

AQoL2022Putrajaya

<https://www.amerabra.org>



06th ABRA International Conference on Quality of Life
Double Tree by Hilton Putrajaya Lakeside, Putrajaya, Malaysia, 21-22 Nov 2022

Exploring Positive Psychology Factors in the Quality of English as A Foreign Language Classroom Life: A case study

Xiaoyu Hu^{1*}, Gurnam Kaur Sidhu¹, Xin Lu²

¹ Faculty of Education, Languages, Psychology, and Music, SEGi University, Petaling Jaya, Malaysia

² School of Music, Shanxi University, Taiyuan, China

eula666xiaoyu@gmail.com, gurnamgurdail@segi.edu.my, 78071710@qq.com
Tel: 0192375826

Abstract

This study aimed to examine the quality of life in EFL classrooms by investigating the relationship between foreign language enjoyment, growth mindset, and language performance in a public university in China. The study employed an explanatory sequential research design involving 388 EFL students. And data were collected via a survey questionnaire, an English language test, and interviews. The findings indicated a moderate quality of life in EFL classrooms as students possessed moderate language enjoyment and growth mindset. Additionally, the structural equation modelling analysis revealed that language enjoyment and growth mindset had significant direct effects on English Language Performance.

Keywords: foreign language enjoyment; growth mindset; English language performance; quality of life

*eISSN: 2398-4287 © 2022. The Authors. Published for AMER ABRA cE-Bs by e-International Publishing House, Ltd., UK. This is an open access article under the CC BYNC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>). Peer-review under responsibility of AMER (Association of Malaysian Environment-Behaviour Researchers), ABRA (Association of Behavioural Researchers on Asians/Africans/Arabians) and cE-Bs (Centre for Environment-Behaviour Studies), Faculty of Architecture, Planning & Surveying, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21834/ebpj.v7i22.4153>*

1.0 Introduction

Quality of classroom life is critical in all learning environments, including learning English as a foreign language (EFL). Today, English has become a global language, which has profoundly impacted English teaching and practice in all countries of the world (Rao, 2019). Almost every country, including China, attaches importance to English language teaching and learning. Though China has embraced the teaching and learning of English for the past few decades, EFL college students' poor performance has continued to be an area of investigation (Wu et al., 2022). With a global paradigm shift towards positive psychology, there is a pivotal focus on getting EFL students to enjoy learning and building their resilience with a growth mindset.

The role of emotions in the quality of the FL learning environment is crucial, and one positive emotion often investigated is FL enjoyment (Guo, 2021). Enjoyment is an emotion that people feel when their basic needs are met, or they accomplish something unexpected or surprising beyond themselves (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008). The broad-and-build theory postulates that enjoyment can "broaden people's momentary thought-action repertoires and build their enduring personal resources, ranging from physical and intellectual resources to social and psychological resources" (Fredrickson, 2001, p. 219). Furthermore, FL enjoyment can improve students' overall confidence, motivate them to learn English more enthusiastically, and lower their stress and anxiety (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2016).

*eISSN: 2398-4287 © 2022. The Authors. Published for AMER ABRA cE-Bs by e-International Publishing House, Ltd., UK. This is an open access article under the CC BYNC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>). Peer-review under responsibility of AMER (Association of Malaysian Environment-Behaviour Researchers), ABRA (Association of Behavioural Researchers on Asians/Africans/Arabians) and cE-Bs (Centre for Environment-Behaviour Studies), Faculty of Architecture, Planning & Surveying, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21834/ebpj.v7i22.4153>*

Growth mindset is seen as a crucial motivating factor that enhances FL learning (Bai & Wang, 2020). People with a growth mindset acknowledge that their learning capacity can be strengthened by working hard. In contrast to individuals with a fixed mindset, growth mindset learners are more likely to create long-term goals. They persevere through difficulties and remain interested in their study despite setbacks (Dweck, 2008). Lou and Noels (2019) emphasised that growth mindset can benefit EFL learners as it can significantly impact how they approach English learning, what goals they set, and how well they achieve their goals. In light of the burgeoning field of positive psychology in FL acquisition, this study aimed to investigate the relationship between Chinese EFL college students' FL enjoyment, growth mindset, and English Language Performance (ELP). The study was guided by the following research objectives:

RO1: to examine EFL classroom quality of life via students' level of FL enjoyment.

