g., enjoyment, curiosity, flow), engagement, and meaning. In SLA, this translates to pedagogical practices designed to foster enjoyment and intrinsic motivation in the language classroom. Activities that are personally relevant, challenging yet achievable, playful, and culturally engaging promote positive experiences. These experiences, as demonstrated by research, are not merely pleasant but are catalysts for learning: they broaden learners' cognitive and attentional resources (Fredrickson, 2003), enhance willingness to communicate, increase persistence in the face of difficulties, and ultimately lead to deeper processing and better long-term retention of linguistic material (Dewaele & Macintyre, 2016; MacIntyre & Mercer, 2014).

Positive individual traits (Pillar 2): This pillar emphasizes identifying and nurturing enduring character strengths and virtues, such as resilience, optimism, self-efficacy, hope, and gratitude – collectively referred to as psychological capital. In the SLA context, this means helping learners develop a growth mindset about language ability, build confidence (self-efficacy) in their capacity to learn and use the L2, cultivate optimism to view challenges as temporary and surmountable, and foster resilience to bounce back from setbacks (Li, 2025). Strengths-based interventions, reflective practices focusing on successes and effort, and explicit teaching of learning strategies all contribute to building these traits. Learners with higher levels of these positive traits (psychological capital) demonstrate greater agency, are more proactive learners, take more risks in communication, show greater perseverance, and report higher subjective well-being throughout their language learning journey (MacIntyre, 2021).

Positive institutions (Pillar 3): This pillar concerns creating environments and systems that nurture the development of positive experiences and traits. For SLA, this means designing classrooms and learning communities characterized by psychological safety, trust, mutual respect, collaboration, and belonging (Shao et al., 2020). Key elements include supportive teacher-student relationships (e.g., showing care, providing constructive feedback), positive peer interactions (e.g., collaborative tasks, peer support), inclusive classroom climates that value diversity and minimize anxiety, and school-wide policies that promote learner well-being. Such positive institutional environments act as facilitators: they protect learners from excessive stress and anxiety, create the safe space necessary for risk-taking and authentic communication, foster positive social connections that motivate learning, and provide the scaffolding needed for individual strengths to flourish. Research confirms that supportive environments significantly buffer against language anxiety and co-construct learner well-being and engagement (Pan et al., 2023b; Wang & Derakhshan, 2023).

Prior to PP's influence, much SLA research operated within a deficit-oriented framework, heavily focused on learner challenges, errors, and corrective strategies (Williams, 1991). This perspective often cast learners as passive recipients of instruction grappling with inherent difficulties. The advent of PP challenged this view, prompting a critical re-examination of fundamental SLA concepts:

Agency: PP redefines learner agency not just as the ability to act, but as the proactive use of psychological resources (e.g., hope, optimism, self-efficacy) to navigate challenges and pursue goals (Mercer, 2011). This perspective shifts the focus from simply overcoming obstacles to actively leveraging learners' internal strengths and building resilience throughout the learning process (MacIntyre, 2021). In this way, agency becomes closely tied to psychological capital (Pillar 2).

Emotion: While traditional SLA acknowledged anxiety, PP broadened the affective landscape to emphasize the catalytic role of positive emotions (e.g., enjoyment, curiosity, pride) (Dewaele & Macintyre, 2016; Fredrickson, 2003). Research demonstrated that these emotions are not peripheral but central: they broaden cognition, build enduring personal resources (the Broaden-and-Build theory), enhance engagement, facilitate deeper processing of input, encourage risk-taking in output, and ultimately foster greater linguistic productivity and perseverance (MacIntyre & Mercer, 2014; Saito et al., 2018). Affect is thus repositioned as a dynamic driver of learning, not just a byproduct or hindrance. (Central to Pillar 1).

