

A Visual Analysis Review of International Research on Foreign Language Learner Wellbeing Based on CiteSpace

Mengjie Yang

School of English Studies, Xi'an International Studies University, Xi'an, Shannxi, China

Abstract: This study conducts a systematic review on international foreign language learners' wellbeing based on CiteSpace. It includes the analysis on the publication situation, research design, research hotspots in this field. In terms of publication situation, the majority of related research has concentrated on the past decade, showing a trend of interdisciplinary integration. In terms of research design, the existing results are mainly based on cross-sectional questionnaire surveys, with relatively insufficient qualitative methods and long-term tracking studies. In terms of research hotspots, the main focus is on core themes such as academic engagement, emotional experience, learning motivation, teacher support, and technological environment. Future research needs to strengthen methodological innovation, theoretical localization, and practical transformation to promote systematic research on the well-being of foreign language learners and the development of educational practice.

Keywords: Foreign Language Learner; Wellbeing; CiteSpace; Paper review

1. Introduction

Foreign language learning has become an important way for individuals to integrate into the international community and improve self-development [1]. In recent years, the issue of wellbeing has received increasing attention from scholars [2]. Studies have shown that wellbeing of learners is significantly associated with the intensity of their learning motivation, the effective application of learning strategies, and so on [3]. Generally, those learners who experience higher wellbeing during language learning often demonstrate stronger learning resilience, more proactive learning engagement, and more outstanding academic performance [4]. Therefore, the exploration of the wellbeing of

foreign language learners is an important window for us to understand the deep psychological motivations [5]. Nowadays, the emphasis of the international research has gradually expanded to positive emotions [6].

The current studies have not yet sketched out a clear and coherent knowledge development map in this field [7]. This work helps clarify the applicability and contributions of different theoretical frameworks in this field [8], distinguish the diversity of empirical research paradigms and their internal connections, and possibly reveal the unexplored blank areas in current research [9]. For foreign language teachers and curriculum designers, it contributes to creating a more emotionally supportive secure [10]. For educational policymakers and school administrators, it helps to elevate the emotional well-being and mental health support system of learners [11]. Ultimately, the expectation of this research is to promote foreign language education practice to go beyond the single emphasis on the cultivation of "instrumental language skills" [12].

Based on the analysis, this research attempts to answer the following three questions:

- 1) What are the publication situation of international research of foreign language learners' wellbeing?
- 2) What are the features of research designs in international research of foreign language learners' wellbeing?
- 3) What are the hotspots in international research of foreign language learners' wellbeing?

2. Literature Review

Some concepts about wellbeing have been developed in positive psychology [13]. Cooke et al. [14] identified two most influential approaches in developing well-being construct: hedonic approach and eudaimonic approach. The hedonic approach focused on pleasure and happiness [15]. While eudaimonic approach centered on how individuals functioned in life, which had been described as "flourishing" and self-actualization

[16]. Based on these two approaches, there were three major research systems on well-being, namely subjective well-being, psychological well-being and social well-being. And the concept of well-being in positive psychology was the integration of subjective well-being, psychological well-being and social well-being [17]. Subjective well-being was developed based on the hedonistic approach. Diener [18] defined subjective well-being as individuals' overall evaluation of their life quality based on predetermined standards, including life satisfaction, positive emotions, and negative emotions.

As a core concept of positive psychology, the research on happiness has undergone a transformation from focusing on emotional experiences to concentrating on the prosperity of life. With the emergence of subjective well-being, Seligman [19] proposed the authentic wellbeing theory, which believed that wellbeing was consist of three elements, including position emotions, engagement and meaning. In this situation, Seligman [20] further defined the concept of well-being with five important aspects, including positive emotion, engagement, relationship, meaning and achievement, namely PERMA.

MacIntyre and Mercer [6] first introduced the well-being theory into the field of second language acquisition and explored the importance of well-being in second language acquisition. It broke the research tradition of linguistic goal-oriented in L2 acquisition [22]. Research on well-being was still in its initial stage in the field of second language acquisition. Based on the PERMA model, Butler and Kern [21] designed PERMA scale, which could be used to subjectively measured the level of well-being. Yang and Mohd [23] examined the reliability and validity of the PERMA scale as a tool for measuring well-being among 309 English major students, and indicated that PERMA instrument was appropriate for EFL students at Chinese universities. Relevant studies indicated that learners' well-being had positive influence on their academic achievements [24, 25] and it also closely related to some important factors that influence academic proficiency, including self-confidence, growth mindset and motivation [26].

