

EXAMINING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FOREIGN LANGUAGE PEACE OF MIND AND LISTENING COMPREHENSION OF YOUNG LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT

Positive emotions have recently attracted the interest of researchers in the field of foreign language teaching. One of the most recent constructs to be studied is Foreign Language Peace of Mind (FLPOM). However, there have been few studies of FLPOM in educational contexts, particularly with regard to foreign language achievement. Given the lack of studies on this construct and the paucity of studying listening skill in foreign language contexts, this study aims to address this gap by investigating whether there is a relationship between perceived FLPOM level and listening comprehension skills of young learners in Turkey. To this end, data were collected from the FLPOM 5-Likert scale and the listening component of the Cambridge KEY exam and then subjected to correlation analysis. The results of the study indicate that there is a statistically significant, moderate positive correlation ($r_s = .52, p < .05$) between students' perceived FLPOM scores and listening comprehension scores. The results suggest practical applications and implications for teachers and curriculum designers to improve language learning by addressing the emotional dimensions of the learning process.

Keywords: *foreign language peace of mind, listening comprehension, peace of mind,*

INTRODUCTION

Research on variables affecting L2 development has largely addressed cognitive factors such as aptitude, working memory, and mental lexicon but fewer studies have examined the social psychological variables such as motivation, attitudes, and personality traits of L2 learners (Zhou, Dewaele, Lochtman & Xi, 2021). Although studies in educational contexts mention that learners experience some kind of emotions such as frustration, joy, anger, and hope, emotions have only recently received attention in second language research (Deweale, 2015). Only anxiety has been studied to some degree, and to a much lesser extent, enjoyment (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015). Therefore, investigating the role of positive emotions has recently gained interest and attention in the field (Prior, 2019).

It is believed that positive affect gives people strength and encourages them to achieve what they need to achieve and make the best of the circumstances in which they find themselves (Isen, 2003). Thus, it has been suggested that positive affect, which is a characteristic feature of well-being, could produce many desirable resources and successes (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005). In support of this perspective, positive affect has been found to be an important factor that promotes student success (Datu, 2017). Therefore, according to Zhou, et al. (2021), it is important to understand foreign language learners' emotions because they can directly affect foreign language performance.

Psychologists categorize emotions into two dimensions: *valence*, which is either positive or negative, and *arousal*, which is either high (elated - excited), medium (content - happy), or low (calm - relaxed). Arousal, which describes the intensity and level of a particular emotion (Barrett, 1996), is one of the emotional factors that most strongly reflect differences across cultures (Lim, 2016). Studies have shown that people in Western countries tend to value high-arousal emotions such as enthusiasm or anger more, while people in Eastern countries tend to value low arousal emotions such as calmness or sadness more (Chen et al., 2015, Lim, 2016). This is due to affect valuation theory (Tsai, Knutson,

& Fung, 2006), which suggests that affects with medium to high-arousal levels tend to be more relevant to people in individualistic contexts (Western cultures) because expressing desires and values is important in their cultural context, while affects with low-arousal levels are more appropriate in collectivistic cultures because accommodating to the needs and desires of others is highly valued in their cultural setting. However, research on positive affect in academic contexts has generally focused on positive emotions with medium to high arousal levels. Therefore, in educational contexts, there is a need to study low arousal positive emotions, especially in collectivistic cultures (Datu, 2017).

Based on the cultural variations of emotional states, Lee, Lin, Huang, and Frederickson (2013) brought light to a new emotional construct, peace of mind (POM). POM was developed to explain emotional well-being in Chinese culture. It encompasses the positive emotions with low arousal such as serenity and calmness. Thus, it refers to the inner peace, well-being, and harmony that one feels (Datu, 2017). However, POM has not been adequately studied in academic contexts. Few studies have focused on academic outcomes (e.g., Datu et al., 2018, Datu, 2017) and foreign language contexts that focused on Foreign Language Peace of Mind (FLPOM) (see Zhou, et al., 2021).