Learner identity: PP fosters a strength-based view of identity development in the L2 context. It moves beyond seeing identity conflicts or deficits and explores how language learning can contribute to the construction of positive possible selves (e.g., the confident speaker, the intercultural mediator). By focusing on strengths, growth mindset, and self-concordant goals, PP supports learners in integrating their L2 learning experiences into a coherent and empowered sense of self, mitigating threats to identity and fostering a more resilient and adaptable learner identity (Wang et al., 2021). (Fostered by Pillars 1 & 2, enabled by Pillar 3).
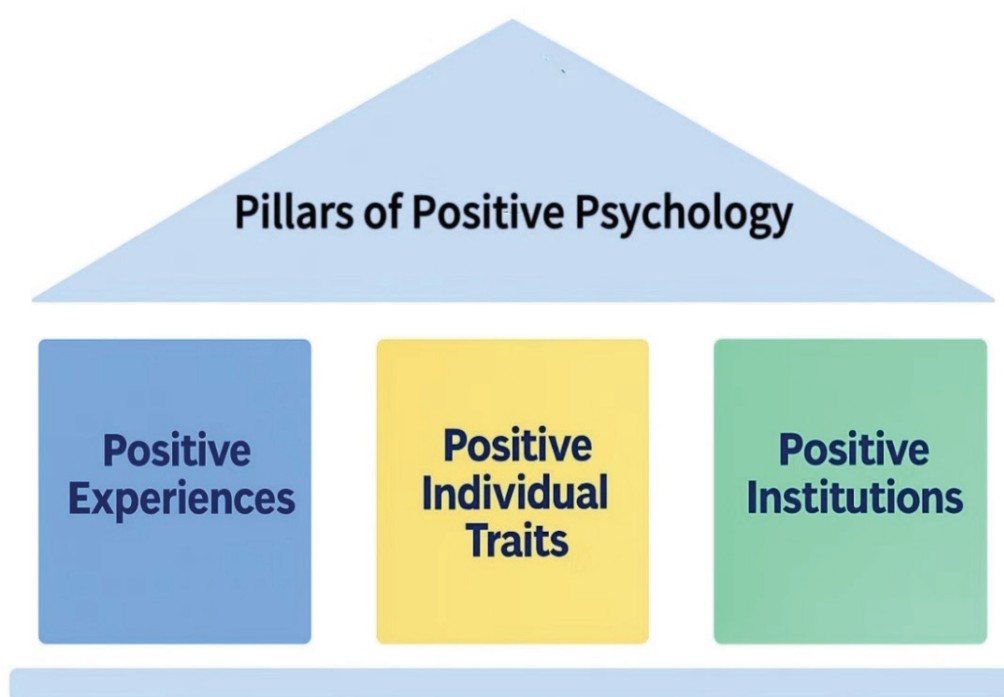

Figure 1. Three pillars of positive psychology.

The integration of PP into SLA gained significant momentum around 2014, with initial research focusing on the mechanisms linking these redefined concepts (positive emotions, motivation, self-efficacy) to language acquisition processes (MacIntyre & Mercer, 2014). Since approximately 2020, PP-informed SLA research has deepened and diversified (MacIntyre, 2021). Building on the reconceptualization of individual agency

and affect, scholars increasingly investigate how environmental factors—such as supportive teacher-student relationships, collaborative peer dynamics, and classroom climates fostering psychological safety and belonging—interact with individual strengths to co-construct well-being and facilitate learning (Pan et al., 2023b; Shao et al., 2020; Wang & Derakhshan, 2023). This holistic view acknowledges that positive institutions (Pillar 3) are crucial for nurturing the redefined learner agency (Pillar 2), emotion (Pillar 1), and identity.

Individual Promoters for Second Language Learners' Well-Being

According to the existing literature, this study identifies five distinct yet potentially interconnected psychological factors that significantly promote the well-being of L2 learners: positive emotions (Li et al., 2024; Yu et al., 2022), emotion regulation (Wu et al., 2023), resilience (Wu et al., 2024a), mindfulness (Namaziandost & Rezai, 2024), and flow experience (Jia et al., 2024). While these factors can interact, each one contributes uniquely to learners' psychological state, learning experience, and adaptive capacities (see Figure 2). Positive emotions, such as enjoyment and pride, generate intrinsic rewards and motivational energy, fostering satisfaction and approach behaviors. Emotion regulation enables learners to consciously manage their affective states, maintaining equilibrium and focus. Resilience provides the adaptive capacity to recover from and grow through setbacks. Mindfulness cultivates present-moment awareness and metacognitive clarity, which helps reduce reactivity. Finally, flow experience facilitates deep, intrinsically rewarding absorption in the learning activity itself.
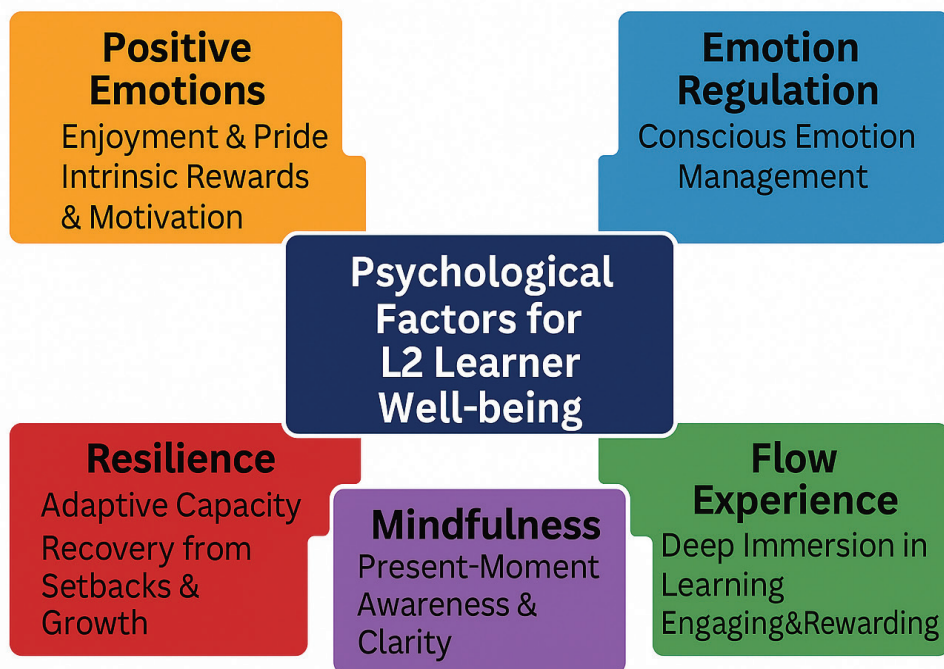

Figure 2. Potential key factors contributing to L2 learners' well-being.

