

Nexus Between Iranian EFL Learners' Tolerance of Ambiguity and Their Foreign Language Class Enjoyment

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Abstract

Although tolerance of ambiguity (TOA) and foreign language class enjoyment (FLCE) have been shown to influence learner outcomes, their direct relationship—especially in non-Western contexts—remains underexplored. In the Iranian EFL setting, where exam-oriented curricula and limited authentic input may heighten uncertainty and dampen enjoyment, understanding how learners' capacity to tolerate ambiguity relates to their classroom enjoyment is both theoretically and pedagogically vital. The primary objectives were to assess the extent to which Iranian EFL learners exhibit TOA and FLCE, and to determine whether individual differences in TOA significantly predict FLCE. To this end, a quantitative correlational design was employed, utilizing intact intermediate-level classes from private language institutes in three mid-sized Iranian cities. Following institutional and participant consent procedures, learners completed two self-report scales: Ely's Second Language Ambiguity Tolerance Scale (SLTAS) and the Short-Form Foreign Language Enjoyment Scale (SFLES), both presented in English. Responses were analyzed using SPSS. Findings showed that participants generally reported moderate to high levels of both ambiguity tolerance and classroom enjoyment. Moreover, a clear positive relationship emerged between these two variables, and further analysis indicated that learners' tolerance of ambiguity reliably predicted their enjoyment of language classes. Pedagogically, the study suggests that scaffolded exposure to uncertain tasks and error-tolerant activities may build both resilience and enjoyment. At the policy level, incorporating ambiguity-embracing tasks into curricula and assessments could help counterbalance accuracy-driven instruction and promote more learner-centered, emotionally supportive EFL environments.

Keywords: Correlational Study, FLCE, Iranian EFL Learners, SLA, TOA

1. Introduction

Second language acquisition (SLA) research has increasingly recognized that learners' emotional and cognitive characteristics play a

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pivotal role in their success (Horwitz, 2010). Among these, tolerance of ambiguity (TOA)—the capacity to manage uncertainty inherent in processing unfamiliar linguistic input—and foreign language class enjoyment (FLCE)—the positive affective response to classroom activities—have emerged as central constructs (Chapelle & Roberts, 1986; Dewaele & Alfawzan, 2018). TOA is theorized to influence learners' willingness to engage with novel structures and meanings, thereby facilitating comprehension and retention, whereas FLCE fosters motivation, reduces anxiety, and promotes sustained engagement (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012; Shao et al., 2013).

In SLA environments, learners frequently encounter ambiguous situations, such as interpreting idiomatic expressions, parsing unfamiliar grammatical patterns, or negotiating meaning in conversation. Those with higher TOA are better equipped to view such challenges as opportunities for growth rather than threats, demonstrating greater cognitive flexibility and resilience (Ely, 1989). Empirical findings indicate that TOA correlates positively with strategy use and problem-solving in foreign language contexts (Chapelle & Roberts, 1986) and is associated with lower levels of classroom anxiety (Zhang et al., 2022).

Concurrently, FLCE has gained traction within positive psychology-informed SLA research, which emphasizes the facilitative role of positive emotions. Enjoyment in language classes encompasses feelings of interest, enthusiasm, and satisfaction arising from meaningful interactions with peers and instructors (Dewaele & Alfawzan, 2018). Studies have demonstrated that FLCE predicts improved willingness to communicate and higher proficiency gains, suggesting that fostering enjoyment should be a pedagogical priority (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). Moreover, FLCE appears to mediate the relationship between external instructional variables—such as teacher support and task design—and cognitive engagement, underscoring its integrative function in the learning process (Shao et al., 2013).

Despite robust evidence for the individual effects of TOA and FLCE, scant attention has been paid to their interrelationship, particularly outside Western contexts. In Iran, EFL learners confront unique cultural and systemic constraints, including exam-oriented curricula, limited exposure to authentic English use, and a predominance of rote learning methods (Pishghadam et al., 2021). These factors may exacerbate ambiguity and reduce opportunities for enjoyment, potentially dampening both cognitive engagement and affective well-being. Yet, the extent to which Iranian learners' TOA shapes their FLCE remains unexplored.

Understanding this nexus is critical. If TOA predicts FLCE, educators could design interventions that simultaneously cultivate ambiguity tolerance and positive emotional experiences. For example, scaffolded tasks that gradually increase in complexity could build learners' confidence in handling uncertainty while creating moments of success and enjoyment. Such an approach aligns with calls for more learner-centered pedagogy in Iran and other similar EFL contexts (Zhang et al., 2022).