3. Research Design

The data of the study were collected from the

Core Collection Database in the Web of Science (WoS). In the process, keywords were defined as "foreign language/ English learners/ student wellbeing/ happiness". The time were set from 2019 to 2026. the literature type were restricted to "article". The quantitative analysis was mainly carried out using bibliometric methods. The study analyzes relevant data by using the software called CiteSpace R6.2.4 (hereinafter referred to as CiteSpace) and Excel. The analysis can be divided into three dimensions: publication situations, research design and research hotpots. Publication situations includes the trend of publication volume, main regions, and author collaboration networks. Research design involves the main research methods, theoretical perspectives, and research objects. Research hotpots shows popular themes and the evolution of the field through analyzing frequent topic words and sudden increases in topic words.

4. Results

4.1 Publication Situation

4.1.1 Publication Volume and Trend

A total of 21 research papers on the well-being of international foreign language learners from 2019 to 2026 were selected for this study, showing a significant upward trend (Figure 1).

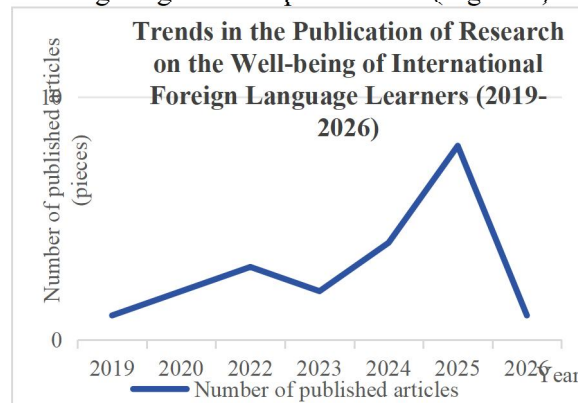


Figure 1. Publication Trend of Relevant Data

4.1.2 Main Source Countries of the Research

The study on the well-being of international foreign language learners shows a distribution pattern from 2019 to 2026 with China and Iran as the core countries, and participation from many countries (Figure 2).

4.2 Research Design

4.2.1 Research Method

The research in this field is dominated by quantitative studies, accounting for approximately two-thirds of the total, and is

mainly conducted through data-driven analysis using methods such as questionnaire surveys, experimental designs, and structural equation models (Table 1). Although qualitative research accounts for a smaller proportion, it provides deep insights into emotions and experiences through narratives and in-depth interviews. Moreover, the application of mixed research methods is increasing.

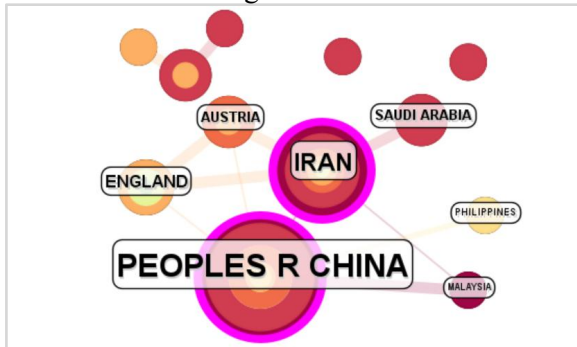


Figure 2. Source Countries of Relevant Data

Table 1. Research Methods of Relevant Data

Research Method	Number of Papers	Percentage
Quantitative Research	14	66.70%
Qualitative Research	3	14.30%
Mixed Methods	4	19.00%
Total	21	100%

4.2.2 Theoretical Perspective

From the theoretical perspective, relevant studies include uses theories including positive psychology, self-determined theory, emotion regulation and so on. Positive psychology constitutes the core theoretical pillar of this field. The Self-Determination Theory is another major theoretical foundation. Relevant theories are frequently used to explain the impact of basic psychological needs such as autonomy, competence, and belonging on wellbeing. Additionally, the Emotional Regulation Theory, the Teacher Support Behavior Theory, and the Educational Technology Integration Perspective are also often incorporated into the analysis, forming a multi-level, interdisciplinary theoretical dialogue.

4.2.3 Research Objects

From the perspective of research objects, the study shows concentration of region and diversity of cultures. Chinese EFL learners are the most group, reflecting the active academic output in the interdisciplinary field of applied linguistics and educational psychology in this region. Learners from Middle Eastern countries such as Iran and Saudi Arabia are also important research subjects, and related studies often involve bilingual contexts and cultural

comparisons.

4.3 Analysis of Research Hotspots

According to the frequency of key themes in the international research on the wellbeing of foreign language learners, it can be seen that the research in this field exhibits a clear focus on both emotional and psychological dimensions. "Positive psychology" (8 times) is the first popular theme. Following closely is "anxiety" (7 times), indicating that emotional obstacles in the learning process remain a key issue for scholars to explore, especially "foreign language classroom anxiety" (3 times), as a specific type of anxiety in a specific context, is singled out and highlights the impact of the teaching environment on learners' emotions.