Positive Emotions

Positive emotions, a core pillar of PP, are affective states characterized by pleasure, interest, or contentment (Fredrickson, 2003). In SLA, they function primarily as motivational catalysts and intrinsic rewards, directly enhancing learners' interest, satisfaction, and desire to engage (Dewaele & Macintyre, 2016; Yu et al., 2022). Distinct from emotion regulation (which manages emotion) or flow (which is a state of absorption), positive emotions like enjoyment and pride energize learning behaviors and signal progress.

Enjoyment, defined as the pleasurable emotion learners derive from both the language learning process and their achievements, is strongly associated with SLA outcomes such as increased motivation, willingness to communicate, and academic engagement (Jiang & Dewaele, 2019). Studies show a clear correlation between higher enjoyment levels and improved performance such as writing skills (Li et al., 2023). The experience of enjoyment in SLA is shaped by learner-specific (e.g., proficiency, multilingualism, attitudes) and environmental factors (e.g., teacher practices, classroom dynamics) (Zhang et al., 2024).

Recent scholarship has expanded to examine pride as another impactful positive emotion in SLA. Defined as the satisfaction from task success or linguistic progress, pride manifests in two forms: authentic pride (rooted in effort-based achievements) and hubristic pride (stemming from perceived innate talent), as per Tracy and Robins (2007). Khajavy and Lüftenegger (2024) further categorize SLA-related pride into four dimensions: self-based (personal skill development), social comparison-based (outperforming peers), praise-based (external validation), and help-based (assisting others). These manifestations emerge in contexts ranging from answering challenging questions to receiving teacher commendation.

Pride uniquely reinforces self-concept and perceived competence within the SLA context. Its motivational influence is associated with self-efficacy and learning interest, where confident, invested learners report stronger pride experiences. While distinct from anxiety, pride interacts reciprocally with enjoyment (Yu et al., 2022). Behaviorally, pride correlates with greater satisfaction with language achievements and increased willingness to communicate, suggesting a self-reinforcing cycle of engagement and proficiency development (Karimi & Nasouri, 2024).

Positive emotions like enjoyment and pride uniquely contribute to L2 well-being by acting as intrinsic motivators (Self-Determination Theory; Deci & Ryan, 1985) and reinforcing learners' sense of competence and value (Control-Value Theory; Pekrun, 2006). They provide immediate affective rewards that energize engagement and signal progress, distinct from managing emotions or achieving flow.

Emotion Regulation

Emotion regulation in SLA refers specifically to learners' conscious, strategic efforts to monitor, evaluate, and modify their emotional reactions to optimize learning (McRae & Gross, 2020). Unlike positive emotions which are affective states, or resilience which is a broader adaptive capacity, emotion regulation is the deliberate process of managing those states, particularly negative or disruptive ones (e.g., anxiety, frustration, boredom).

This process enables learners to navigate the socio-cultural demands of SLA by adapting to new linguistic environments (Wu et al., 2023). For instance, students might isolate themselves in quiet study spaces (situation selection) to minimize distractions or reinterpret challenging tasks as growth opportunities (cognitive reappraisal) to sustain motivation. Such regulation is a set of learned strategies (while it is distinct

from the inherent capacity for resilience or the state of mindfulness, it can utilize mindful awareness).

Crucially, successful emotion regulation shows bidirectional relationships with self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1977) and intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Learners who successfully mitigate anxiety during complex grammar studies, for example, often report reinforced confidence and deepened investment in learning, suggesting a virtuous cycle. This self-regulatory dynamic extends to collaborative settings, where learners co-create supportive atmospheres through shared strategies like peer encouragement and experience exchange, thereby reducing collective anxiety and fostering knowledge co-construction (Su & Guo, 2024).

Emotion regulation uniquely contributes to L2 well-being by enabling learners to strategically manage disruptive affective states (like anxiety), thereby preserving psychological resources needed for engagement (Effort Regulation; Zimmerman, 2002) and facilitating intrinsic motivation (Self-Determination Theory; Deci & Ryan, 1985). It is the active process of maintaining focus and equilibrium amidst challenges, distinct from inherent capacities like resilience or states like flow.