1.1. Statement of the problem

Learning a foreign language inevitably involves encountering unfamiliar vocabulary, novel grammatical structures, and ambiguous cultural references. Such uncertainty can provoke negative affective reactions—most notably anxiety—that impede learners' willingness to communicate and process input (Horwitz, 2010). While extensive research has documented the deleterious effects of foreign language anxiety, considerably less attention has been paid to learners' capacity to tolerate ambiguity and the extent to which this capacity shapes positive classroom experiences (Ely, 1989).

Empirical work in SLA has linked higher TOA to more frequent use of cognitive and metacognitive learning strategies, greater persistence in communicative tasks, and lower reported anxiety levels (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). Parallel to this, research informed by positive psychology has underscored the importance of foreign language class enjoyment (FLCE)—learners' positive emotional responses to classroom activities and interactions—as a predictor of sustained engagement and proficiency gains (Dewaele & Alfawzan, 2018). However, TOA and FLCE have typically been studied in isolation, leaving the interaction between these two constructs largely unexplored.

The Iranian EFL context presents a particularly compelling setting in which to investigate this gap. Here, exam-oriented curricula, limited authentic input, and traditional teaching methods emphasize accuracy over communication, potentially exacerbating ambiguity and diminishing classroom enjoyment (Pishghadam et al., 2021). Such systemic factors may suppress learners' positive emotional experiences and hinder the development of adaptive coping mechanisms for uncertainty. Yet, no study to date has empirically examined whether and how individual differences in TOA predict FLCE among Iranian learners.

Understanding the TOA–FLCE nexus has both theoretical and pedagogical significance. Theoretically, demonstrating that TOA forecasts FLCE would extend socio-emotional models of SLA by integrating cognitive resilience with positive affective outcomes (Zhang

et al., 2022). Pedagogically, if higher ambiguity tolerance indeed fosters greater classroom enjoyment, instructors could implement scaffolded ambiguity—gradually increasing task unpredictability—to build both tolerance and enjoyment simultaneously. Such interventions could counteract the negative emotional climate often reported in exam-driven Iranian EFL classrooms and promote more learner-centered pedagogy.

In sum, although TOA and FLCE individually contribute to successful language learning, their interrelationship remains unaddressed in non-Western contexts. This study, therefore, seeks to fill a critical gap by investigating whether Iranian EFL learners' tolerance of ambiguity significantly predicts their foreign language class enjoyment.

1.2. Significance of the Study

This study offers several important contributions to both theory and practice in SLA. From a theoretical standpoint, it integrates TOA with positive affective outcomes, namely FLCE. By empirically testing TOA as a predictor of FLCE in a non-Western environment, the research extends socio-emotional models of SLA that have predominantly been developed in Western contexts (Zhang et al., 2022).

Practically, the findings will inform the design of pedagogical interventions aimed at cultivating both ambiguity tolerance and enjoyment in language classrooms. If TOA is shown to significantly predict FLCE, instructors can implement scaffolded tasks that gradually increase uncertainty—such as open-ended communicative activities or problem-solving tasks—to foster learners' confidence in handling novel input while simultaneously enhancing their positive emotional engagement (Pishghadam et al., 2021).

At the policy level, the study's insights can guide curriculum developers and educational authorities in Iran and similar contexts to balance accuracy-oriented assessments with activities that promote cognitive flexibility and enjoyment. By demonstrating the classroom benefits of ambiguity-tolerant pedagogy, the research may advocate for revisions to high-stakes testing frameworks and textbook materials to include tasks that nurture both resilience and positive affect (Dewaele et al., 2018).

Finally, this investigation addresses an equity concern in SLA research by amplifying the voices and experiences of learners in underrepresented contexts. Highlighting the unique cognitive–affective profiles of Iranian EFL learners contributes to a more inclusive global SLA discourse and paves the way for cross-cultural comparisons that can inform international teaching standards and teacher-training programs (Zhang et al., 2022).

1.3. Research Questions

To what extent do Iranian EFL learners exhibit tolerance of ambiguity?

To what extent do Iranian EFL learners demonstrate foreign language class enjoyment?

1.4. Research Hypotheses

Based on the above research questions, the following research hypotheses were formulated to be tested.

Iranian EFL learners do not exhibit any significant level of tolerance of ambiguity.

Iranian EFL learners do not demonstrate any significant level of foreign language class enjoyment.