Based on Fredrickson's (2001) broaden-and-build theory, it is believed that positive affect is likely to promote motivation and broaden the range of thinking and action bases, which contributes to having psychological resources (Datu, 2017). Therefore, it can be assumed that there might be a possible relationship between the level of POM and learners' academic achievement and motivation. Therefore, it is possible to investigate FLPOM in relation to foreign language performance in four skills: speaking, reading, writing, and listening. This study focuses on the relationship between FLPOM and listening comprehension because even though listening comprehension is crucial for effective language learning, it is generally neglected and not given much attention in the context of foreign language teaching among other skills (Valizadeh & Alavinia, 2013).

Literature Review

Positive Emotions in Foreign Language

It is believed that due to the dominance of the cognitive approach in applied linguistics (Shardow-Smith, 2017), emotions have recently received more attention in the context of foreign language learning and teaching (Dewaele, 2015). Among these emotions, anxiety is the one that has been studied the most (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015). With MancIntyre and Grengersen's (2012) claim that positive emotions can help learners perceive and acquire language input and lead to faster progress, positive emotions have become a popular construct in the field. Therefore, these positive emotions such as enjoyment, flow, grit, and resilience have begun to attract attention in foreign language contexts to enhance learners' language development (Dewaele, Chen, Padilla & Lake, 2019). The main pedagogical understanding of emotions and foreign language development is that emotions have a significant impact on learner performance and success (Dewaele, 2015; Pekrun, 2014).

The studies in the context of foreign language learning and teaching show that foreign language emotions are important since they have an effect on foreign language performance (Zhou, Dewaele, Lochtman, 2021). To give an example, a meta-analysis of investigations around the world showed that there was a moderate positive correlation ($r = .36$) between foreign language enjoyment and academic performance in foreign language context (Botes, Dewaele, & Greiff, 2021). Besides, another meta-analysis in foreign language context showed that there was a moderate negative correlation ($r = -.39$) between foreign language classroom anxiety and academic performance (Botes, Greiff, & Dewaele, 2020).

Peace of Mind

Peace of Mind (POM) is one of the positive emotions introduced by Lee et al. (2013) in an attempt to conceptualize the state of peacefulness and harmony. It refers to an inner peace that includes positive emotional states with low arousal such as calmness and peacefulness and harmony

that involves a state of equilibrium (Zhou et al., 2021). It is also believed to enhance and enable self-control and emotional regulation (Lu, 2008). It is believed that individuals who experience positive affect tend to have higher motivation and academic achievement (Datu, 2017). Thus, it is possible to argue that POM, a positive affect, may be associated with better academic performance because it can promote different types of academic motivation. This could be due to the fact that POM can potentially broaden students' perspective and thinking, enabling them to expand their behavioral strategies, which has a positive impact on learning outcomes (e.g., Guay et al., 2013). Moreover, POM can increase students' motivation as they realize that it is important to learn in order to obtain rewards and avoid guilt (Datu, 2017).

In the literature, there are studies that investigated the construct POM and they found that POM is associated with positive academic and work performance (Datu, 2017). For example, Datu (2017) examined the relationship between peace of mind and academic motivation and academic achievement. The study involved 525 Filipino high school students. The results of the study showed that there was a positive relationship between POM and academic achievement as well as autonomous and controlled motivation. In addition, the results showed that POM accounted for between 1% and 18% of the difference between academic achievement and motivation. Another study that examined POM in an academic context is the study by Datu et al. (2018). In this study, the authors sought to determine the relationship between POM and academic engagement and the extent to which POM predicts academic engagement. The study involved 606 Filipino high school students whose mean age was 13.87 years. The results of the study showed that there was a positive relationship between POM and academic engagement.

Foreign Language Peace of Mind

Based on the findings of POM, Zhou et al. (2021) attempted to investigate the POM in a foreign language context and introduced a new construct for positive emotions, Foreign Language Peace of Mind (FLPOM), in their study. FLPOM refers to learners' psychological well-being and emotional state of inner peace and harmony in foreign language context (Zhou et al., 2023). In the paper (Zhou et al., 2021), the authors conducted three sub-studies. In the first study, they developed and validated the FLPOM scale to measure the FLPOM level of foreign language learners. In the second study, they applied the FLPOM scale they developed to Chinese EFL learners to determine whether and to what extent FLPOM differs from Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE). And in the third sub-study, they investigated the extent to which FLPOM and FLE predict learners' language proficiency. The results of these sub-studies showed that although FLPOM and FLE are related, they are different emotional constructs. In addition, the results of the stepwise regression analyses showed that FLPOM predicted learners' self-perceived foreign language proficiency better than FLE.