Resilience

In SLA, resilience is defined as the learner's capacity to adapt positively, recover effectively, and potentially grow following exposure to significant adversity, stressors, or setbacks inherent in the language learning process (Wu et al., 2024a). While distinct from emotion regulation (which manages specific affective states) or mindfulness (which focuses on present awareness), resilience encompasses the broader ability to withstand and bounce back from challenges. It manifests in three key aspects (Chen et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2024):

First, as a capacity, which refers to the inherent or developed potential to overcome significant linguistic and psychological hurdles, such as mastering complex grammar, dealing with persistent communication failures, or managing acculturative stress, through adaptive learning methods and psychological fortitude; second, as a process, involving a dynamic sequence where learners encounter adversity, appraise the challenge, mobilize internal and external resources like problem-solving skills and social support, implement coping strategies, and adapt based on the outcomes; and third, as an outcome, which is the demonstrated ability to maintain or regain positive functioning, such as sustained motivation, continued engagement, and the achievement of learning goals, despite facing difficulties.

Research underscores resilience's unique impact on navigating adversity in SLA. Highly resilient learners demonstrate greater persistence in maintaining motivation and engaging actively in learning activities despite significant stressors (Chen et al., 2025). This persistence is associated with improved long-term L2 outcomes (Chu et al., 2024). When confronted with major difficulties, they proactively seek support, experiment with diverse strategies, and sustain effort—behaviors linked to overcoming obstacles and achieving proficiency.

Resilience uniquely contributes to L2 well-being by providing the adaptive capacity to withstand, recover from, and grow through significant setbacks. It enables sustained motivation and engagement (Self-Determination Theory; Deci & Ryan, 1985) despite adversity by facilitating effective resource mobilization and positive reappraisal (Control-Value Theory; Pekrun, 2006), acting as a fundamental buffer distinct from momentary emotion regulation or mindfulness practices.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness in SLA is defined as the cultivated capacity for purposeful, non-judgmental attention to and awareness of present-moment experiences, including bodily sensations, thoughts, emotions, and the surrounding environment, during language learning activities (Kabat-Zinn, 1994; Ryad Chems-Maarif et al., 2025). Its core function is metacognitive awareness and reduced cognitive/emotional reactivity, distinct from the affective states of positive emotions, the strategic management of emotion regulation, or the deep absorption of flow.

In SLA, this capacity proves vital as learners often grapple with distracting anxiety, rumination about past difficulties, or excessive worry about future outcomes (Zeilhofer & Sasao, 2022). Mindfulness counteracts these tendencies by anchoring attention in the "here and now" of the learning task.

Mindfulness also interacts uniquely with other psychological factors. It strengthens metacognitive self-regulation, empowering learners to observe their learning states dispassionately and make timely strategy adjustments (Fan & Cui, 2024). Simultaneously, the non-reactive awareness fostered by mindfulness can reduce the intensity of negative emotions like anxiety, creating a calmer cognitive space for learning, which indirectly supports emotion regulation. Furthermore, this clarity and reduced self-criticism is linked to enhanced self-efficacy over time.

Mindfulness uniquely contributes to L2 well-being by fostering metacognitive awareness and reducing cognitive/emotional reactivity. This cultivates a calmer, clearer mental space conducive to focused learning and adaptive self-regulation (Metacognition; Flavell, 1979), distinct from experiencing positive affect, actively regulating emotions, or entering flow states. It supports well-being by mitigating distraction and enhancing present-moment engagement.

Flow Experience

Flow experience, or "optimal experience", is characterized by a state of intense, effortless concentration, complete absorption, and deep enjoyment in an activity, often accompanied by a loss of self-consciousness and distorted sense of time (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). In SLA, flow represents a unique state of deep cognitive and affective engagement with the language task itself, distinct from general positive emotions (which can occur outside flow) or mindfulness (which involves detached observation rather than absorption).

Learners are more likely to enter a flow state when encountering challenging yet skill-matched tasks. For example, during English writing exercises, learners may fluidly articulate ideas, apply grammar and vocabulary with ease, and become fully absorbed in the writing process, losing awareness of their surroundings. This state arises from specific antecedent conditions such as a perceived balance between challenge and skill, clear goals, and immediate feedback, and encompasses dimensions like deep concentration, sense of control, and intrinsic enjoyment (Wu & Wang, 2025).

Flow experience uniquely optimizes the learning process through deep engagement. Research indicates that learners in a flow state exhibit heightened focus, invest more effort effortlessly, and tend to achieve improved task-specific outcomes(Karimi & Nasouri, 2024). The intrinsic enjoyment derived from flow reinforces motivation, while the successful immersion fosters learners' self-confidence and sense of accomplishment (Jia et al., 2024).

Flow experience uniquely contributes to L2 well-being by facilitating a state of deep, intrinsically rewarding absorption in the learning activity itself. This optimal state, arising from balanced challenge-skill perception (Flow Theory; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), enhances immediate enjoyment, effort, and focus, leading to a powerful sense of accomplishment and competence (Self-Determination Theory; Deci & Ryan, 1985). It is distinct from general positive emotions or the regulatory processes of mindfulness and emotion regulation.