RO2: to examine EFL classroom quality of life via students' level of growth mindset.

RO3: to investigate the effects of FL enjoyment and growth mindset on ELP.

2.0 Literature Review

The following sections will provide a brief review of the literature on the theory and variables relevant to this study.

2.1 Positive Psychology

Since the publication of *Positive Psychology: An Introduction* by Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000), positive psychology as a subfield of psychology has gained the increased interest of thousands of researchers in various countries and achieved a huge media impact. Positive psychology is known as "the scientific study of positive human functioning and flourishing" (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 6). As a new orientation of psychology, it has been used to study the positive aspects of life, including positive emotional states or experiences (such as happiness and flow), positive individual characteristics (such as resilience and perseverance), and positive institutions (such as schools, families, organisations, and companies that encourage positive principles and practices). Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) emphasised that positive psychology relies on the rigorous scientific approach rather than "wishful thinking, faith, self-deception, fads, or hand waving" (p. 7). The positive factors that make life meaningful include optimism, hope, wisdom, mindedness, responsibility, and enjoyment. It is worth noting that positive psychology's goal is not to take the place of traditional psychology but to offset its weakness of it with a focus on the positive powers in life that could complement the previous methods. With the recent integration of positive psychology into learning, including language learning, research has looked at the development of learners' strengths instead of their limitations. In the view of researchers in the field of FL learning who have realised the powerful effects of positive factors on language learning, the goal of positive psychology is to "develop positive emotions, greater engagement, and meaningful language learning experiences for second language learners" (Padilla et al., 2020, p. 1). However, research on how positive psychology factors can affect Chinese students' ELP is much needed. Two positive factors that have gained increasing attention in the field of EFL are FL enjoyment and growth mindset.

2.2 FL Enjoyment

Recent research in FL learning has highlighted FL enjoyment as a hot topic since the advent of positive psychology (Guo, 2021). Enjoyment refers to a good feeling that comes from breaking the limits of self-balance and going beyond oneself to accomplish something new or unexpected, especially in the face of complex tasks (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008). Enjoyment can be triggered if students complete the tasks assigned by the teacher or get praised by the teacher through their efforts in the FL classroom (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2016). Several studies have examined the indirect effects of FL enjoyment on students' language performance. For example, Li (2019) found that FL enjoyment partially mediated the relationship between Chinese high school students' trait emotional intelligence and EFL achievement. Likewise, the findings of Liu and Wang (2021) revealed that both FL enjoyment and anxiety mediated the relationship between grit and FL performance among Chinese high school students. Additionally, the results of Li and Wei (2022) and Guo (2021) have indicated the favourable direct influence of FL enjoyment on FL performance. Nonetheless, further studies on the immediate effects of FL enjoyment on FL learning are needed. This study was conducted to address this aspect by investigating the direct effects of FL enjoyment on Chinese EFL college students' ELP.

2.3 Growth Mindset

The mindset was put forward by psychologist Carol Dweck. Dweck (2008) pointed out that there are two basic mindsets: fixed mindset and growth mindset. Individuals with a fixed mindset believe their learning ability is fixed and innate. To avoid other people's negative evaluations of themselves, they are afraid of failure and unwilling to face challenges and difficulties. Instead, they choose easy-to-succeed tasks to show their intelligence and wisdom. On the other hand, individuals who possess a growth mind believe that their capacity to learn can be shaped, regulated, and improved through training and hard work. They regard difficulties and failures as opportunities to help them progress and grow. It has been shown that learners' academic achievement is positively impacted by growth mindset. For instance, growth mindset was found to enhance learners' math and reading performance (Romero et al., 2010). The findings of Wang et al. (2020) indicated a strong correlation between growth mindset and academic success among Chinese teenagers. In the field of FL acquisition, Rui and Muthikrishnan (2019) found growth mindset was a key determinant of Chinese EFL students' language proficiency. Similarly, growth mindset was found to positively impact Iranian university students' English language achievement (Khajavy et al., 2021). However, Lou and Noels (2019) noted that insufficient attention had been paid to the importance of growth mindset in FL learning. Hence, this study was conducted to explore the effects of growth mindset on students' ELP in a public university in China.