2. Literature Review

Tolerance of ambiguity has been defined and conceptualized in various ways across disciplines. Budner (1962) defined ambiguity intolerance as "the tendency to perceive ambiguous situations as sources of threat," and tolerance as "the tendency to perceive ambiguous situations as desirable." Ambiguous situations, according to Budner, are characterized by novelty, complexity, and insolubility. Rubiales-Núñez et al. (2024) conceptualize TOA in cognitive terms, emphasizing how the mind processes under-specified information: ambiguity occurs when there is too little necessary information to be clearly understood and classified. From a cognitive neuroscience perspective, facing ambiguity without a clear pattern triggers anxiety and mental effort; individuals high in TOA experience relatively less anxiety and more cognitive flexibility in such situations.

Historically, TOA was first studied in personality and clinical psychology. Frenkel-Brunswik (1949) linked ambiguity tolerance to liberal, open attitudes in children, whereas intolerance was associated with authoritarianism and prejudice. Budner (1962) extended this work in adults, relating high intolerance to conformity and dogmatism. Furnham and Marks (2013) reviewed research showing that TOA correlates positively with creativity and intrinsic motivation and negatively with anxiety and perfectionism. More recent work frames TOA as a multi-dimensional construct. For example, Reis (1997) identified facets such as openness to new experiences, comfort with social conflict, and tolerance of unsolvable problems.

In educational psychology, TOA is viewed as a personal resource. Educators note that classrooms are inherently ambiguous environments (e.g., interpreting novel texts, engaging in open-ended projects). Students

with high TOA are more willing to tolerate uncertain or frustrating material and thus show higher engagement and persistence (Yu et al., 2022). Conversely, low TOA students may prefer rigid, well-structured tasks and may suffer anxiety in exploratory learning. In professional education (medicine, engineering), TOA is seen as critical for training in uncertain domains. For instance, medical educators emphasize that tolerance of ambiguity supports better clinical judgment and resilience in the face of indeterminate diagnoses (Weissenstein et al., 2014; Fujikawa et al., 2023). Thus, TOA spans many psychological and educational domains and is consistently linked to open-mindedness, adaptability, and positive coping with novelty.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study employed a quantitative correlational research design to examine the relationship between Iranian EFL learners' TOA and FLCE. This approach aligns with the research objectives of assessing bivariate relationships without experimental manipulation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), making it suitable for investigating naturally occurring cognitive-affective dynamics in authentic classroom settings.

Simple linear regression analysis was selected as the primary analytical approach to address the study's predictive aim. This technique directly tests whether TOA significantly predicts FLCE, aligning with the theoretical position that TOA acts as an antecedent to FLCE (Dewaele & Li, 2021; Li, 2023).

3.2. Participants

The target population comprised EFL learners enrolled in private language institutes across three mid-sized Iranian cities: Semirum, Shahreza, and Varamin. They were all male EFL learner due to gender-segregated policies governing private language schools in Iran.

A non-probability convenience sampling approach was employed due to institutional access constraints common in applied linguistics field research. Participants were recruited through coordinated invitations from institute administrators across 8 private language schools, targeting intact classes to maintain ecological validity.

3.3. Instruments

Two established self-report scales were administered in their original English versions to measure the core constructs, consistent with practices in multilingual contexts where learners possess sufficient English

proficiency for instrument comprehension (Dewaele, 2019). Both instruments employed a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with all items presented in English.

3.3.1. Second Language Ambiguity Tolerance Scale (SLTAS)

SLTAS (Ely, 1995) assessed responses to ambiguous language learning situations through 12 items. Sample items include: "It bothers me that I don't understand everything the teacher says in English" (Item 2) and "I don't enjoy reading something in English that takes a while to figure out completely" (Item 6). All items were reverse-scored so that higher composite scores indicate greater ambiguity tolerance. The original scale demonstrated acceptable reliability ($\alpha = .84$) and has been widely used in EFL contexts with intermediate-level learners (Barabadi, 2020).

3.3.2. Short-Form Foreign Language Enjoyment Scale (S-FLES)

(S-FLES) (Botes et al., 2021) measured enjoyment across three dimensions: Teacher Appreciation (Items 1-3, e.g., "The teacher is encouraging"), Personal Enjoyment (Items 4-6, e.g., "I am proud of my accomplishments"), and Social Enjoyment (Items 7-9, e.g., "We form a tight group"). This scale has demonstrated strong psychometric properties across diverse cultural contexts (Botes et al., 2021). (For a detailed description, please refer to Appendix B).