Pedagogical Implications: Creating a Psychological Ecosystem for L2 Well-Being

The integration of PP and SLA research represents a significant paradigm shift—from a "deficit perspective", which focuses on learners' mistakes and difficulties, to an "asset perspective" that highlights human potential, well-being, and optimal psychological functioning. This review systematically identifies and synthesizes five key individual factors that contribute to enhancing L2 learners' well-being: positive emotions (i.e., enjoyment and pride), emotion regulation, resilience, mindfulness, and flow experiences. Critically, these factors operate synergistically within the L2 classroom as a psychological ecosystem, where each element interacts to sustain learner engagement and growth. To translate this ecosystem into practice, I organize pedagogical strategies supported by empirical evidence and framed by the ecosystem metaphor (visualized in Figure 3).
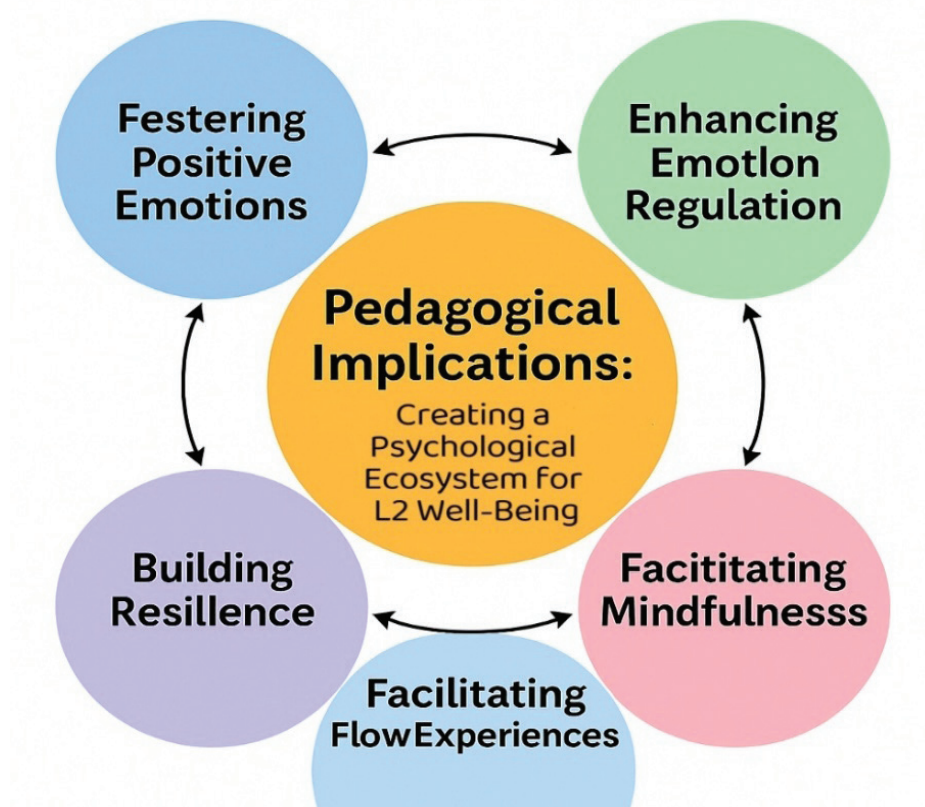

Figure 3. Visualization of a psychological ecosystem for L2 well-being.

Fostering Positive Emotions

To foster students' enjoyment and pride in SLA, a comprehensive approach to teaching design and practice remains essential. This approach should consider teaching content, methods, and the classroom atmosphere. When selecting teaching content, students' interests and real-life needs should be prioritized. Incorporating popular culture, current events, and familiar life scenarios—such as analyzing English movie dialogues, discussing trending global topics, or simulating tourist interactions—makes learning more engaging and relatable, a practice empirically shown to heighten emotional investment (Zhang et al., 2024). Innovative teaching methods are also crucial for cultivating these emotions. Approaches such as group cooperative learning, gamified teaching, and project-based learning are particularly effective. In group tasks, students collaborate on activities like presentations or scriptwriting, which not only improve language skills but also foster social bonds, creating a sense of shared achievement (Tamimy et al., 2023). Gamified teaching methods—such as word chain games, role-playing, and language competitions—blend learning with fun, stimulating student enthusiasm (Zhang & Hasim, 2023). Project-based learning (Abderrazak & Salaberri Ramiro, 2022), where students research specific topics and present their findings, can also generate a deep sense of pride as they see their efforts culminate in tangible results.

A positive classroom atmosphere is vital for nurturing students' emotional states (Shao et al., 2019). Teachers should approach each student with enthusiasm and friendliness, respecting their individuality and viewpoints, while encouraging open expression. Regardless of the quality of students' responses, they should always receive timely affirmation and constructive feedback (Liu et al., 2024), reinforcing their sense of value within the learning ecosystem. Additionally, fostering a culture of mutual support among peers—such as through collaborative peer evaluations and praise—can create a supportive and uplifting learning environment, where students feel encouraged and proud of one another's progress (Khajavy & Lüftenegger, 2024). Regular feedback and recognition are also important. Teachers should be attentive to students' incremental achievements—whether it is an impressive speech, a well-written composition, or a positive shift in learning attitude—and offer sincere praise. Along with verbal recognition, rewards like certificates or progress awards can reinforce positive behavior. Encouraging self-assessment and reflection, helping students recognize their growth and further boost their sense of enjoyment and pride.