3.0 Methodology

This study utilised an explanatory sequential research design. This mixed-methods approach allowed triangulation, giving greater credibility to the findings obtained (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

The study involved 388 second-year EFL students (183 males and 205 females) who were randomly selected from one public university in China. Second-year students were chosen because they were familiar with university study compared to first-year students, while third-year students are often busy with internship programs. Most of the students were 19 years old (21.4%) or 20 years old (61.3%).

Data were collected employing established valid instruments. Students' FL enjoyment was measured by employing the 15-item English Classroom Enjoyment Scale with three sub-scales: enjoyment of teacher support, enjoyment of student support, and enjoyment of English Language Learning (Jin & Zhang, 2019). In this present study, the results of confirmatory factor analysis indicated that the scale had high construct validity ($\chi^2/df = 1.306 < 3.0$, RMSEA = $0.028 < 0.08$, CFI = $0.993 > 0.95$, TLI = $0.991 > 0.95$, and NFI = $0.972 > 0.95$), with a Cronbach's alpha score of 0.919. To measure students' growth mindset, nine items were selected from the Language Mindsets Inventory by Lou and Noels (2017) with three sub-scales, namely, general language intelligence beliefs, second language aptitude beliefs, and age sensitivity beliefs about language learning. In this study, the results of confirmatory factor analysis indicated that the high construct validity of the scale was achieved ($\chi^2/df = 1.271 < 3.0$, RMSEA = $0.026 < 0.08$, CFI = $0.997 > 0.95$, TLI = $0.995 > 0.95$, and NFI = $0.985 > 0.95$), with Cronbach's alpha, 0.889. Participants scored all the items in the questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale. Students' ELP was measured by the scores obtained in the College English Test-Band 4.

Data were collected via an online survey questionnaire, an ELP test, and semi-structured interviews with ten students coded as SA (Student A) to SJ. The quantitative data were analysed descriptively and inferentially using SPSS 26.0 and AMOS 24.0, whilst qualitative data were analysed thematically using NVivo 12.0.

4.0 Findings

The following sections will provide the main findings of this study.

4.1 EFL Classroom Quality of Life: Level of FL Enjoyment

Research Objective One examined EFL classroom quality of life via students' level of FL enjoyment, and the results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Mean Scores of Students' FL Enjoyment (n=388)

Sub-scales	Mean	SD
Enjoyment of teacher support	3.69	0.870
Enjoyment of English language learning	3.57	0.817
Enjoyment of student support	3.63	0.976
Overall	3.61	0.746

Scale: 1.00-1.80=low, 1.81-2.60=low to moderate, 2.61-3.40=moderate, 3.41-4.20= moderate to high, 4.21-5.00=high

Based on the results, students indicated a moderate to high quality of classroom life, as this was reflected in students' overall level of FL enjoyment ($M = 3.61$, $SD = 0.746$). Among the three sub-scales, the highest score was recorded for "enjoyment of teacher support" ($M = 3.69$, $SD = 0.870$), while the lowest mean score was recorded for "enjoyment of English language learning" ($M = 3.57$, $SD = 0.817$). All these positive scores showed that the majority of students enjoyed learning English.

The qualitative findings were generally aligned with the quantitative findings. Many students gained enjoyment from their English teachers' support. They enjoyed English classes because their English teachers were friendly and supportive. For example, Respondent SE stated:

... My English teacher is very sincere and easy to get close to. She often encourages and enlightens us in class. She would share with us some stories she had experienced in her life, some of her learning methods in learning English, how she studied English hard as a student, and how she solved the difficulties she encountered in her studies. We enjoy the stories she shared, and we are very inspired.

