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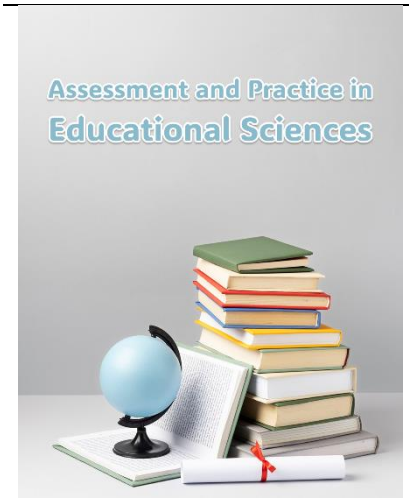

Developing and Validating a Positive Psychology Model of Flourishing in EFL Contexts: A Structural Equation Modeling Study

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ABSTRACT

Over the past decade, Positive Psychology has gained substantial momentum in Second Language Acquisition (SLA). However, flourishing as a multidimensional higher-order construct has remained underexplored in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. This study developed and validated a structural model of flourishing in EFL settings, grounded in Positive Psychology and Self-Determination Theory. A quantitative cross-sectional design was employed. Data were collected from 450 EFL learners in Iran. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and second-order Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) were used to test the measurement and structural models. To address potential methodological concerns, supplementary analyses including partial correlations, independent samples t-tests, one-way ANOVA, MANOVA, and non-parametric tests (Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis) were also conducted to examine the robustness of the findings and the influence of demographic variables. The measurement model demonstrated excellent fit (CFI = 0.94, TLI = 0.92, RMSEA = 0.06, SRMR = 0.05). Flourishing was validated as a second-order latent construct comprising positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. Foreign Language Enjoyment (β = 0.42), teacher support (β = 0.35), self-determined motivation (β = 0.38), and academic resilience (β = 0.31) significantly predicted flourishing. Flourishing significantly predicted academic engagement (β = 0.52) and language achievement (β = 0.29). Supplementary analyses confirmed the stability of these relationships. Specifically, a significant partial correlation was found between Foreign Language Enjoyment and academic resilience ($r = 0.39$, $p < .01$) after controlling for age. Furthermore, no significant differences in flourishing were observed based on gender ($t(448) = 1.45$, $p = .14$) or age group, as confirmed by ANOVA ($F(2, 447) = 0.98$, $p = .37$) and Kruskal-Wallis tests ($H(2) = 4.21$, $p = .12$), reinforcing the generalizability of the model across these demographic factors. This study introduces flourishing as an integrative well-being construct in SLA, validates a second-order SEM model, and provides a comprehensive framework for understanding optimal psychological functioning in EFL learning environments.

Keywords: Flourishing; Positive Psychology; EFL; Structural Equation Modeling; Well-being; Second Language Acquisition

Introduction

Second language acquisition is not solely a cognitive process of mastering vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and communicative conventions; it is also an affective, motivational, interpersonal, and developmental experience through which

learners construct competence, identity, purpose, and a sense of belonging. For many years, research in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education concentrated predominantly on negative psychological experiences, including foreign language anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, demotivation, burnout, communication apprehension, and academic failure. Although this problem-oriented tradition has clarified many barriers to successful language learning, its emphasis on psychological deficits has provided only a partial account of learners' functioning. The emergence of positive psychology in second and foreign language research has therefore represented an important paradigmatic shift from identifying what impairs learning toward understanding the personal and contextual conditions under which learners can function optimally, experience sustained well-being, and achieve meaningful linguistic development (1). This shift does not deny the importance of negative emotions or learning difficulties; rather, it expands the scope of inquiry by examining the strengths, resources, positive emotions, supportive relationships, and motivational processes that allow learners to manage adversity and develop successfully. Recent systematic evidence indicates that positive psychology research in second and foreign language education has grown rapidly, yet much of this literature remains fragmented around isolated constructs rather than comprehensive models of optimal psychological functioning (2). Consequently, there is a growing need to move beyond the study of separate positive variables and toward theoretically integrated models that explain how learners flourish within EFL environments.

Flourishing provides a particularly suitable construct for this purpose because it conceptualizes well-being as more than temporary happiness, positive mood, or the absence of psychological distress. In educational settings, flourishing refers to a broad condition of optimal functioning in which learners experience positive emotions, become deeply engaged in learning activities, establish supportive interpersonal relationships, perceive meaning and value in their educational pursuits, and develop a sense of competence and accomplishment. From this perspective, a flourishing language learner is not simply a student who receives high examination scores. Rather, such a learner enjoys the process of learning, participates actively, perceives relationships with teachers and peers as psychologically supportive, interprets language learning as meaningful, and believes that sustained effort produces personally valuable progress. Contemporary reviews of positive psychology and motivation in English language learning suggest that flourishing can serve as an integrative framework connecting affective experiences, autonomous motivation, resilience, interpersonal support, and academic development (3). Similarly, discussions of psychological well-being in EFL emphasize that learner wellness should be conceptualized as a multidimensional outcome shaped by interactions among personal competencies, classroom relationships, instructional conditions, and broader sociocultural expectations (4). Flourishing may therefore provide a more comprehensive criterion for evaluating educational success than either academic achievement or general life satisfaction considered independently.

A multidimensional understanding of flourishing is especially compatible with positive psychology frameworks that distinguish several interrelated components of optimal functioning. Positive emotion refers to experiences such as enjoyment, hope, interest, satisfaction, and enthusiasm during language learning. Engagement involves concentration, absorption, active participation, and sustained investment in learning tasks. Relationships concern the experience of care, respect, trust, and belonging within the language classroom. Meaning reflects the learner's perception that English learning serves personally, academically, professionally, or socially valuable purposes. Accomplishment refers to progress, mastery, goal attainment, and the belief that one is becoming a more capable language user. Evidence from technology-mediated instruction also supports the relevance of these dimensions. In a study of Chinese EFL learners participating in a massive open online course, positive emotions were associated with English performance through a mediational model based on the PERMA framework, indicating that well-being dimensions may operate together in shaping academic outcomes (5). Research on Chinese EFL students' well-being, language mindset, and performance has likewise demonstrated that positive psychological functioning is meaningfully connected with adaptive beliefs about learning and stronger English outcomes (6). These findings imply that flourishing should

not be treated as an incidental by-product of language achievement; it may instead represent an important psychological foundation through which sustained engagement and successful performance become possible.