Enhancing Emotion Regulation

To support emotional regulation, teachers could help students enhance emotional awareness by devoting class time to discussing different emotional states—such as anxiety, nervousness, excitement, and confidence—and their impact on SLA. Through case studies and group discussions, students can identify their own emotions and better understand their underlying causes (Bielak & Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2024). For instance, if a student feels nervous during speaking activities, teachers can guide the class to analyze whether the cause is unfamiliarity with the topic, fear of mistakes, or other factors, helping students understand their emotions, ~~which~~ forms the basis for effective regulation. Teachers should also teach specific emotional regulation strategies. Techniques like deep breathing and relaxation exercises can be practiced regularly to help students manage stress and anxiety (Karami & Karimi, 2025). Additionally, guiding students to shift their focus away from negative triggers—such as taking a short break to engage in enjoyable language-learning activities (e.g., listening to English songs or watching movie clips)—can help them regain emotional balance and return to problem-solving with a clearer mindset (Braunstein et al., 2017).

Building Resilience

For developing resilience, learning tasks should be appropriately challenging—slightly more difficult than students' current abilities, so that they feel motivated to improve and experience a sense of accomplishment (Raslan, 2024). For example, in speaking practice, teachers can set up real-world dialogue scenarios—such as ordering food at a restaurant or checking into a hotel—allowing students to practice language use in context, overcome communication barriers, and build resilience through problem-solving. Additionally, students should be encouraged to adopt positive coping strategies when facing learning setbacks. Teachers can help students analyze problems and develop solutions, encouraging them to use effective study methods—such as creating study plans and seeking diverse learning resources—and to cultivate emotional regulation skills, which help them face challenges with calmness and determination (Tanja & Susanne, 2025). Finally, introducing role models—such as successful L2 learners—may inspire students and encourage them to maintain a positive attitude in the face of obstacles, sustaining their perseverance in pursuing language learning goals. This multifaceted approach builds the classroom ecosystem's capacity to absorb shocks.

Cultivating Mindfulness

To support mindfulness training, teachers' communication should be straightforward, steering clear of long-winded or complex explanations, so students can focus on the core points. Teachers can also teach specific techniques for enhancing concentration. For example, guiding students to highlight key words or summarize the main ideas of a passage while reading L2 texts can improve focus and comprehension (Kang, 2024). Additionally, teachers can encourage students to create study plans and allocate their time effectively, gradually strengthening their ability to concentrate for longer periods. Incorporating mindfulness practices into language instruction can further enhance focus (Meiklejohn et al., 2012). For example, setting aside a few minutes at the beginning or end of class for meditation, where students close their eyes, focus on their breath, and relax, can help improve concentration (Eberth & Sedlmeier, 2012) . During lessons, teachers can guide students in mindfulness exercises, such as paying attention to the feel of the pen on paper while writing or focusing on pronunciation and intonation during speaking activities, which help them stay anchored in the present moment within the ecosystem.

Facilitating Flow Experiences

To facilitate the flow experience, teachers can systematically create conditions that trigger flow by designing progressive tasks that align students' skills with appropriate challenges (Hwang et al., 2025). This can be achieved by providing video dubbing materials of varying difficulty levels, allowing students to select autonomously based on their abilities. Additionally, breaking down goals into manageable phases—such as separating dubbing into subtasks like pronunciation imitation and emotional integration, with visible progress tracking—can enhance focus and achievement. Establishing a multi-dimensional feedback system, including peer evaluations, real-time teacher guidance, and opportunities for self-assessment through comparison with original clips, further supports students' development. Additionally, creating an immersive learning environment, with soundproof spaces and role-playing elements, promotes engagement. Finally, fostering intrinsic motivation by offering autonomy in content selection and linking tasks to real-world applications can sustain students' interest. Together, these strategies ensure that students remain deeply engaged, with clear objectives, timely feedback, and appropriately challenging tasks, which not only enhance their language skills but also positively impact their psychological experience.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Although considerable strides have been made in integrating PP and SLA research, several conceptual and methodological limitations require focused attention to advance the field. These limitations can be categorized into five key thematic areas (see Figure 4): cultural generalizability, learner heterogeneity, digital ecosystems, classroom environments, and the need for integrated theoretical frameworks.
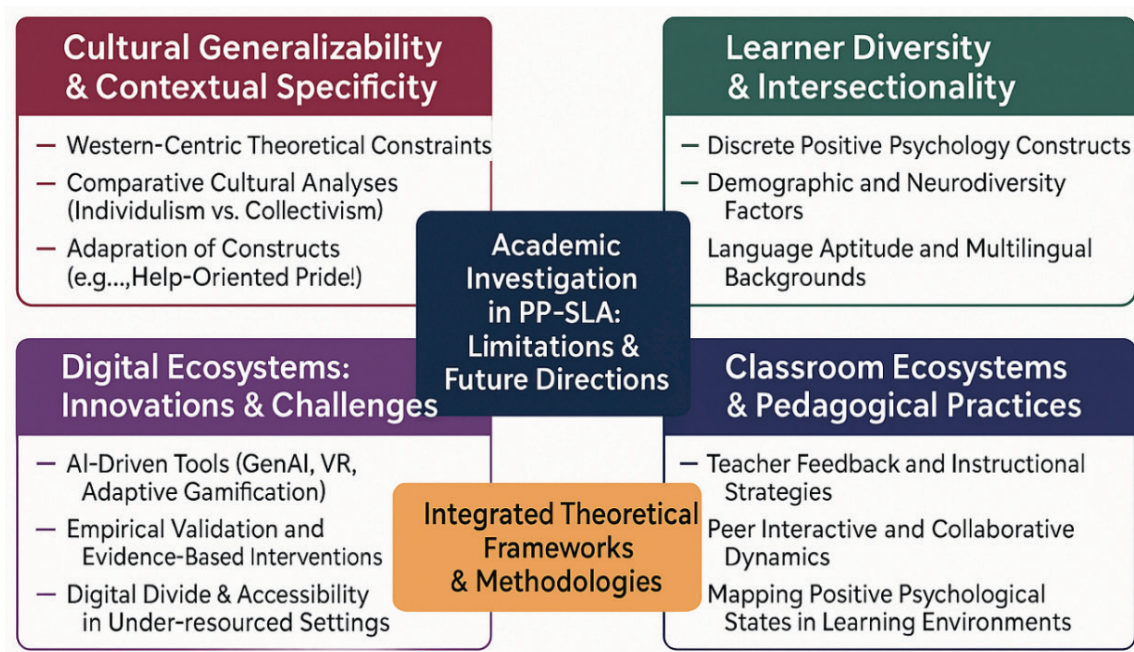

