

# Linguistic Ostracism and Academic Achievement in EFL Learning: The Mediating Role of Subjective Well-Being and the Moderating Role of Foreign Language Enjoyment

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**Abstract.** Linguistic ostracism has emerged as a growing concern in foreign language learning environments, yet its influence on academic outcomes remains insufficiently understood. This study examined the direct and indirect effects of linguistic ostracism on academic achievement through subjective well-being and investigated the moderating role of foreign language enjoyment among Chinese EFL learners. A cross-sectional survey was conducted with 415 undergraduate students from foreign language universities in Jiangxi Province, China. Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The findings revealed that linguistic ostracism negatively predicted academic achievement and significantly reduced life satisfaction and positive affect while increasing negative affect. Subjective well-being emerged as a significant mediating mechanism, with positive affect demonstrating the strongest indirect effect on academic achievement. The results further indicated that foreign language enjoyment significantly attenuated the adverse impact of linguistic ostracism, highlighting its role as a psychological resilience resource. The integrated model explained substantial variance in both subjective well-being and academic achievement, underscoring the importance of social and emotional experiences in language learning. These findings contribute to the growing intersection of social exclusion research, positive psychology, and second-language acquisition by demonstrating how exclusionary language experiences shape educational outcomes through affective and cognitive processes. Practical implications for fostering inclusive and emotionally supportive language-learning environments are discussed.

**Keywords:** linguistic ostracism; subjective well-being; foreign language enjoyment; academic achievement; EFL learners; positive psychology



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## 1. Introduction

Language learning is inherently a social process. Beyond acquiring grammatical knowledge and communicative competence, learners continuously negotiate belonging, identity, and participation within classroom communities. Contemporary research in second-language acquisition has increasingly emphasized that successful language learning depends not only on cognitive abilities but also on the quality of learners' social and emotional experiences (MacIntyre et al., 2020;

Dewaele & Li, 2021; Teimouri et al., 2023). Within multilingual and multicultural educational settings, however, not all learners experience language learning as an inclusive process. Many encounter forms of marginalization arising from accent differences, linguistic proficiency disparities, or perceived deviations from dominant language norms. Such experiences may culminate in linguistic ostracism, defined as the perception of being ignored, excluded, or socially marginalized because of one's language use or linguistic identity (Williams, 2007; Giles & Johnson, 2009). Although social exclusion has long been recognized as a powerful threat to human well-being, its implications for foreign language learning remain insufficiently understood. Emerging evidence suggests that exclusionary experiences undermine learners' motivation, classroom participation, and sense of belonging, thereby creating conditions that may hinder educational success (Rudert et al., 2021; Hales et al., 2022; Jiang et al., 2024).

The educational significance of linguistic ostracism becomes particularly evident when viewed through the lens of academic achievement. Previous studies have consistently shown that students who experience social exclusion exhibit lower engagement, reduced self-regulation, and weaker academic performance than their socially included peers (Baumeister et al., 2005; Williams, 2009; Rudert & Greifeneder, 2019). In language classrooms, these consequences may be amplified because communication itself constitutes both the medium and the objective of learning. Learners who perceive themselves as linguistically marginalized often withdraw from interaction, avoid communicative risks, and participate less actively in classroom discourse (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2016; Li et al., 2022). Such behavioral responses reduce opportunities for language practice and collaborative learning, which are essential components of language development. Nevertheless, empirical evidence linking linguistic ostracism directly to academic achievement remains limited, particularly in EFL contexts where language proficiency, identity, and social participation are closely intertwined. Consequently, the mechanisms through which linguistic ostracism affects educational outcomes warrant further investigation.

One promising explanation lies in the role of subjective well-being. Research across educational psychology, positive psychology, and second-language acquisition consistently demonstrates that learners' emotional and cognitive evaluations of their lives influence academic engagement, persistence, and performance (Diener et al., 2018; Ryan & Deci, 2020; Fredrickson, 2023). Subjective well-being is commonly conceptualized as comprising life satisfaction, positive affect, and negative affect, each of which contributes to individuals' overall psychological functioning (Diener et al., 1999; Diener et al., 2018). Positive emotional states broaden learners' attention, facilitate cognitive flexibility, and encourage exploration, whereas negative emotional states often narrow attention and impede adaptive functioning (Fredrickson, 2001, 2023). Recent studies have demonstrated that well-being plays a central role in foreign language learning, influencing motivation, resilience, classroom engagement, and achievement (Dewaele & Li, 2021; MacIntyre et al., 2020; Oxford, 2023). Despite these advances, relatively little is known about whether subjective well-being serves as the psychological mechanism through which linguistic ostracism translates into academic

disadvantage. Addressing this question is essential for understanding why some learners experience stronger educational consequences of exclusion than others.