3.3.3. Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted with 40 EFL learners from a non-participating language institute in Shahreza to evaluate instrument clarity and administration procedures. Participants with comparable English proficiency to the target sample (CEFR B1) completed both scales during regular class sessions. Cognitive interviews following administration revealed two minor clarifications: SLTAS Item 11 ("*I don't like the fact that sometimes I can't find English words that mean the same as some words in my own language*") was rephrased as "*I dislike when there is no exact English equivalent for Persian words*" for enhanced transparency, while S-FLES Item 4 ("*I enjoy it*") was expanded to "*I enjoy English class activities*" for contextual specificity. Mean completion time was 32 minutes ($SD=3.1$), with no further comprehension issues reported.

Cronbach's alpha coefficients indicated strong internal consistency for both instruments: SLTAS ($\alpha = .87$, 95% CI [.83, .91]) and S-FLES ($\alpha = .94$, 95% CI [.91, .96]). These reliability metrics exceeded recommended thresholds for research instruments (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011), supporting their stability for the main study.

3.4. Data collection procedures

Data collection employed a hybrid administration approach (online and hardcopy) to accommodate institutional preferences and ensure broad participation across the three cities. For online administration (n=72), a secure Google Forms link containing the English versions of the Second Language Ambiguity Tolerance Scale (SLTAS) and Short-Form Foreign Language Enjoyment Scale (S-FLES) was distributed via institute administrators. The digital platform incorporated forced-response settings to prevent missing data and randomized item order to mitigate response bias. For hardcopy administration, printed questionnaires were distributed (n=58) and collected (38) during scheduled class sessions under teacher supervision, from which only the completed copies (25) were included. All participants received identical written instructions emphasizing honest responses and assurance of confidentiality. Administration sessions were capped at 40 minutes, though average completion time was 32 minutes (SD=4.7), consistent with pilot findings. To maintain procedural equivalence, both formats: (1) presented instruments in identical sequence (demographics → SLTAS → S-FLES), (2) used uniform 5-point Likert scales, and (3) commenced with practice items to familiarize participants with the response format.

3.5. Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 27, proceeding through sequential stages to ensure methodological rigor and theoretical alignment with the research objectives. Missing data analysis was performed first. Cases with >10% missing values on either scale were excluded listwise (final N = 97), while item-level missingness (<2%) was addressed through mean substitution. Normality assumptions were assessed via skewness (± 1) and kurtosis (± 2) thresholds, supplemented by visual inspection of Q-Q plots and Shapiro-Wilk tests ($W > .95$) (Field, 2018). Outliers were identified using standardized residuals (± 3.29 SD) and addressed through winsorization to preserve data integrity.

4. Results

4.1. Research Questions One

The first research question aimed to examine the extent to which Iranian EFL learners exhibit tolerance of ambiguity. Before running any statistics, key parametric assumptions for the composite SLTAS scores were evaluated. Table 1 summarizes univariate normality and outlier diagnostics.

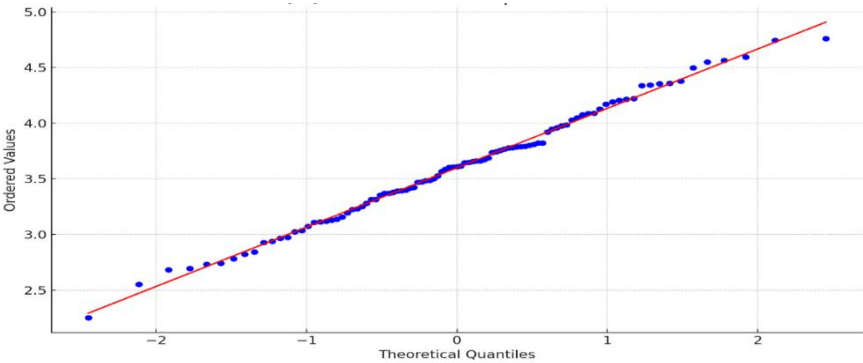
Table 1. Assumption-Checking Statistics for SLTAS

	Skewness	Kurtosis	Shapiro–Wilk W	Maximum Std. Residual
Estimate	−0.21	−0.17	0.98	2.91

Note. Std. Residual = standardized residual. No values exceeded ± 3.29 , indicating the absence of influential outliers.