Several students found learning English enjoyable when the English classes were very interesting. For example, Respondent SI highlighted that:

... There was a class about tourism English. The topic was tourism in Thailand. The teacher first showed us some videos and photos and then introduced us to many places she had been to. She also talked to us about some local cultural customs and traditional festivals. The teacher also told us a joke in the local Thai language, which made the whole class laugh. I am still impressed by that lesson. It was very interesting.

In addition, some students obtained enjoyment from their peers' support. Many students enjoyed learning English with their classmates, especially when they were conducting group discussions or tasks together. For instance, Respondent SG stated:

... I enjoy discussing with my classmates in class. Each student has a unique point of view, and discussing with them can broaden my mind. Many classmates have very new and interesting ideas, and I can learn a lot from them. I feel very happy when I learn something.

4.2 EFL Classroom Quality of Life: Level of Growth Mindset

Research Objective Two examined EFL classroom quality of life via students' level of growth mindset, and the findings are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2. Mean Scores of Students' Growth Mindset (n=388)

Sub-scales	Mean	SD
General language intelligence beliefs	3.64	1.137
Second language aptitude beliefs	3.60	1.005
Age-sensitivity beliefs about language learning	3.71	0.931
Overall	3.65	0.846

Scale: 1.00-1.80=low, 1.81-2.60=low to moderate, 2.61-3.40=moderate, 3.41-4.20= moderate to high, 4.21-5.00=high

The findings revealed that the quality of EFL classroom life in terms of growth mindset ranged from moderate to high ($M = 3.65$, $SD = 0.846$). The highest mean score was recorded for "age sensitivity beliefs about language learning" ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 0.931$), indicating that EFL classrooms postulated the belief that people's language ability could be cultivated regardless of age, followed by "general language intelligence beliefs" ($M = 3.64$, $SD = 1.137$), wherein students believed that general language intelligence was malleable. Students' perception towards "second language aptitude beliefs" ($M = 3.60$, $SD = 1.005$) was the lowest displaying their belief that their language ability could be improved through effort. All these positive scores indicated that the EFL classroom embraced a positive learning environment instilling in students that their ability to learn languages could be improved over time through hard work.

The qualitative findings echoed the quantitative findings. Results indicated that students were optimistic about their language ability because their hard work had paid off. For example, Respondent SC stated the following:

... I face some difficulties in learning English. For example, my reading skills were not good before, and I found that most of the time, I couldn't understand the content of the reading material because I didn't know many words. So, I started memorising words, and it took me about two months to finish a vocabulary book. When I went back to the long and difficult reading material, I found that I could read it. My personal experience tells me that hard work works.

Some students believe that middle-aged and older people can learn English well if they work hard. This was well articulated by Respondent SA:

... I always think that if you work hard, what you want to learn may not reach the level of proficiency, but it will certainly be improved. I read in the news that an old lady who started learning English in her eighties has learned English very well and can chat with foreigners in simple English. As long as you want to learn something, regardless of age, if you work hard, you can learn it well.

4.3 Effects of FL Enjoyment and Growth Mindset on ELP

Research Objective Three investigated the effects of FL enjoyment and growth mindset on ELP. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was performed to examine the relationship between the three variables. Figure 1 displays the standardised estimates for the structural model, which yielded excellent model fit ($\chi^2/df = 1.059 < 3.0$, $RMSEA = 0.012 < 0.08$, $CFI = 0.997 > 0.95$, $TLI = 0.997 > 0.95$, and $NFI = 0.955 > 0.95$).