Among the affective factors likely to contribute to flourishing, Foreign Language Enjoyment has received substantial scholarly attention. Foreign Language Enjoyment describes the positive emotional experience arising when learners encounter stimulating challenges, recognize progress, interact successfully, and participate in socially rewarding classroom activities. It may emerge from internal sources, such as curiosity, perceived competence, and satisfaction with one's performance, as well as interpersonal sources, including teacher enthusiasm, peer cooperation, and a supportive classroom atmosphere. Positive psychology research has established enjoyment as conceptually distinct from low anxiety, meaning that a learner can experience both challenge-related anxiety and substantial enjoyment within the same learning environment (1). From a positive psychology perspective, enjoyment broadens learners' attention, encourages exploration, supports flexible thinking, and promotes willingness to communicate. Empirical findings among Chinese EFL learners indicate that trait emotional intelligence is related to language achievement partly through Foreign Language Enjoyment, demonstrating that enjoyment can translate personal emotional resources into academic performance (7). Moreover, growth mindset and grit have been shown to contribute to enjoyment, suggesting that learners are more likely to experience positive emotions when they view ability as developable and remain committed during difficulty (8). Enjoyment is therefore not merely a pleasurable classroom reaction; it may be an affective mechanism through which learners become engaged, resilient, socially connected, and confident in their capacity to succeed.

The relationship between positive emotion and flourishing may be particularly important in contexts where language learning is demanding, highly evaluated, or associated with limited opportunities for authentic exposure. Factor-analytic research in learning environments characterized by restricted English exposure indicates that positive psychology constructs constitute meaningful and measurable dimensions of the learner's internal experience (9). In such contexts, positive emotional experiences may compensate partly for limited contact with the target language by sustaining interest, commitment, and psychological energy. Research involving Iranian and Saudi bilingual English learners has also highlighted the contribution of hope and enjoyment to learner well-being, while showing that the strength and configuration of these emotional relationships may vary across cultural contexts (10). These results are significant because they caution against assuming that positive psychological models developed in Western settings can be transferred directly to non-Western EFL populations. Cultural norms concerning emotional expression, authority, academic competition, interpersonal dependence, and educational success may influence how enjoyment is experienced and how strongly it contributes to broader flourishing. Accordingly, models of flourishing require validation within specific linguistic and sociocultural contexts.

Teacher support represents another major contextual foundation of learner flourishing. Language learning involves frequent public performance, error correction, interpersonal comparison, and exposure of one's communicative limitations. Under such conditions, learners' perceptions of teacher care, instructional competence, fairness, availability, encouragement, and emotional responsiveness may strongly influence whether the classroom is experienced as threatening or developmentally supportive. Teacher support can be instructional, involving clear explanations, constructive feedback, scaffolding, and adaptive task design, or emotional, involving respect, empathy, patience, and genuine concern for students' well-being. Research among Chinese EFL learners has shown that academic self-efficacy, grit, and teacher support jointly predict psychological well-being, indicating that learner wellness emerges from interactions between internal capacities and relational resources (11). Teacher caring has also been associated with student well-being through grit, suggesting that supportive teacher–student relationships may strengthen learners' perseverance and subsequently improve their psychological functioning (12). These findings position

the teacher not merely as a transmitter of linguistic knowledge but as a central emotional and motivational agent within the EFL learning ecology.

The psychological benefits of teacher support may operate through several mechanisms. Supportive teachers can reduce fear of mistakes, normalize difficulty, encourage help-seeking, communicate confidence in learners' potential, and provide the structure needed for students to experience progress. Productive scaffolding may also help learners manage tasks that would otherwise exceed their current competence, thereby supporting both educational connectedness and psychological wellness (13). More recent structural evidence has shown that perceived teacher emotional support mediates the relationship between students' social-emotional competence and psychological well-being, suggesting that personal competencies may not fully promote wellness unless learners experience a responsive and emotionally secure instructional environment (14). Similarly, teacher competence has been connected with students' motivation through the mediating roles of psychological flourishing and engagement, while the integration of artificial intelligence may condition some of these relationships in contemporary higher education (15). Collectively, this literature indicates that teacher support is likely to function as both a direct contributor to flourishing and a contextual catalyst through which learners' personal strengths become educationally effective.

Self-determined motivation is another theoretically central antecedent of flourishing. In EFL learning, motivation varies not only in intensity but also in quality. Some learners study English because they enjoy the activity, identify with its personal importance, or consider it meaningful for their future; others participate mainly because of external pressure, grades, social expectations, or fear of failure. Autonomous or self-determined motivation is generally associated with stronger persistence, deeper engagement, more adaptive self-regulation, and greater well-being because learners perceive their actions as consistent with personally endorsed values. The association between teacher competence, learner motivation, flourishing, and engagement suggests that motivational quality is embedded within the broader social and instructional environment rather than being a fixed individual trait (15). A third-wave positive psychology approach to language education similarly emphasizes that self-efficacy, self-concept, and motivation should be understood as interconnected and dynamic psychological resources rather than separate variables (16). From this standpoint, learners are more likely to flourish when they view language learning as self-chosen, meaningful, and consistent with their developing identities.