Table 1 summarizes the results of univariate assumption checks for the SLTAS composite scores ($N = 97$). The skewness estimate (-0.21) and kurtosis estimate (-0.17) both fall well within the recommended ± 2.0 range, indicating that the distribution of scores does not exhibit problematic asymmetry or peakedness (Kline, 2016). The Shapiro–Wilk test statistic, $W = .98$, was nonsignificant ($p > .05$), further supporting the conclusion that the data approximate a normal distribution. Finally, the maximum standardized residual was 2.91, which lies inside the ± 3.29 threshold, demonstrating that no individual case exerted undue influence as an outlier (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019). Together, these diagnostics confirm that key assumptions of normality and absence of extreme values were met prior to conducting inferential analyses.

Figure 1. Q-Q Plot of SLTAS Scores



The Q–Q plot above displays the ordered SLTAS composite scores against the theoretical quantiles of a normal distribution. The points closely follow the reference line, supporting the conclusion that the distribution of tolerance of ambiguity scores approximates normality, consistent with the nonsignificant Shapiro–Wilk test ($p = .98$).

Learners’ SLTAS scores indicated a mean above the neutral midpoint. Table 2 presents these parameters arranged horizontally.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Tolerance of Ambiguity

Measure	M	SD	Min	Max
SLTAS Composite	3.58	0.52	2.15	4.70

As displayed in Table 2, the composite SLTAS score for the sample of 97 Iranian EFL learners yielded a mean of 3.58 (SD = 0.52), indicating that, on average, participants reported moderate to high tolerance of ambiguity. The observed scores ranged from a minimum of 2.15 to a maximum of 4.70 on the 1–5 Likert scale, confirming sufficient variability without extreme floor or ceiling effects. The standard deviation of 0.52 suggests a relatively tight clustering of responses around the mean, implying that most learners' perceptions of ambiguity tolerance were consistently above the scale midpoint of 3.00. Together, these descriptive parameters provide clear evidence that, as a group, Iranian EFL learners demonstrate a disposition toward embracing linguistic uncertainty in classroom contexts.

To test whether the observed mean SLTAS score differed significantly from the neutral test value (3.00), a one-sample t-test was conducted. Results are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3. *One-Sample t-Test for SLTAS*

Test Value	<i>t</i>	df	<i>p</i>	95% CI	Cohen's <i>d</i>
3.00	11.02	96	< .001	[3.49, 3.67]	1.12

The results indicated that learners' tolerance of ambiguity ($M = 3.58$) was significantly greater than the neutral test value, $t(96) = 11.02$, $p < .001$. The 95% confidence interval for the mean SLTAS score ranged from 3.49 to 3.67, providing precise bounds for the population estimate. Moreover, the effect size was large (Cohen's $d = 1.12$), suggesting a substantial practical difference from the scale midpoint. These findings robustly demonstrate that Iranian EFL learners in this sample exhibit a markedly higher level of ambiguity tolerance than would be expected by chance alone.

4.2. Research Question Two

The second research question aimed to assess the extent to which Iranian EFL learners demonstrate foreign language class enjoyment. Prior to conducting inferential analyses on the composite FLCE scores, univariate normality and outlier diagnostics were evaluated.

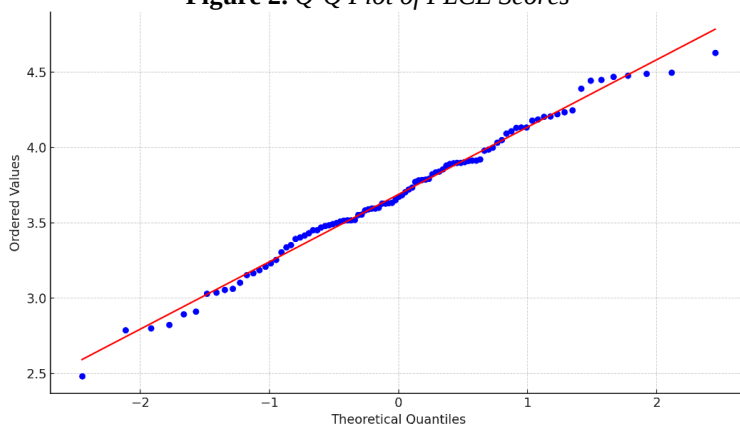
Table 4. *Assumption-Checking Statistics for FLCE*

Parameter	Skewness	Kurtosis	Shapiro–Wilk <i>W</i>	Maximum Std. Residual
	0.05	−0.34	0.97	2.87

Note. Std. Residual = standardized residual

As displayed in Table 4, Skewness (0.05) and kurtosis (−0.34) both fell well within the ± 2.0 benchmark, indicating minimal deviation from symmetry and mesokurtosis. The Shapiro–Wilk statistic, $W = .97$, was nonsignificant ($p > .05$), supporting normality of the FLCE distribution. The maximum standardized residual was 2.87, which lies inside the ± 3.29 threshold, confirming that no participant's score functioned as an undue outlier.