Another study that examined FLPOM in a foreign language context was conducted by Zhou et al. (2023). In this study, the authors aimed to investigate the positive impact of FLPOM on language performance by assessing learners' cognitive engagement as a mediator of the relationship between FLPOM and language performance. They also tested FLE in the same model, as it is a comparable positive emotion with high arousal level. The results of the study showed that cognitive engagement had an impact on the relationship between FLPOM and FLE and foreign language performance. One of the most important findings of the study was that FLPOM affected learners' individual resources and helped to reduce resource loss and maintain learners' engagement in high resource loss situations, such as high competitiveness and stress. These results support previous assumptions that FLPOM can help learners focus on tasks and reduce the effects of external distractions (Zhou et al., 2021).

Although it is possible to see the potential impact of POM and FLPOM in educational contexts, there are not many studies that have adequately examined these constructs in academic or foreign language contexts. One of the reasons for this is that the literature has generally focused on

high-arousal positive emotions such as enjoyment, which leads to neglecting the study of low-arousal positive emotions such as POM (Lee et al., 2013). Therefore, as Datu (2017) also mentioned, it is clear that more studies are needed to find out the relationship between POM and academic achievement.

The Turkish Setting

The purpose of this study is to investigate the FLPOM construct with Turkish elementary school EFL learners in the Turkish context. Based on Basabe et al.'s (2002) study, the Hofstede Center's comments on Turkey's national individualism scores and report that Turkey is a collectivist society due to its individualism score of 37 out of 100. This value means that the "we" matters and people belong to groups such as families and organizations in which they take care of each other in return for their loyalty. Communication is indirect and open confrontations are avoided to maintain the unity of the group (Hofstede Center 2014b, "Individualism"). These findings suggest that Turkey has a collectivist setting in a collectivist culture (Caffaro, Ferraris, & Schmidt, 2014).

The reason for examining FLPOM in the Turkish context is that it may be misleading to examine only the positive emotions with high arousal levels in collectivist societies, as emotions with high arousal levels may represent emotional states better in Western societies than in collectivist settings (Tsai et al., 2006). Moreover, people in collectivistic cultures may perceive the value of expressing positive emotions with low arousal more strongly than in individualistic cultures (Tsai et al., 2006). Therefore, based on the affect valuation theory (Tsai, et al., 2006), which states that LAP emotions are more relevant to people in collectivistic cultures, studying FLPOM in the Turkish context would be appropriate and could provide effective results, as Turkey is characterized by a collectivistic structure (Caffaro et al., 2014).

Current Study

Considering the lack of studies on low-arousal positive emotions in collectivist contexts and the FLPOM construct in educational contexts, this study aims to fill this gap by investigating the relationship between foreign language learners' FLPOM and their performance in listening comprehension in the context of English as a foreign language (EFL) in Turkey, which is suggested to be a collectivist country. The reason why listening comprehension is investigated is because listening is an important skill in second language teaching. As Rost (1994) states, "listening is crucial in second language teaching because it provides input to the learner; without understanding the input at the right level, learning simply cannot begin. Thus, listening is fundamental to speaking" (pp. 141-142). But unfortunately, listening skill is neglected and not given enough attention (Valizadeh & Alavinia, 2013). It is also called the Cinderella skill among other language skills because it has been overlooked by its sisters speaking because most people believe that knowing a second language means being able to speak and write in that language (Nunan, 1991).

Based on the lack of studies in both FLPOM and foreign language listening skill, this paper aims to answer two research questions:

1. What is the FLPOM level of the EFL learners in this study in Turkey?
2. Is there a relationship between the FLPOM level of the Turkish EFL learners and their listening comprehension performance?

METHOD

Participants

The participants of the study are 40 11-year-old Turkish EFL students attending the fourth grade of a private school in Turkey. The reason that the participants in this study were 11 years old is because children at this age are reported to be developing their critical thinking and self-monitoring

and reflection skills (Scheider, 2008). Therefore, they are appropriate for this group of young learners to reflect on their own FLPOM level. Their corresponding level in CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) is A2. In other words, they are able to understand basic personal, family and work-related language as well as short and simple texts on familiar topics. All participants are Turkish L1 speakers, none of them reported being bilingual.