Self-efficacy is closely related to this motivational process because learners who believe they can manage language-learning demands are more likely to invest effort, interpret difficulty as manageable, and experience success as the result of effective action. Longitudinally oriented positive psychology research has conceptualized EFL self-efficacy as a developmental construct that can strengthen through supportive experiences, mastery, feedback, and positive emotional engagement (17). Conversely, low self-efficacy may intensify anxiety and lead learners to avoid communicative risks, withdraw from demanding tasks, or interpret temporary setbacks as evidence of inability. Recent research on university learners' foreign language classroom anxiety has shown that self-efficacy, flow, and self-compassion are important positive psychological resources for alleviating anxiety (18). Flow is especially relevant to flourishing because it reflects deep absorption in optimally challenging activities, while self-compassion allows learners to respond to mistakes and perceived inadequacies with understanding rather than harsh self-criticism. These constructs reinforce the view that flourishing develops when learners possess both confidence in their capabilities and psychologically adaptive ways of responding to imperfection.

Academic resilience constitutes a further critical component of optimal functioning because foreign language learning is inherently characterized by uncertainty, repeated error, delayed mastery, performance fluctuations, and occasional failure. Resilience refers to the capacity to sustain or restore effective functioning when facing academic adversity. In EFL contexts, it may include persistence, adaptive help-seeking, emotional regulation, flexible strategy use, recovery after poor performance, and continued commitment despite linguistic difficulty. Recent work has reconceptualized English language learning resilience

from a positive psychology perspective and developed psychometric evidence supporting its multidimensional structure (19). This reconceptualization is important because resilience should not be reduced to endurance or passive tolerance. A resilient learner does not simply continue working under pressure but adjusts strategies, mobilizes social resources, regulates emotions, and interprets difficulty as part of development. Research among Iranian EFL teachers has demonstrated that resilience, well-being, and L2 grit are meaningfully related to teaching enjoyment, revealing a broader network of positive psychological capacities across language-education populations (20). Similarly, resilience has been linked with psychological well-being and professional development among Iranian EFL teachers, suggesting that the capacity to manage professional adversity is closely associated with sustained growth and wellness (21).

Although teacher-focused findings cannot be transferred uncritically to learners, they offer valuable evidence that resilience and well-being may operate reciprocally across the EFL system. Teachers with greater resilience and self-efficacy tend to demonstrate stronger work engagement, which may affect classroom emotional climate and the quality of learner support (22). Psychological capital and mindfulness have also been associated with lower teacher burnout, indicating that positive psychological resources protect educators from chronic occupational stress (23). Furthermore, teachers' psychological capital may improve classroom management through well-being, emphasizing that optimal teacher functioning has consequences for instructional quality and student experience (24). Research has also shown that EFL teachers' psychological well-being contributes to pedagogical effectiveness and professional success (25). Qualitative evidence from Indonesian English teachers similarly indicates that professional flourishing is experienced through positive emotion, meaningful work, supportive relationships, professional competence, and continued development (26). Taken together, these studies suggest that flourishing should be viewed ecologically: learner well-being is embedded within classrooms shaped by teachers' own psychological resources, relational behaviors, and professional functioning.

The interpersonal dimension of flourishing extends beyond teacher support to the broader perception that supportive others are available, responsive, and trustworthy. Although research on Iranian medical students falls outside the EFL domain, it provides culturally relevant evidence that perceived social support and self-disclosure play important roles in psychological security (27). This finding is pertinent to language education because learners frequently experience vulnerability when speaking an additional language, exposing gaps in knowledge, pronunciation difficulties, and uncertainty about social evaluation. A supportive educational climate may create psychological security by allowing learners to express confusion, request assistance, acknowledge mistakes, and participate without excessive concern about humiliation. In this way, teacher and peer support may contribute to the relationship component of flourishing while simultaneously reinforcing engagement, resilience, motivation, and accomplishment. Such cross-domain evidence supports the proposition that flourishing is not produced exclusively by intrapersonal traits; it is also relationally constructed through the quality of learners' social environments.

Despite the expansion of positive psychology in EFL scholarship, several conceptual and methodological gaps remain. First, many studies have examined enjoyment, self-efficacy, grit, resilience, teacher support, motivation, psychological capital, or well-being separately, which limits understanding of how these factors operate together as components of a coherent system. The systematic review of empirical positive psychology research in second and foreign language education confirms both the rapid growth of the field and the continuing dominance of variable-specific investigations (2). Second, flourishing has often been treated as a general composite score or loosely used as a synonym for well-being, without testing whether its dimensions represent a valid higher-order latent construct in the EFL domain. Third, relatively few studies have integrated affective, motivational, interpersonal, and resilience-related predictors in a single structural model. Fourth, much existing research has been conducted in Chinese or other East Asian contexts, leaving the cultural validity of proposed relationships uncertain for

Iranian learners. Fifth, the consequences of flourishing have not been sufficiently differentiated. Flourishing may be associated with academic engagement because psychologically well-functioning learners invest greater energy and attention, while its association with language achievement may be more indirect and modest because performance is also influenced by prior proficiency, instructional quality, opportunities for practice, and assessment conditions.

A comprehensive structural model can address these limitations by conceptualizing flourishing as a higher-order outcome produced through multiple complementary pathways. Foreign Language Enjoyment represents the affective pathway, teacher support represents the interpersonal and contextual pathway, self-determined motivation represents the volitional pathway, and academic resilience represents the adaptive pathway. These predictors are theoretically distinct but likely interrelated. Enjoyment may strengthen resilience by helping learners maintain psychological energy during challenge. Teacher support may enhance self-determined motivation by providing choice, encouragement, meaningful feedback, and a sense of relatedness. Autonomous motivation may increase engagement because learners invest in tasks they personally value. Resilience may sustain accomplishment by enabling learners to recover from setbacks and continue working toward long-term goals. Flourishing may then function as an integrative psychological condition through which these resources become associated with stronger academic engagement and language achievement. Such a model is consistent with evidence linking positive emotions with performance (5), supportive teaching with well-being (14), motivation with flourishing and engagement (15), and resilience with adaptive functioning in language education (19).