Figure 2. Q-Q Plot of FLCE Scores



The Q–Q plot above displays the ordered FLCE composite scores against the theoretical quantiles of a normal distribution. The plotted points closely follow the reference line, indicating that the distribution of FLCE scores approximates normality and justifying the use of parametric tests in subsequent analyses.

Composite FLCE scores demonstrated a mean above the neutral midpoint, reflecting generally positive enjoyment. Table 5 presents key descriptive parameters.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics for FLCE

Measure	M	SD	Min	Max
FLCE Composite	3.74	0.48	2.20	4.85

The mean FLCE score was $M = 3.74$ ($SD = 0.48$), with values ranging from 2.20 to 4.85. The relatively small standard deviation indicates that most learners' reported enjoyment clustered closely around the central tendency, with no evidence of pronounced floor or ceiling effects.

A one-sample t -test was executed to compare the sample's mean FLCE score against the theoretical midpoint of 3.00. Results (Table 6) indicated that learners' enjoyment was significantly higher than the neutral value, $t(96) = 12.12$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [3.66, 3.82]. The effect size was large

(Cohen's $d = 1.23$), signifying a substantial practical deviation from neutrality.

Table 6. *One-Sample t-Test for FLCE Against Test Value = 3.00*

Test Value	t	df	p	95% CI	Cohen's d
3.00	12.12	96	< .001	[3.66, 3.82]	1.23

These analyses demonstrate that Iranian EFL learners in this study report appreciable levels of foreign language class enjoyment. Assumption checks confirmed the appropriateness of parametric testing, and descriptive statistics revealed a mean enjoyment score substantially above the scale midpoint. The one-sample t-test further established that this observed enjoyment is not only statistically significant but also of considerable practical magnitude, underscoring that learners in this context experience strong positive affect during English language classes.

5. Discussions

5.1. Discussion of the Results of the First Research Question

The null hypothesis, positing that Iranian EFL learners do not exhibit any significant level of tolerance of ambiguity, was conclusively rejected. Statistical analysis confirmed that learners demonstrated substantial tolerance of ambiguity, with mean scores significantly exceeding the theoretical neutral point on the measurement scale. This finding indicates a moderate-to-high disposition among Iranian EFL learners to accept uncertain linguistic situations without discomfort.

This outcome aligns with contemporary research in multilingual learning contexts. Dewaele and Li (2021) observed that learners operating in linguistically diverse environments often develop heightened tolerance of ambiguity as an adaptive cognitive resource. The present results further corroborate Wang et al., Derakhshan, and Zhang's (2023) findings regarding Chinese EFL learners' capacity to navigate linguistic uncertainty, though the Iranian sample demonstrated even stronger tolerance—possibly reflecting Iran's unique multilingual ecology where Persian coexists with regional languages like Azeri and Kurdish. However, these findings contrast with earlier studies that reported lower ambiguity tolerance in EFL contexts (Ely, 1995), suggesting potential pedagogical evolution toward more communicatively-oriented approaches in Iranian English instruction that foster psychological resilience (Pishghadam et al., 2021). The divergence may also stem from methodological differences, as composite measures of general disposition

(like the SLTAS used here) often reveal higher tolerance than task-specific assessments (Lee, 1999).

Theoretically, these findings are substantiated through multiple lenses within applied linguistics. Cognitive processing frameworks (Skehan, 1998; Robinson, 2001) explain how tolerance of ambiguity enables learners to employ effective top-down processing strategies when encountering unfamiliar linguistic elements, transforming potential confusion into learning opportunities. From a Complex Dynamic Systems perspective (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008), this tolerance represents a crucial attractor state that maintains system adaptability amid linguistic instability, allowing knowledge restructuring without disengagement (Hiver & Al-Hoorie, 2020). Positive psychology in SLA (Dewaele et al., 2018) further elucidates how tolerance of ambiguity functions as an affective resource that buffers against anxiety and sustains motivation—a connection evidenced by the parallel finding of high foreign language enjoyment in this cohort.