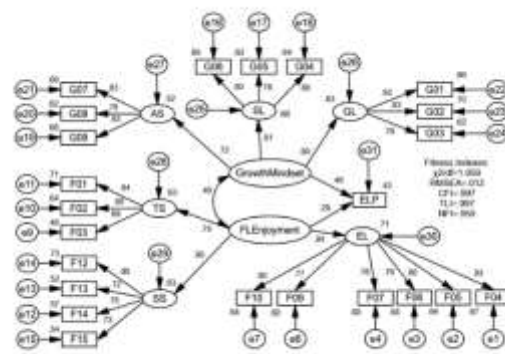


Fig. 1: Structural Model of FL Enjoyment, Growth Mindset, and ELP
(Note: All paths were significant at $p < 0.001$)

The results in Fig. 1 indicated that FL enjoyment had significant direct effects on ELP ($\beta = 0.290$). In addition, growth mindset also had significant direct effects on ELP ($\beta = 0.462$). Overall, 43% of ELP variance could be explained by FL enjoyment and growth mindset.

5.0 Discussion

The overall results indicated a positive quality of life in the EFL classroom environment in this study. This was reflected in students experiencing moderate to high levels of FL enjoyment. Likewise, Guo (2021) found that most Chinese EFL university students enjoyed learning English. This study also recorded a higher FL enjoyment score than high school learners in Li (2019). Liu and Wang (2021) explained that the participants' varying instructional backgrounds could be the cause. In contrast to college students, high school students

in China need to take the competitive college entrance exam. Hence high school students may not experience a positive quality of life and fun learning English compared to university students.

Secondly, positive quality of life was also recorded in terms of growth mindset. Wang et al. (2021) reported similar findings that the majority of Chinese EFL university students possessed a growth mindset toward learning English. Besides, a moderate to high degree of growth mindset was also found in Chinese adolescents (Wang et al., 2020) and primary school students in Hong Kong (Bai & Wang, 2020). Rui and Muthikrishnan (2019) noted that, compared with western students, Chinese students are more likely to adhere to the incremental theory of intelligence. This might be because working hard is considered a virtue and, therefore, particularly emphasised in Chinese Confucian culture.

Thirdly, the results of path analysis showed that FL enjoyment had significant direct effects on ELP, indicating that a positive classroom environment can lead to language success. This finding is supported by past studies that have found a positive link between FL enjoyment and language learning achievements (Hu et al., 2022; Li & Wei, 2022). As indicated by the broad-and-build theory, learners in an enjoyable language learning environment are more motivated to seek opportunities to learn the target language. In addition, positive emotions could increase the resilience of students. A positive EFL classroom climate might help students overcome psychological challenges (such as anxiety) and motivate them to participate more actively in class, leading to enhanced language skills (Lee, 2020).

Finally, the SEM analysis also revealed that growth mindset had significant direct effects on ELP, indicating that learners with a positive attitude regarding their capacity for language acquisition were more likely to acquire greater language proficiency. This finding also confirmed the results of other studies that showed growth mindset contributed significantly to FL performance (Hu et al., 2022; Khajavy et al., 2021). Bai and Wang (2020) noted that a person who believes that his language learning ability can be developed with hard work might be more motivated to put forth the effort and sustain effort in the face of challenges, leading to greater success in language learning.

6.0 Conclusion & Recommendations

This study found that the quality of EFL classroom life has repercussions on FL enjoyment and growth mindset as they positively impact ELP. It is recommended that EFL instructors create fun and positive learning environments to encourage students to learn English with a growth mindset. Instructors can highlight how setbacks can be used constructively rather than dismissing them as a sign of ineptitude and enable students to view criticism constructively. To foster students' enjoyment, instructors are advised to promote a calm, supportive, and upbeat atmosphere in their EFL classrooms by assigning suitable collaborative learning activities that could stimulate students' engagement, like role-playing and group discussions.

Finally, this study is not without limitations. The participants were EFL students from only one university in China, and it is recommended that future studies involve a more extensive sample throughout China or other contexts to replicate the results of this study. Nonetheless, the findings have shed light on the burgeoning field of positive psychology and the importance for EFL instructors to create quality EFL learning environments for positive learning gains.

Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

This paper provides both theoretical and practical implications for integrating positive psychology in language learning to create quality EFL classroom environments.