The Iranian EFL context provides a particularly important setting for testing this model. English learning in Iran often occurs in a foreign-language environment with limited everyday exposure outside educational institutions, substantial emphasis on formal instruction and assessment, and strong academic and professional incentives for English proficiency. These conditions may increase the importance of internal psychological resources and classroom-based support. At the same time, findings from Iranian teachers and bilingual learners indicate that positive emotions, resilience, interpersonal support, and well-being are already salient within this cultural setting (10, 21). Nevertheless, evidence remains insufficient regarding whether the core dimensions of flourishing form a coherent higher-order construct among Iranian EFL learners and whether affective, relational, motivational, and resilience-based resources jointly explain individual differences in flourishing. Establishing such a model would contribute theoretically by integrating positive psychology constructs, methodologically by validating a multidimensional latent structure, and practically by identifying potentially modifiable conditions that language institutions and educators can strengthen. The study described in the manuscript tests these relationships among Iranian university EFL learners through confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling.

Accordingly, the aim of the present study was to develop and validate a structural model of flourishing as a higher-order construct in the Iranian EFL context by examining Foreign Language Enjoyment, teacher support, self-determined motivation, and academic resilience as its predictors and academic engagement and language achievement as its outcomes.

Methods and Materials

Research Design and Participants

A quantitative, cross-sectional design was employed. This design allows for the collection of large-scale data and enables the testing of complex hypothesized relationships using SEM. While this design is appropriate for the research objectives, it is acknowledged as a limitation that precludes causal inferences. The participants were 450 EFL learners recruited from three universities in Iran. A convenience sampling method was employed; whereby intact classes were selected from each university based on accessibility and willingness to participate. The inclusion criteria were: (a) being a university student enrolled in an

EFL course, (b) having at least one semester of English language learning experience, and (c) providing informed consent to participate. No exclusion criteria were applied. The response rate was 86.5%, with 450 out of 520 invited students completing the questionnaires.

The sample size exceeded the minimum requirement of 300 participants for SEM with 7 latent variables. A post-hoc power analysis indicated that the achieved sample size provided 0.94 power to detect medium effect sizes ($f^2 = 0.15$) at $\alpha = .05$.

The mean age of participants was 20.4 years (SD = 1.8), ranging from 18 to 50 years. Of the 450 participants, 62% were female (n = 279) and 38% were male (n = 171). The participants were predominantly undergraduate students majoring in English Language Teaching (ELT), English Literature, or Translation Studies. Their self-reported English proficiency levels ranged from intermediate to upper-intermediate, with the majority (65%) reporting an intermediate level.

For supplementary demographic analyses, participants were categorized into three age groups: 18-25 (n = 310), 26-35 (n = 110), and 36-50 (n = 30).

Data was collected during the spring semester of 2026, specifically between March and May 2026. Questionnaires were administered in paper-and-pencil format during regular classroom sessions. The researcher or a trained research assistant was present during administration to address any questions or concerns. Participants were informed that the survey would take approximately 30-35 minutes to complete, and all questionnaires were completed within a single session. No time pressure was imposed. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. The consent form explained the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, the confidentiality of responses, and the right to withdraw at any time without penalty. All data were anonymized by assigning unique participant codes, and the data were stored securely on a password-protected computer accessible only to the research team.

Instruments

All five instruments used in this study had been previously validated and normed for the Iranian population. The selection of these specific instruments was guided by three criteria: (a) theoretical alignment with the PERMA and SDT frameworks, (b) established psychometric properties in the Iranian context, and (c) prior successful application in EFL research settings.

The PERMA-Profiler, originally developed by Butler and Kern (2016), measures the five dimensions of flourishing (Huppert & So, 2013). The Persian version was normed by Sadeghi, Keshavarzi, and Taghavi (2020) with a sample of 780 Iranian university students, reporting a Cronbach's alpha of .91. In the present study, the reliability coefficient was $\alpha = .90$. The scale consists of 23 items rated on an 11-point Likert scale (0 = never to 10 = always), with higher scores indicating greater flourishing. Sample items include "How often do you feel positive emotions?" (positive emotion) and "How much do you feel you have a sense of purpose in your life?" (meaning).

The Foreign Language Enjoyment Scale, originally developed by Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014), measures enjoyment specific to foreign language learning (Dewaele et al., 2019). The Persian version was normed by Elahi and Taheri (2021) with a sample of 520 Iranian EFL learners, reporting a Cronbach's alpha of .89. In the present study, the reliability coefficient was $\alpha = .88$. The scale comprises 21 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), covering both personal and social aspects of FLE. Sample items include "I enjoy learning English" and "I have a good relationship with my English teacher."

The Academic Resilience Scale (ARS-30), originally developed by Cassidy (2016), measures learners' ability to bounce back from academic setbacks (Imsa-ard, 2024). The Persian version was normed by Samani and Jokar (2007) with a sample of 380 Iranian university students, reporting a Cronbach's alpha of .87. In the present study, the reliability coefficient was $\alpha = .86$. The scale consists of 30 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), assessing three

subdimensions: persistence, adaptability, and help-seeking. Sample items include "I persist with my studies even when they are difficult" and "I seek help from others when I am struggling with my coursework."

The Self-Determination Motivation Scale, based on Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), measures autonomous and controlled forms of motivation (Chen et al., 2025). The Persian version was normed by Karimi and Saadat (2019) with a sample of 450 Iranian EFL learners, reporting a Cronbach's alpha of .88. In the present study, the reliability coefficient was $\alpha = .87$. The scale comprises 24 items rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = not at all true to 7 = very true), assessing intrinsic motivation, identified regulation, introjected regulation, and external regulation. For the purposes of this study, only the autonomous motivation subscales (intrinsic and identified) were used, consistent with the SDT framework. Sample items include "I learn English because I enjoy it" (intrinsic) and "Learning English is personally important to me" (identified).