Teacher development literature provides additional explanatory power, as pedagogies emphasizing psychological safety and reframing ambiguity as learning opportunities demonstrably cultivate this disposition (Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2014). While not directly measured, the results suggest Iranian teachers may be implementing such approaches, highlighting the importance of integrating ambiguity tolerance awareness into professional development programs (Oxford, 2017; Khajavy et al., 2018). Sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978) further contextualizes these findings, as scaffolded classroom interactions can transform ambiguous moments into productive zones of proximal development when teachers effectively mediate uncertainty.

Culturally, these findings complicate straightforward applications of Hofstede's uncertainty avoidance indices (Hofstede et al., 2010). Iranian EFL learners appear to compartmentalize their approach to language learning, temporarily suspending broader cultural tendencies to embrace ambiguity as a necessary condition for acquiring English, a language perceived as instrumental for global engagement (Pishghadam et al., 2013). This demonstrates how domain-specific learning environments can cultivate psychological dispositions distinct from generalized cultural patterns.

In conclusion, Iranian EFL learners exhibit significant tolerance of ambiguity that functions as a valuable psychological resource. This disposition aligns with contemporary multilingualism research while challenging earlier deficit-oriented perspectives. The convergence of cognitive, affective, pedagogical, and sociocultural explanations

underscores the multidimensional nature of this construct in language learning. Future research should investigate how specific instructional practices in the Iranian context further develop this adaptive competence.

5.2. Discussion of the Results of the Second Research Question

The second research question addressed the extent to which Iranian EFL learners experience FLCE. Based on the analysis, the null hypothesis—stating that Iranian EFL learners do not demonstrate any significant level of FLCE—was rejected. Learners reported perceiving substantial levels of enjoyment in their English language classes, indicating that, effectively, their engagement with the classroom environment is largely positive.

This finding corresponds with an expanding body of international literature that affirms the salience of enjoyment in foreign language learning. The pioneering work of Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) highlighted FLCE as a dominant emotional factor, often superseding anxiety in its prevalence and educational impact. This research echoes such findings, suggesting that the Iranian EFL context—often assumed to be anxiety-ridden—actually accommodates robust expressions of enjoyment. Studies in other Asian EFL settings, such as those conducted in China (Li et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2021) and Japan (Dewaele et al., 2018), similarly point to moderate to high levels of FLE, reinforcing the idea that positive classroom emotions transcend national and cultural boundaries. In particular, Dewaele, Witney, et al. (2018) emphasized the global predominance of FLCE, a conclusion that supports the observations made in the present investigation.

Within the Iranian educational context, this pattern of high enjoyment is further supported by an emerging wave of research influenced by the principles of positive psychology. Empirical studies by Pishghadam and colleagues (e.g., Pishghadam et al., 2019; Derakhshan et al., 2022) have consistently documented the prevalence of positive affect among Iranian learners, attributing such emotions to factors like teacher behavior, classroom rapport, and the learning environment. These findings converge with earlier Iranian studies, including Fathi and Derakhshan (2019), which also identified enjoyment as a key emotional experience in EFL classrooms. The consistency across studies invites reconsideration of formerly deficit-oriented narratives that framed language learning in Iran as predominantly stressful, instead drawing attention to learners' capacity for emotional engagement and enjoyment.

From a theoretical perspective, the prevalence of FLCE among Iranian EFL learners can be understood through several overlapping frameworks.

Drawing on the principles of Positive Psychology in Second Language Acquisition (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; MacIntyre et al., 2019), enjoyment is recognized as a vital emotional resource that broadens learners' cognitive capacities and builds long-term personal assets such as motivation, resilience, and self-efficacy (Fredrickson, 2001). In this regard, FLCE functions not only as an emotional byproduct of classroom experience but also as a catalyst for deeper engagement and willingness to communicate (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Dewaele et al., 2019; Khajavy et al., 2018).

The findings also align with the Control-Value Theory of Achievement Emotions (Pekrun, 2006; Pekrun et al., 2007), which posits that positive emotions such as enjoyment emerge when learners perceive their learning as both controllable and valuable. In the current context, learners' emotional responses likely reflect a perceived sense of agency and a recognition of English as a meaningful and beneficial academic pursuit. These emotional outcomes may be enhanced by pedagogical approaches, classroom dynamics, and learning tasks that emphasize learner autonomy and relevance.