5. Conclusions and Implications

This study analyzes relevant research on foreign language learners' wellbeing based on CiteSpace. Based on above research findings, future studies can further deepen and expand in the following aspects. First, longitudinal tracking studies, qualitative in-depth descriptions, and the application of mixed methods can be conducted. Second, the diversity of research objects needs to be expanded, and attention should be paid to the well-being status of learners in primary and secondary schools, vocational colleges, multilingual backgrounds, and those with special needs. Third, future research can further explore the mechanisms and implementation paths of the collaborative efforts of home, school, and society in promoting the mental health of foreign language learners.

References

- [1] Gregersen, T., and MacIntyre, P. D. (2014) Capitalizing on language learners' individuality: From premise to practice. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- [2] MacIntyre, P. D., Gregersen, T., and Mercer, S. (2019) Setting an agenda for positive psychology in SLA: Theory, practice, and research. *The Modern Language Journal*, 103(1), 262–274.
- [3] Oxford, R. L. (2016) Toward a psychology of well-being for language learners: The "EMPATHICS" vision. In P. D. MacIntyre, T. Gregersen, and S. Mercer (Eds.), *Positive psychology in SLA* (pp. 10–88) Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- [4] Dewaele, J.-M., and Alfawzan, M. (2018)

- Does the effect of enjoyment outweigh that of anxiety in foreign language performance? *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching*, 8(1), 21–45.
- [5] Jin, Y., and Zhang, L. J. (2018) The dimensions of foreign language classroom enjoyment and their effect on foreign language achievement. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 24(7), 948–962.
- [6] MacIntyre, P. D., and Mercer, S. (2014) Introducing positive psychology to SLA. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching*, 4(2), 153–172.
- [7] Lake, J. (2013) Positive L2 self: Linking positive psychology with L2 motivation. In M. Apple, D. Da Silva, and T. Fellner (Eds.), *Language learning motivation in Japan* (pp. 225–244) Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- [8] Ryan, R. M., and Deci, E. L. (2020) Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation from a self-determination theory perspective: Definitions, theory, practices, and future directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 61, 101860.
- [9] Dörnyei, Z., and Ryan, S. (2015) *The psychology of the language learner revisited*. New York: Routledge.
- [10] Mercer, S., and Dörnyei, Z. (2020) *Engaging language learners in contemporary classrooms*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [11] Wang, T., Liu, Y., and Ryan, S. (2021) Understanding the ecology of foreign language learner well-being: A person-centered approach. *System*, 103, 102641.
- [12] Fredrickson, B. L. (2013) Positive emotions broaden and build. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 47, 1–53.
- [13] Butler, J., and Kern, M. L. (2016) The PERMA-Profil: A brief multidimensional measure of flourishing. *International journal of wellbeing*, 6(3), 1-48.
- [14] Ryan, R. M., and Deci, E. L. (2001) On happiness and human potentials: A review of research on hedonic and eudaimonic well-being. *Annual review of psychology*, 52(1), 141-166.
- [15] Cooke, R., Dahdah, M., Norman, P., and French, D. P. (2016) How well does the theory of planned behaviour predict alcohol consumption? A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Health psychology review*, 10(2), 148-167.
- [16] Ryff, C. D., and Singer, B. (1998) The contours of positive human health. *Psychological inquiry*, 9(1), 1-28.
- [17] Cao Rui, Li Fang, Zhang Haixia. (2013) From Subjective Happiness to Psychological Well-being and Social Well-being: A New Perspective in Positive Psychology Research. *Journal of Tianjin Education and Research Institute*, (05), 68-70.
- [18] Diener, E. (1984) Subjective well-being. *Psychological bulletin*, 95(3), 542.
- [19] Seligman, M. E. P., and Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000) Positive psychology: An introduction. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 5–14.
- [20] Seligman, M. E. (2011) *Flourish: A visionary new understanding of happiness and well-being*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- [21] Butler, J., and Kern, M. L. (2016) The PERMA-Profil: A brief multidimensional measure of flourishing. *International journal of wellbeing*, 6(3), 1-48.
- [22] Xu Jinfen. (2020) New Trends in Foreign Language Education Research: From the Perspective of Positive Psychology. *English Studies*, (02), 155-164.
- [23] Yang, L., and Mohd, R. B. S. (2021) Exploratory and Confirmatory Factor Analysis of PERMA for Chinese University EFL Students in Higher Education. *International Journal of Language Education*, 5(2), 51-62.
- [24] Howell, A. J. (2009) Flourishing: Achievement-related correlates of students' well-being. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 4(1), 1-13.
- [25] Suldo, S., Thalji, A., and Ferron, J. (2011) Longitudinal academic outcomes predicted by early adolescents' subjective well-being, psychopathology, and mental health status yielded from a dual factor model. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 6(1), 17-30.
- [26] King, R. B. (2016) A fixed mindset leads to negative affect. *Zeitschrift für Psychologie*, 225(2), 137-145.