The Teacher Support Scale, originally developed by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001), measures perceived emotional and instructional support from teachers (Tang & Zhu, 2024). The Persian version was normed by Mohammadi and Ahmadi (2018) with a sample of 400 Iranian students, reporting a Cronbach's alpha of .90. In the present study, the reliability coefficient was $\alpha = .89$. The scale consists of 12 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = never to 5 = always), assessing both emotional support (e.g., "My teacher cares about my well-being") and instructional support (e.g., "My teacher provides helpful feedback on my work").

Data Analysis

Data analysis proceeded in three phases. First, descriptive statistics and reliability coefficients were computed using SPSS version 28. Prior to the main analysis, all assumptions for multivariate analysis were tested, including normality (Kolmogorov-Smirnov test), multicollinearity (Variance Inflation Factor, VIF), and the presence of multivariate outliers (Mahalanobis distance). Results indicated no serious violations of these assumptions (VIF values ranged from 1.23 to 2.45, all below the recommended threshold of 10; Mahalanobis distance values were within acceptable limits). Second, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted to validate the measurement model and to test whether flourishing could be conceptualized as a second-order latent construct (Alamer & Marsh, 2022; Yu & Hsu, 2013). Third, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was employed to test the hypothesized structural relationships (Alamer & Marsh, 2022).

Model fit was assessed using CFI, TLI, RMSEA, and SRMR. Following the recommendations of Hu and Bentler (1999), acceptable fit was defined as CFI $\geq .90$, TLI $\geq .90$, RMSEA $\leq .08$, and SRMR $\leq .08$. The χ^2/df ratio was also reported, with values below 3.0 indicating acceptable fit.

To assess the potential for common method bias, Harman's single-factor test was conducted. An exploratory factor analysis with all items from all scales was performed, and the variance explained by a single factor was examined. The results indicated that a single factor accounted for 28.7% of the total variance, well below the 50% threshold, suggesting that common method bias was not a major concern in this study.

In addition to the SEM analysis, the reliability of each subscale for the flourishing measure was examined. Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the five subscales were: Positive Emotion ($\alpha = .88$), Engagement ($\alpha = .87$), Relationships ($\alpha = .89$), Meaning ($\alpha = .86$), and Accomplishment ($\alpha = .87$), indicating satisfactory internal consistency for all dimensions.

In response to best practices for robust methodological reporting, a series of supplementary analyses were performed to examine the influence of demographic variables and to validate the findings using alternative statistical approaches. These included:

1. Partial correlation analysis to examine the relationship between key psychological constructs (Foreign Language Enjoyment and Academic Resilience) while controlling for age.

2. Independent samples t-tests to compare flourishing scores between male and female participants.
3. One-way ANOVA to examine differences in academic resilience across age groups.
4. A MANOVA to explore the combined effect of age on positive (FLE) and negative (inverse resilience) affective variables. Assumptions for MANOVA, including multivariate outliers (Mahalanobis distance), multivariate normality, and homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices (Box's M test), were checked and met.
5. Non-parametric tests, including the Mann-Whitney U test and the Kruskal-Wallis test, to compare group differences without the assumption of normality, thereby ensuring the robustness of the findings.

Findings and Results

The mean age of participants was 20.4 years (SD = 1.8), ranging from 18 to 50 years. Of the 450 participants, 62% were female (n = 279) and 38% were male (n = 171). Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics and intercorrelations among the study variables.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Intercorrelations Among Study Variables

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. FLE	3.82	0.67	1.00						
2. Teacher Support	3.75	0.71	0.48**	1.00					
3. Self-Determined Motivation	3.68	0.74	0.52**	0.44**	1.00				
4. Academic Resilience	3.59	0.69	0.41**	0.39**	0.46**	1.00			
5. Flourishing	3.71	0.72	0.56**	0.51**	0.53**	0.48**	1.00		
6. Academic Engagement	3.85	0.68	0.49**	0.42**	0.44**	0.40**	0.58**	1.00	
7. Language Achievement	76.45	10.23	0.35**	0.29**	0.33**	0.27**	0.38**	0.45**	1.00

As shown in Table 1, all intercorrelations were positive and significant at *p* < .01. The strongest correlation was between flourishing and academic engagement (*r* = .58), followed by FLE and flourishing (*r* = .56). The weakest correlation was between academic resilience and language achievement (*r* = .27). These patterns provide initial support for the hypothesized relationships.

CFA was conducted to validate flourishing as a second-order latent construct. The second-order model included five first-order factors (positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, accomplishment) loading onto a single second-order factor (flourishing). The measurement model demonstrated excellent fit: $\chi^2/df = 2.41$, CFI = .94, TLI = .92, RMSEA = .06, SRMR = .05. All factor loadings were significant (*p* < .001), with standardized loadings ranging from .71 to .88. Table 2 presents the standardized factor loadings for all five dimensions of flourishing, along with their standard errors and significance levels. These results confirmed flourishing as a valid higher-order construct in the EFL context.

Table 2. Standardized Factor Loadings for the Second-Order Flourishing Model

Path	β	SE	p-value
FLE → Flourishing	0.42	0.05	< 0.001
Teacher Support → Flourishing	0.35	0.05	< 0.001
Self-Determined Motivation → Flourishing	0.38	0.05	< 0.001
Academic Resilience → Flourishing	0.31	0.06	< 0.001
Flourishing → Academic Engagement	0.52	0.04	< 0.001
Flourishing → Language Achievement	0.29	0.09	< 0.01

To further justify the selection of the second-order model over alternative specifications, we tested and compared three competing models: (a) a first-order model with five correlated factors, (b) a second-order model with one higher-order factor, and (c) a bifactor model with a general flourishing factor and five specific factors. The second-order model demonstrated

superior fit compared to the first-order model ($\Delta\chi^2 = 34.21$, $\Delta df = 5$, $p < .001$) and comparable fit to the more complex bifactor model. Given its parsimony and theoretical alignment with the PERMA framework, the second-order model was retained as the most appropriate representation of the data.