Additionally, the results can be interpreted through the lens of Complex Dynamic Systems Theory (CDST) (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008; Hiver & Al-Hoorie, 2020), which conceptualizes FLCE as a dynamic attractor state within the broader language learning system. According to this view, enjoyment plays a stabilizing and amplifying role, creating positive feedback loops that bolster engagement, deepen classroom interaction, and promote sustained motivation. The enduring presence of FLCE in this sample suggests that enjoyment may serve as a resilient and adaptive attractor within learners' evolving language learning trajectories (Dewaele & Dewaele, 2017).

Teacher immediacy and other socio-contextual influences are also likely contributors to the observed affective outcomes. Considerable evidence has demonstrated that teacher-related factors—such as verbal and non-verbal immediacy, enthusiasm, emotional support, and classroom management—are strong predictors of student enjoyment (Dewaele et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2021; Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020). Although this study did not directly assess teacher behavior, the prevalence of FLCE suggests that learners may be benefiting from emotionally competent instruction and affectively supportive learning environments. Derakhshan (2022) underscores the importance of “teacher positivity” within the Iranian EFL context, suggesting that positive teacher-learner interactions may buffer external stressors and create emotionally secure classroom climates conducive to learning.

Finally, the socio-cultural context within which these learners are situated cannot be overlooked. Despite broader geopolitical or systemic challenges, Iranian EFL learners appear to exhibit remarkable affective resilience, demonstrating the capacity to derive enjoyment from language learning activities within classroom micro-contexts. This capacity reflects the internalization of intrinsic motivation and a deeply held recognition of the instrumental and integrative value of English (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Moreover, the classroom may function as a protective or transformative space, allowing learners to experience positive emotions irrespective of external constraints—a phenomenon similarly documented in cross-cultural studies of language learning enjoyment (Pishghadam et al., 2021).

6. Conclusion

This study makes several innovative contributions by integrating an interdisciplinary theoretical framework—including Second Language Acquisition (SLA), educational psychology, and positive psychology—with a culturally specific investigation of Iranian EFL learners. The methodological design, which employed standardized self-report instruments, allowed for a nuanced exploration of the interplay between learners' cognitive disposition (tolerance of ambiguity) and affective engagement (foreign language class enjoyment). Conducted in the context of Iranian language institutes, the study addresses a gap in existing research by highlighting affective and cognitive traits in a Middle Eastern EFL context, where both constructs are underexplored.

The primary findings revealed that Iranian EFL learners demonstrated high levels of both tolerance of ambiguity and foreign language enjoyment. Moreover, tolerance of ambiguity significantly predicted classroom enjoyment, suggesting that learners who are more comfortable with linguistic uncertainty are also more likely to experience positive emotions in language classes. This finding reinforces earlier work by Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014), who found that enjoyment plays a crucial role in learners' emotional experiences, often surpassing anxiety in frequency and influence. It also aligns with classroom-based findings that associate ambiguity-tolerant students with greater resilience and willingness to take communicative risks (MacIntyre & Mercer, 2014).

Theoretically, this study refines multiple influential models in SLA. Krashen's (1985) Affective Filter Hypothesis explains how emotional states affect language acquisition; in this study, high ambiguity tolerance likely reduced anxiety, lowering the affective filter and facilitating greater enjoyment and input processing. From a Complex Dynamic Systems Theory (CDST) perspective (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008), the co-

fluctuation of ambiguity tolerance and enjoyment demonstrates the dynamic interdependence of affective and cognitive states. Similarly, the Broaden-and-Build Theory of Positive Emotions (Fredrickson, 2001) helps explain how enjoyment—fueled by comfort with ambiguity—broadens learners’ cognitive and behavioral repertoires, contributing to greater classroom engagement. Finally, Pekrun’s (2006) Control-Value Theory posits that enjoyment arises when students perceive learning as both controllable and valuable. Ambiguity-tolerant learners may see uncertain language input as manageable and meaningful, thus enhancing their emotional response.

These theoretical refinements carry important pedagogical implications. Teachers in EFL contexts should consider integrating ambiguity-rich tasks into their instructional design, supported by a positive classroom climate that encourages risk-taking and frames uncertainty as a normal aspect of learning (Zhao & Yang, 2022). By reinforcing learners’ confidence and curiosity, instructors can leverage ambiguity tolerance as a driver of affective engagement. This study underscores the need for teacher education programs to emphasize the development of emotionally supportive and cognitively stimulating environments that promote both resilience and enjoyment.

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