Instruments and Data Collection

Listening Comprehension Test: To measure students' L2 listening comprehension, the listening comprehension section of the Cambridge A2 Key Exam, 2022 is administered. In order to focus exclusively on listening comprehension, only parts 1 (5 questions) and 3 (10 questions) of the exam is used for data collection. In total, participants are asked to answer 15 multiple-choice questions. There is 1 point for each correct answer and no points for incorrect answers. The maximum score that can be achieved is therefore 15. Each recording is played twice to maintain the natural environment of the A2 Key Cambridge exam. The teacher collects and scores the papers after the students have finished the test. Since the questions are multiple-choice and the correct answers are fixed, it is not necessary to involve another teacher to calculate the inter-rater reliability.

Foreign Language Peace of Mind Questionnaire: To measure participants' FLPOM level, the FLPOM questionnaire developed and validated by Zhou et al. (2021) is used (see Appendix A). It contains 8 items on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). As in Wright and Asmundson's (2003) study, the items in this study were converted to a 4-point Likert scale format to make them more appropriate for young learners. Therefore, for each item, they were asked to choose between the responses "strongly agree" (4), "agree" (3), "disagree" (2), and "strongly disagree" (1). In addition, smileys ranging from sad to happy were included next to the items. The questionnaire contains statements such as "1. My mind is free and at ease in English class. 2. I am patient and unhurried in English class" The internal consistency of FLPOM scale measured in the study of Zhou et al. (2021) was .95 (measured by Cronbach's alpha), indicating high reliability. And in the current study, it was measured at .93, which is a high reliability value.

Data Analysis

The collected data is analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences 26.0 (SPSS). To answer the first research question, descriptive statistical analysis is used to determine listening comprehension and FLPOM scores. To answer the second research question and to find out the relationship between participants' listening comprehension and their reported FLPOM, Spearman correlation is calculated.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

RQ1: What is the FLPOM level of the EFL learners in this study in Turkey?

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of the FLPOM Levels of Learners for Each Statement (N=40)

<i>Measured Statement</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
1. My mind is free and at ease in the English class.	1.00	4.00	3.22	1.02
2. I have peace and harmony in my mind when learning English	1.00	4.00	3.31	.83
3. I am patient and unhurried in the English class.	1.00	4.00	3.40	.79

4. My mind remains very steady in the process of studying English.	1.00	4.00	3.13	.99
5. I feel peace and comfort in the English class.	1.00	4.00	3.36	.84
6. I am able to find inner peace and harmony when experiencing stress or pressure in English learning.	1.00	4.00	3.18	1.22
7. I have an inner sense of tranquility and harmony in the English class.	1.00	4.00	3.36	.84
8. In English learning, I learn from my mistakes and move forward.	1.00	4.00	3.50	.85

Table 1 shows the results of the descriptive statistical analyses for each statement in the FLPOM questionnaire. Looking at the mean scores for the statements, we can say that the students have a fairly high FLPOM level. These high mean scores for the statements indicate that students in this study tend to have high levels of FLPOM. These results support previous studies by showing that students in Turkey, a collectivist society and culture, tend to have high levels of positive emotions with low levels of arousal, as is the case in other collectivist societies (Datu, 2018). Therefore, it provides us with valuable and preliminary information that low positive arousal state may be an influencing factor for EFL learners in Turkey based on limited participants. Thus, it could be a valid emotional state to be explored in the context of Turkey and in this particular context of listening comprehension.

Among the statements, the highest mean was for statement number 8, indicating that students have a positive attitude and approach to their mistakes in English class. The lowest mean value was for statement number 4, which asked students to indicate the extent to which they have a calm mind when learning English. The reason for this low score might be that the students did not know how to rate the 'steadiness' of their mind. Since it requires a higher level of metacognitive awareness to report this statement, it might have been difficult for them to rate this statement as high as the other statements because of their awareness of their thoughts and learning process. This is because, as described in the literature, children develop their metacognitive awareness as early as elementary school age (Flavell, Miller, & Miller, 1993). Therefore, since they are just developing their awareness, it may have been somewhat more difficult for them to assess the steadiness of their mind.