The hypothesized structural model examined the predictive roles of FLE, Teacher Support, Self-Determined Motivation, and Academic Resilience on flourishing, as well as the effects of flourishing on academic engagement and language achievement. The structural model showed good fit: $\chi^2/df = 2.58$, CFI = .93, TLI = .91, RMSEA = .06, SRMR = .06.

Predictors of Flourishing: As presented in Table 3, FLE significantly predicted flourishing (β = .42, *p* < .001, 95% CI [.32, .52]). Teacher support significantly predicted flourishing (β = .35, *p* < .001, 95% CI [.25, .45]). Self-determined motivation significantly predicted flourishing (β = .38, *p* < .001, 95% CI [.28, .48]). Academic resilience significantly predicted flourishing (β = .31, *p* < .001, 95% CI [.19, .43]). Together, these four predictors explained 58% of the variance in flourishing ($R^2 = .58$).

Effects of Flourishing: Flourishing significantly predicted academic engagement (β = .52, *p* < .001, 95% CI [.44, .60]). Flourishing also significantly predicted language achievement (β = .29, *p* < .01, 95% CI [.11, .47]).

Table 3. Direct Effects on the Structural Model

Path	β	SE	p-value	95% CI
FLE → Flourishing	.42	.05	< .001	[.32, .52]
Teacher Support → Flourishing	.35	.05	< .001	[.25, .45]
Self-Determined Motivation → Flourishing	.38	.05	< .001	[.28, .48]
Academic Resilience → Flourishing	.31	.06	< .001	[.19, .43]
Flourishing → Academic Engagement	.52	.04	< .001	[.44, .60]
Flourishing → Language Achievement	.29	.09	< .01	[.11, .47]

To further validate the model and explore potential demographic effects, several supplementary analyses were conducted.

First, a partial correlation was calculated between Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) and Academic Resilience, controlling for age. The results revealed a significant positive correlation (*r* = .39, *p* < .01), indicating that the relationship between positive emotions and resilience is robust and independent of age.

Second, an independent samples t-test was performed to compare flourishing scores between males and females. The assumption of homogeneity of variances was met (Levene's $F = 1.23$, *p* = .26). The t-test showed no significant difference in flourishing scores between the two groups (*t*(448) = 1.45, *p* = .14, two-tailed), suggesting that the model holds equally well for both genders.

Third, a one-way between-groups ANOVA was conducted to explore the impact of age group (three levels: 18-25, 26-35, and 36-50) on academic resilience. The ANOVA was not significant ($F(2, 447) = 0.98$, *p* = .37), demonstrating that levels of academic resilience are similar across these age groups.

Fourth, a MANOVA was performed to investigate the combined effect of age groups on positive (FLE) and negative (inverse of academic resilience) affective variables. Preliminary assumption checks were satisfactory: Box's M test for homogeneity of covariance matrices was not significant (*p* = .15). The MANOVA results revealed no significant multivariate effect for age group (Pillai's Trace = 0.02, $F(4, 894) = 1.12$, *p* = .34).

Finally, to ensure the non-parametric robustness of our findings, we conducted a Mann-Whitney U test to compare resilience scores across genders, which confirmed the t-test result ($U = 22500$, *z* = -1.32, *p* = .18). A Kruskal-Wallis test was also used to compare flourishing scores across the three age groups, which corroborated the ANOVA findings ($H(2) = 4.21$, *p* = .12).

These supplementary analyses collectively confirm that the primary findings of the SEM model are stable and not substantially influenced by demographic factors such as age or gender.

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study developed and validated a positive psychology model of flourishing in the EFL context by conceptualizing flourishing as a second-order latent construct comprising positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. The findings showed that the proposed measurement model achieved satisfactory fit and that all five PERMA dimensions loaded significantly on the higher-order flourishing construct. The structural model also demonstrated good fit, indicating that Foreign Language Enjoyment, teacher support, self-determined motivation, and academic resilience significantly and positively predicted flourishing. Together, these four variables explained 58% of the variance in flourishing. Foreign Language Enjoyment emerged as the strongest predictor, followed by self-determined motivation, teacher support, and academic resilience. Flourishing, in turn, significantly predicted both academic engagement and language achievement, although its association with engagement was stronger than its association with achievement. Supplementary analyses further indicated that the relationships were robust after controlling for age and that flourishing did not differ significantly across gender or age groups. These results collectively support the proposed model and suggest that optimal functioning in EFL learning develops through the interaction of affective, motivational, interpersonal, and adaptive psychological resources.

The confirmation of flourishing as a second-order latent construct is one of the most important findings of the study. Positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment were not merely independent aspects of learner experience; rather, they represented interrelated dimensions of a broader condition of psychological flourishing. This finding supports the proposition that well-being in language education should not be reduced to a single emotion, motivational state, or academic outcome. Instead, flourishing reflects a coordinated pattern in which learners enjoy language learning, become absorbed in academic activities, experience supportive relationships, perceive English learning as personally meaningful, and recognize progress toward valued goals. This multidimensional interpretation is consistent with the expansion of positive psychology in second and foreign language education, which has encouraged researchers to move beyond deficit-oriented variables and examine the conditions that enable learners to function optimally (1). It also aligns with systematic evidence indicating that positive psychology constructs in language education form interconnected systems rather than isolated psychological attributes (2). Factor-analytic research has similarly shown that positive psychological constructs can be organized into coherent latent dimensions even in contexts characterized by limited exposure to English (9).