Figure 4. Limitations and directions for future PP-SLA research.

Cultural generalizability and contextual specificity: A primary constraint lies in the predominantly Western cultural grounding of existing PP constructs within SLA. Concepts such as the distinction between "genuine pride" and "hubristic pride" (Tracy & Robins, 2007), or the manifestation and impact of positive emotions and resilience strategies (e.g., help-seeking, mindfulness), have been largely explored within Anglo-American or European contexts. The influence of collectivist values, as emphasized in cultures like China, on emotional expression (e.g., pride constrained by social norms for group harmony, Ge et al., 2021) and regulation strategies remains inadequately understood. This Western-centric framework limits the applicability and validity of findings across diverse cultural settings, potentially imposing inappropriate psychological models on learners in multicultural environments. Future research must prioritize comparative studies examining how fundamental cultural dimensions (e.g., individualism-collectivism, power distance) moderate the effects of PP factors. For instance, exploring whether constructs like "help-oriented pride" (Khajavy & Lüftenegger, 2024) are more salient in collectivist contexts, or how culturally specific educational philosophies (e.g., Confucian influences, Wang, 2023) necessitate adaptations in mindfulness practices, is crucial for developing globally relevant SLA theories.

Learner heterogeneity and intersectionality: Existing research often treats PP factors (e.g., resilience, mindfulness, flow) as discrete constructs, overlooking their complex interplay with critical learner characteristics (Kang, 2024; Wu & Wang, 2025; Wu et al., 2024a). There is a significant gap in understanding

how age (e.g., differential impacts of mindfulness on adolescent vs. adult anxiety), neurodiversity (e.g., how learners with ADHD engage with mindfulness or achieve flow states), language aptitude, multilingual backgrounds (e.g., how prior language learning experiences influence flow potential or how multilinguals leverage cross-linguistic strategies for resilience), and motivation types shape the experience and efficacy of PP interventions. Neglecting these intersections risks "one-size-fits-all" approaches that fail to address the unique psychological needs and pathways of diverse learner groups. Future investigations should explicitly examine these interactions. How does neurodiversity affect the neural correlates of flow during language tasks? Can multilingual learners utilize metalinguistic awareness as a specific resilience resource? Adopting frameworks like Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2000) will be essential to model the dynamic interplay between individual learner variables (microsystem), social interactions (mesosystem), and broader cultural/educational contexts (macrosystem/exosystem), thereby informing the design of truly customized interventions.

Digital ecosystems: Potential and challenges: While digital tools (e.g., GenAI, VR, adaptive gamification) hold significant promise for fostering positive psychological states in SLA (Lan, 2020; Wu & Dong, 2025), their empirical validation and effective integration present substantial challenges. Research on the impact of digital environments on PP in SLA is still nascent, with insufficient evidence regarding their effectiveness in promoting sustained flow, emotion regulation, or authentic social connection (e.g., peer support in virtual spaces). Key questions demanding empirical attention include: How can GenAI be leveraged to dynamically scaffold language tasks within learners' "flow channels", adjusting difficulty in real-time based on affective and cognitive signals? Can VR environments be designed to effectively simulate safe spaces for practicing emotion regulation strategies during high-anxiety language scenarios (e.g., public speaking simulation)? How do we balance linguistic accuracy demands with engagement in gamified designs powered by AI, ensuring pedagogical goals are met? Furthermore, the digital divide and accessibility issues in under-resourced settings pose significant barriers to equitable implementation. Future research should employ rigorous randomized controlled trials to evaluate the impact of specific digital interventions (e.g., AI-driven adaptive gamification for flow, VR for exposure therapy in anxiety reduction). Collaboration with stakeholders in under-resourced areas is vital to co-design inclusive, locally adaptable technologies (e.g., offline mindfulness modules, low-bandwidth AI tutors) and explore how technology can foster social-emotional learning in online/blended settings (e.g., AI chatbots for just-in-time emotional regulation support).