References

- Bai, B., & Wang, J. (2020). The role of growth mindset, self-efficacy and intrinsic value in self-regulated learning and English language learning achievements. *Language teaching research*, 1362168820933190. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168820933190>
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2017). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approach*. Sage publications.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2008). *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. ser. PS Series. HarperCollins.
- Dewaele, J.-M., & MacIntyre, P. D. (2016). Foreign Language Enjoyment and Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety: The Right and Left Feet of the Language Learner. In T. Gregersen, P. D. MacIntyre, & S. Mercer (Eds.), *Positive psychology in SLA* (pp. 215-236). Multilingual Matters. <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781783095360-010>
- Dweck, C. S. (2008). *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. Random House Digital, Inc.
- Fredrickson, B. L. (2001). The role of positive emotions in positive psychology: the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. *American psychologist*, 56(3), 218. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066x.56.3.218>
- Guo, Y. (2021). Exploring the dynamic interplay between foreign language enjoyment and learner engagement with regard to EFL achievement and absenteeism: a sequential mixed methods study. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.766058>
- Hu, X., Sidhu, G. K., & Lu, X. (2022). Relationship Between Growth Mindset and English Language Performance Among Chinese EFL University Students: The Mediating Roles of Grit and Foreign Language Enjoyment. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13.
- Jin, Y., & Zhang, L. J. (2019). A comparative study of two scales for foreign language classroom enjoyment. *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, 126(5), 1024-1041. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0031512519864471>

- Khajavy, G. H., MacIntyre, P. D., & Harii, J. (2021). A closer look at grit and language mindset as predictors of foreign language achievement. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 43(2), 379-402. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0272263120000480>
- Lee, J. S. (2020). The role of grit and classroom enjoyment in EFL learners' willingness to communicate. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2020.1746319>
- Li, C. (2019). A positive psychology perspective on Chinese EFL students' trait emotional intelligence, foreign language enjoyment and EFL learning achievement. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 41(3), 246-263. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2019.1614187>
- Li, C., & Wei, L. (2022). Anxiety, enjoyment, and boredom in language learning amongst junior secondary students in rural China: How do they contribute to L2 achievement? *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 1-16.
- Liu, E., & Wang, J. (2021). Examining the Relationship Between Grit and Foreign Language Performance: Enjoyment and Anxiety as Mediators. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.666892>
- Lou, N. M., & Noels, K. A. (2017). Measuring language mindsets and modelling their relations with goal orientations and emotional and behavioural responses in failure situations. *The Modern Language Journal*, 101(1), 214-243. <https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12380>
- Lou, N. M., & Noels, K. A. (2019). We are promoting growth in foreign and second language education: A research agenda for mindsets in language learning and teaching. *System*, 86, 102126. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2019.102126>
- Padilla, A. M., Chen, X., & Lake, J. (2020). Editorial: Positive Psychology and Learning a Second or Third Language [Editorial]. 11(2719). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.599326>
- Rao, P. S. (2019). The role of English as a global language. *Research Journal of English*, 4(1), 65-79.
- Romero, C., Paunesku, D., & Dweck, C. (2010). Preliminary report: Crittenden middle school growth mindset study. *Project for Education Research That Scales*.
- Rui, Y., & Muthikrishnan, P. (2019). Growth mindset and students' perception of their English language teachers' feedback as predictors of language proficiency of the EFL learners. *Asian EFL Journal*, 3(2), 32-60.
- Seligman, M., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000). Positive psychology. An introduction. *The American Psychologist*, 55 1, 5-14.
- Wang, D., Yuan, F., & Wang, Y. (2020). Growth mindset and academic achievement in Chinese adolescents: A moderated mediation model of reasoning ability and self-affirmation. *Current Psychology*, 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-019-00597-z>
- Wang, H., Peng, A., & Patterson, M. M. (2021). The roles of class social climate, language mindset, and emotions in predicting willingness to communicate in a foreign language. *System*, 99, 102529. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2021.102529>
- Wu, Y. T., Foong, L. Y. Y., & Alias, N. (2022). Motivation and Grit Affect Undergraduate Students' English Language Performance. *European Journal of Educational Research*, 11(2), 781-794.