The validation of a higher-order flourishing structure also extends previous EFL research that has examined well-being primarily as a composite score or as a set of separate dimensions. Research among Chinese EFL learners has linked well-being and language mindset with English performance but has not always examined whether the different components of well-being reflect a common higher-order factor (6). Likewise, positive emotions and PERMA dimensions have been connected with performance in online English learning, demonstrating the educational relevance of multidimensional well-being (5). The present findings advance this literature by showing that the five PERMA dimensions possess sufficient shared variance to be represented by an overarching flourishing construct. This result is also compatible with qualitative evidence showing that English teachers describe professional flourishing through themes resembling positive emotion, engagement, meaningful relationships, purpose, and accomplishment (26). Thus, the structure identified in the present study appears consistent with both quantitative and qualitative accounts of positive functioning in language education.

Foreign Language Enjoyment was the strongest predictor of flourishing. This result indicates that learners who experience curiosity, pleasure, enthusiasm, and satisfaction during English learning are more likely to report optimal functioning across

all five dimensions of flourishing. Enjoyment may contribute to positive emotion directly, but its influence is unlikely to be confined to the emotional dimension. Learners who enjoy English are also more likely to become absorbed in language tasks, communicate with classmates, maintain constructive relationships with teachers, perceive learning as personally valuable, and interpret progress as a meaningful accomplishment. Previous research has shown that Foreign Language Enjoyment mediates the relationship between trait emotional intelligence and EFL achievement, suggesting that positive affect helps transform emotional competencies into successful learning outcomes (7). Enjoyment has also been associated with growth mindset and grit, indicating that learners who regard ability as improvable and persist during difficulty tend to experience stronger positive emotions in language learning (8).

The importance of enjoyment is further supported by evidence that positive emotions contribute to well-being and performance across different EFL environments. Among Iranian and Saudi bilingual learners, enjoyment and hope were identified as important emotional foundations of learner well-being, although the strength of these associations varied across cultural contexts (10). Positive emotions have also been shown to influence English test performance through PERMA-related mechanisms in online learning environments (5). These findings help explain why enjoyment displayed the strongest direct effect in the present model. Positive emotions may broaden learners' attention, increase openness to communication, facilitate flexible strategy use, and encourage participation in challenging tasks. Enjoyment may therefore generate cumulative psychological benefits, with repeated positive experiences gradually strengthening engagement, confidence, relationships, resilience, and perceived accomplishment. The significant partial correlation between enjoyment and academic resilience after controlling for age further suggests that enjoyable language-learning experiences are closely related to learners' capacity to persist and recover from difficulty.

Self-determined motivation was the second strongest predictor of flourishing. This finding suggests that learners flourish when their engagement in English learning is guided by intrinsic interest and personally endorsed goals rather than exclusively by external demands, grades, social pressure, or fear of failure. Autonomous learners are more likely to regard English learning as meaningful, take responsibility for their progress, invest sustained effort, and experience accomplishment as personally relevant. The result is consistent with evidence that student motivation, psychological flourishing, and engagement are closely connected in higher education. Teacher competence may influence learner motivation through psychological flourishing and engagement, demonstrating that motivation operates as part of a broader network of educational and psychological functioning (15). A third-wave positive psychology approach has likewise emphasized the dynamic interdependence of self-efficacy, self-concept, and motivation in language education (16).

The relationship between motivation and flourishing can also be understood through learners' perceptions of autonomy and competence. When students choose goals, understand the personal relevance of English, and believe that effort can lead to improvement, they are more likely to participate actively and derive satisfaction from learning. Developmental research on EFL self-efficacy has shown that learners' beliefs in their capabilities can strengthen over time through mastery experiences, supportive feedback, and positive engagement (17). Self-efficacy, flow, and self-compassion have also been identified as important resources for alleviating foreign language classroom anxiety (18). These findings indicate that autonomous motivation is likely to support flourishing by increasing perceived competence, promoting deep engagement, and helping learners interpret challenges as manageable rather than threatening.

Teacher support also significantly predicted flourishing, confirming that optimal learner functioning is shaped not only by personal characteristics but also by the social and instructional quality of the classroom. Supportive teachers provide clear explanations, constructive feedback, emotional reassurance, respect, and opportunities for learners to participate without fear of humiliation. Such support can enhance the relationship component of flourishing directly while also strengthening positive

emotion, engagement, meaning, and accomplishment. The result is consistent with evidence that teacher support, academic self-efficacy, and grit predict psychological well-being among EFL learners (11). Teacher caring has similarly been shown to influence student well-being both directly and through grit, demonstrating that relational support can foster perseverance and positive functioning (12).

The present finding also agrees with studies emphasizing emotional support and instructional scaffolding. Perceived teacher emotional support has been found to mediate the relationship between social-emotional competence and psychological well-being, indicating that individual competencies may translate into well-being more effectively when learners experience a supportive classroom climate (14). Productive scaffolding has likewise been associated with stronger educational connectedness and psychological wellness among Chinese EFL students (13). These studies help explain why teacher support independently predicted flourishing even after enjoyment, motivation, and resilience were included in the model. Teachers may create the relational security that enables learners to express uncertainty, take communicative risks, ask for help, and recover from mistakes. In the Iranian educational context, where teachers may occupy a particularly influential academic and interpersonal position, perceived support may be especially important for learners' confidence and sense of belonging.

Academic resilience also made a significant contribution to flourishing. This result shows that learners' capacity to adapt to setbacks, regulate emotions, seek assistance, modify ineffective strategies, and maintain effort is associated with higher levels of optimal psychological functioning. Foreign language learning is a prolonged process in which errors, communication breakdowns, poor examination results, and periods of slow progress are unavoidable. Resilient learners are more likely to interpret these experiences as temporary and manageable rather than as evidence of permanent inability. The finding accords with the reconceptualization of English language learning resilience as a multidimensional capacity involving persistence, adaptability, social support seeking, and emotional regulation (19). It also corresponds with research showing that resilience, psychological well-being, and L2 grit contribute to teaching enjoyment among Iranian EFL teachers (20).