RQ2: Is there a relationship between the FLPOM level of the Turkish EFL learners and their listening comprehension performance?

Table 2. Correlations between Learners' FLPOM levels and Listening Comprehension Scores (N=40)

	FLPOM	Listening Comprehension
FLPOM	1	.52*
Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.013

Note: *. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Spearman's rho correlation results showed that there was a moderate positive significant correlation between learners' FLPOM level and listening comprehension scores ($r_s = .52, p < .05$) with a common variance of 27%. These results indicate that there is a significant positive relationship between these two constructs. These results also support previous studies that POM has a positive relationship with academic achievement (Datu, 2017) and academic engagement (Datu et al., 2018). Moreover, the results are consistent with the findings of previous studies on FLPOM, which showed that FLPOM was associated with foreign language achievement (Zhou et al., 2021; Zhou et al., 2023). Therefore, the results of this study also contribute to the findings of previous studies by showing a positive relationship between learners' FLPOM level of EFL and their listening comprehension scores. Thus, it can be concluded that the assumption of Zhou et al. (2021) might be true and that FLPOM could help learners to avoid the effects of distractions and focus their attention on the tasks.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate the FLPOM construct in the context of turkey with 11-year-old young EFL learners. Therefore, two research questions were posed: What is the FLPOM level of the EFL learners in this study and whether there is a relationship between the FLPOM level of the young EFL learners and their listening comprehension scores. First, the results of the study showed that the participants of this study who are young EFL learners in Turkey had quite high FLPOM level by having mean scores of maximum 3.50 and minimum 3.13 out of 4.00 for the individual statements. This shows that the FLPOM construct was worth exploring in the Turkish context. Second, the results also showed that there was a moderate positive significant correlation between the learners' reported FLPOM scores and their listening comprehension scores.

Some pedagogical conclusions can be drawn from these results. First, it is important for EFL teachers, course designers, and program administrators to know that FLPOM may have an impact on the academic achievement of EFL learners. It is important to keep in mind that a higher FLPOM level can promote students' academic achievement. Therefore, teachers can try to create and maintain an environment in their classrooms where students feel comfortable. Second, teachers can help students realize that mistakes in class are nothing to be ashamed of, but an opportunity to improve and learn from them. By knowing and awareness of this fact, they can keep their FLPOM at a high level and maintain it. And educational stakeholders can also try to find different ways to promote FLPOM in EFL classrooms that best serve them, such as meditation to promote inner peace (Goenka, 2012).

This study also has some limitations that should be noted. First, the number of participants in this study is only 40. The limited number of participants limits the generalizability of the results of this study. Second, all participants are the same private school in Istanbul, Turkey. Thus, the selection of participants is not random, which affects and limits the generalizability of the results. In this case, further studies could include more participants from different contexts to present more generalizable results and shed light on the topic. In addition, this study focused only on the listening comprehension aspect of foreign language development. However, future studies can also examine foreign language performance from a holistic perspective by including all 4 skills: Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking. The FLPOM construct also needs to be further investigated in different instructional contexts. In this study, it is examined in the elementary school context, but it should also be examined in the secondary school, high school, and university contexts to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the topic. In this way, it would be possible to guide EFL learners and help them achieve greater success in their foreign language development. Therefore, this study could be perceived as a call for further studies on this topic in order to shed more light on the field of foreign language teaching.

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Appendix

Foreign Language Peace of Mind Scale

		Hiç Katılmıyorum 	Katılmıyorum 	Katılıyorum 	Tamamen Katılıyorum 
1	İngilizce derslerinde zihnim özgür ve sakin hissedirim.				

2	İngilizce öğrenirken huzurlu hissederim.				
3	İngilizce derslerinde sabırlıyım.				
4	İngilizce çalışırken aklım ve zihnim sakindir.				
5	İngilizce derslerinde huzurlu ve rahat hissedirim.				
6	İngilizce öğrenirken stres yaşarsam iç huzurumu tekrar bulabilirim.				
7	İngilizce derslerinde içim rahat hissedirim.				
8	İngilizce derslerinde hatalarımdan ders alıp, öğrenmeye devam ederim.				