Classroom ecosystems and teacher practices: Although the interaction between individual PP resources and the classroom environment is recognized (Shao et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2021), the operational definition and mechanisms of a "positive classroom ecosystem" remain vague. There is a lack of detailed empirical evidence on how specific teacher behaviors (e.g., process-oriented vs. outcome-oriented feedback styles) interact with cultural norms to influence students' experiences of pride or self-efficacy. Similarly, the impact of peer interactions and collaborative task design on the spread of positive emotions and co-regulation within heterogeneous groups is under-researched. How do classroom discourse norms (e.g., encouraging risk-taking vs. error correction focus) impact students' emotional regulation capacities? How do collaborative learning structures facilitate or hinder the development of collective resilience? Future research needs to develop granular models of positive classroom environments. Controlled pedagogical interventions of classroom practices (e.g., feedback types, task structures) combined with social network analysis to map emotional contagion and support networks can illuminate the micro-dynamics of PP within learning communities. This will bridge theory and practice, providing educators with concrete, actionable frameworks for cultivating supportive learning climates.

Expanding scope and theoretical integration: Finally, the focus of PP-SLA research should broaden beyond immediate academic outcomes to encompass broader indicators of well-being and lifelong learning, such as self-determination, intercultural competence, and post-educational resilience. Future studies should explore how PP in SLA contributes to learners' abilities to navigate rapid linguistic and technological changes (Wu, 2025; Wu et al., 2024b). Longitudinal designs are paramount to track the developmental trajectories of PP factors (e.g., resilience, sustained positive emotion) and their delayed effects on both proficiency and well-being over extended periods (Derakhshan et al., 2023). Crucially, advancing the field requires a concerted move towards integrated theoretical modeling and mixed-method approaches. Combining longitudinal tracking with mixed methods (quantitative surveys, qualitative interviews, experience sampling) and neuro-cognitive techniques (e.g., exploring whether sustained positive emotions reduce amygdala activation during language processing, thereby enhancing working memory capacity) will reveal the complex, dynamic mechanisms through which PP influences SLA. Frameworks like Dynamic Systems Theory could be particularly fruitful for modeling the non-linear, reciprocal interactions between psychological states, cognitive processes, social contexts, and learning outcomes over time (Ellis, 2007). By embracing these holistic perspectives and methodological diversity, future research can generate robust evidence to inform the development of effective, culturally sensitive, and learner-centered PP interventions that foster not only language proficiency but also holistic learner flourishing.

Conclusion

This review synthesizes critical advances at the intersection of PP and SLA, demonstrating how learner well-being transcends peripheral status to function as a foundational catalyst for cognitive engagement and sustained linguistic development. By systematically examining five core psychological resources—positive emotions, emotion regulation, resilience, mindfulness, and flow experience—the analysis establishes PP not merely as an additive element but as a transformative theoretical lens that redefines success metrics beyond proficiency to encompass holistic human flourishing. The pedagogical implications derived herein call for paradigm shifts in instructional design, urging movement from deficit-remediation models toward ecosystems that actively cultivate psychological resources through culturally responsive feedback, scaffolded challenge-skill balance, and metacognitive strategy co-construction.

While acknowledging the conceptual and methodological limitations—particularly the cultural biases inherent in PP constructs, the underspecified nature of digital interventions, and the insufficient focus on neurodiverse learners—this review highlights these gaps as opportunities for the evolution of the discipline. Future research should prioritize adopting ecological and dynamic systems frameworks to better understand the nonlinear interactions between psychological states, sociocultural contexts, and learning trajectories. Importantly, the integration of PP principles holds significant potential to transform language education.

To achieve this, teacher development programs should prepare educators to recognize and cultivate psychological resources that serve as academic enablers. Curriculum policy reforms must incorporate well-being indicators alongside traditional linguistic benchmarks, while the design of digital tools should prioritize evidence-based architectures that effectively integrate both affective and cognitive learning dimensions.

Looking beyond immediate academic outcomes, the ultimate impact lies in fostering learners' capacities for intercultural resilience, self-determined multilingual identities, and adaptive learning strategies that endure amidst accelerating linguistic and technological change. This synthesis aims to consolidate theoretical foundations while catalyzing empirically rigorous, contextually grounded innovations that reposition well-being as the nucleus of human-centric language education.

Declarations

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