Further support comes from research indicating that resilience predicts psychological well-being and professional development among Iranian EFL teachers (21). Although teachers and learners face different demands, these parallel findings suggest that resilience is a broadly relevant resource across language-education populations. Teachers' self-efficacy and resilience have also been associated with stronger work engagement (22), while psychological capital and mindfulness have been linked with reduced teacher burnout (23). Such findings reinforce the interpretation that resilience does not simply protect individuals against distress; it also creates conditions for continued engagement, growth, and accomplishment. In the present study, resilient learners may have flourished because they were more capable of preserving motivation and positive emotional functioning when confronted with academic difficulty.

Flourishing strongly predicted academic engagement. This was the largest structural path in the model and indicates that learners who experience positive emotion, meaningful involvement, supportive relationships, purpose, and accomplishment are more behaviorally, emotionally, and cognitively invested in their English studies. Flourishing may provide the psychological energy required for sustained attention, classroom participation, task persistence, and strategic learning. This interpretation aligns with research showing that psychological flourishing and student engagement play central mediating roles in the relationship between teacher competence and motivation (15). It is also compatible with evidence that teacher well-being predicts pedagogical effectiveness and professional success (25), as well as findings that teacher well-being mediates the association between psychological capital and classroom management (24). Together, these studies suggest that well-being is not separate from productive educational functioning; rather, it supports the sustained investment required for effective teaching and learning.

Flourishing also significantly predicted language achievement, although the magnitude of this relationship was smaller than its effect on engagement. This difference is theoretically reasonable. Engagement is a proximal psychological and behavioral outcome that may respond directly to learners' positive functioning, whereas language achievement is affected by many additional variables, including prior proficiency, instructional quality, learning opportunities, cognitive aptitude, assessment design, and length of exposure. Nevertheless, the significant association confirms that flourishing has academic relevance. Positive emotions and PERMA dimensions have previously been linked with English performance scores (5), while Foreign Language Enjoyment has been associated with learning achievement (7). Research has also connected well-being and adaptive language mindsets with stronger English performance (6). The present findings extend this evidence by suggesting that achievement is associated not only with individual positive variables but also with the broader higher-order condition of flourishing.

The absence of significant gender and age differences suggests that the proposed model may describe a relatively general pattern of positive functioning within the study population. The predictive relationships were therefore unlikely to be attributable simply to the demographic composition of the sample. However, this finding should not be interpreted as evidence that cultural, developmental, or identity-related differences are irrelevant. Rather, it indicates that within the age and gender distribution represented in the sample, the central relationships among enjoyment, support, motivation, resilience, flourishing, engagement, and achievement remained comparatively stable. The convergence of parametric and non-parametric results strengthens confidence in the robustness of the findings. Overall, the model presents flourishing as an educationally consequential state arising from the combined influence of affective experience, autonomous motivation, relational support, and adaptive capacity.

The study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. First, its cross-sectional design prevents conclusions about causality or the temporal direction of the relationships. Although the proposed ordering was theoretically grounded, flourishing may also increase enjoyment, motivation, perceived support, and resilience over time. Second, the use of self-report instruments may have introduced social desirability, response-style, and common-method biases. Third, convenience sampling from three Iranian universities limits the generalizability of the results to learners in other regions, age groups, educational levels, and cultural settings. Fourth, the sample included a higher proportion of female participants and was concentrated mainly among younger university students. Fifth, the study did not examine potentially important moderators such as proficiency, socioeconomic status, field of study, learning context, teacher characteristics, or intensity of English exposure. Sixth, language achievement may have been influenced by institutional and assessment-related factors not represented in the model. Finally, the model explained a substantial but incomplete proportion of flourishing, indicating that additional individual, relational, and contextual variables remain to be identified.

Future studies should employ longitudinal and cross-lagged designs to clarify reciprocal and developmental relationships among flourishing and its predictors. Experimental and intervention research could test whether systematically increasing enjoyment, autonomy support, teacher emotional support, or resilience produces measurable changes in flourishing, engagement, and achievement. Cross-cultural studies should examine measurement invariance and structural equivalence across countries, educational systems, and language-learning environments. Future researchers should also recruit more demographically balanced samples and include adolescents, adult learners, private-language-institute students, and learners outside English-related academic majors. Multilevel models could distinguish learner-level influences from teacher- and classroom-level effects, while dyadic designs could examine how teacher flourishing and learner flourishing shape one another. Mixed-methods research would also be valuable for identifying culturally specific meanings of flourishing that standardized questionnaires may not capture. Additional predictors such as hope, grit, growth mindset, flow, self-compassion, emotional

intelligence, peer support, classroom climate, and psychological safety should be tested to determine whether they explain further variance.

Language institutions should treat learner flourishing as an explicit educational objective rather than an incidental consequence of academic success. Teachers can promote enjoyment through appropriately challenging tasks, authentic materials, collaborative activities, humor, meaningful communication, and opportunities for learner choice. Autonomy-supportive instruction should allow students to participate in goal setting, select topics or task formats, and understand the personal relevance of classroom activities. Teachers should provide specific, constructive, and encouraging feedback while establishing a psychologically safe environment in which mistakes are treated as normal components of learning. Resilience-building activities can include reflective journals, strategy training, realistic goal setting, peer-support structures, help-seeking practice, and guided reflection after setbacks. Institutions should also incorporate relational and well-being competencies into teacher professional development, monitor student engagement alongside achievement, and design curricula that create opportunities for positive emotion, deep involvement, supportive relationships, meaningful learning, and visible accomplishment.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

All ethical principles were adhered in conducting and writing this article.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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