Equally important, not all learners respond to exclusionary experiences in the same manner. Recent developments in positive psychology and second-language acquisition have highlighted foreign language enjoyment (FLE) as a key emotional resource capable of promoting resilience, engagement, and academic success (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2016; Li et al., 2022; Botes et al., 2023). Learners who experience high levels of enjoyment are generally more willing to communicate, persist in challenging tasks, and maintain positive attitudes toward language learning. These characteristics suggest that FLE may weaken the adverse effects of linguistic ostracism by helping learners maintain psychological resources despite exclusionary experiences. However, empirical evidence regarding the buffering role of FLE remains scarce, particularly within integrated models that simultaneously consider linguistic ostracism, subjective well-being, and academic achievement. To address these gaps, the present study examines the direct and indirect effects of linguistic ostracism on academic achievement through subjective well-being and investigates whether foreign language enjoyment moderates these relationships. By integrating social exclusion, well-being, and positive emotion perspectives within a single framework, this study seeks to advance understanding of the psychological processes that shape educational outcomes in foreign language learning contexts.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Research Design

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to investigate the relationships among linguistic ostracism, subjective well-being, foreign language enjoyment, and academic achievement in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning contexts. The study was designed to examine both the mediating role of subjective well-being and the moderating role of foreign language enjoyment within a unified explanatory framework. Given the complexity of the proposed relationships and the simultaneous estimation of direct, indirect, and interaction effects, Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was adopted as the primary analytical approach. PLS-SEM is particularly appropriate for predictive and theory-building research involving latent constructs and complex causal pathways (Hair et al., 2022; Sarstedt et al., 2022).

### 2.2. Participants and Data Collection

The participants were undergraduate students majoring in English-related programs at foreign language universities located in Jiangxi Province, China. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to ensure that respondents possessed sufficient experience with EFL learning and classroom interaction to meaningfully evaluate the constructs under investigation. This sampling approach enabled the selection of participants who were directly exposed to the social and linguistic dynamics central to the study (Etikan et al., 2016).

A total of 415 valid responses were retained for analysis. Of these, 243 students (58.55%) were in their second year of study and 172 students (41.45%) were in their third year. The sample consisted of 250 female students (60.2%) and 165 male students

(39.8%). Geographically, approximately 45% of participants originated from Jiangxi Province, 25% came from neighboring provinces such as Zhejiang, Anhui, Jiangsu, and Fujian, while the remaining 35% represented more culturally and linguistically diverse regions of China, including Yunnan, Xinjiang, and Inner Mongolia. This demographic diversity provided a heterogeneous sample that captured a broad range of EFL learning experiences while maintaining contextual coherence.

Data were collected through self-administered questionnaires distributed electronically during the academic semester. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed about the purpose of the study, confidentiality procedures, and their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. Only fully completed questionnaires were included in the final dataset.

### 2.3. Measures

All constructs were measured using previously validated instruments that have demonstrated satisfactory psychometric properties across educational and cross-cultural contexts. To ensure linguistic and cultural appropriateness for Chinese EFL learners, all instruments underwent a rigorous back-translation procedure and expert review prior to administration. A pilot study was subsequently conducted to confirm item clarity, cultural relevance, and content validity.

#### a. Linguistic Ostracism

Linguistic ostracism was assessed using an adapted version of the scale developed by Fiset and Bhave (2021). The instrument measures the extent to which individuals perceive themselves as being ignored, excluded, marginalized, or socially distanced because of their language use, linguistic proficiency, accent, or communication style. The scale has been successfully applied in cross-cultural contexts and was adapted to reflect the realities of EFL classroom interactions.

#### b. Subjective Well-Being

Subjective well-being was conceptualized as a multidimensional construct comprising life satisfaction, positive affect, and negative affect. Life satisfaction was measured using the Satisfaction with Life Scale developed by Diener et al. (1985), whereas positive affect and negative affect were assessed using measures derived from Mroczek and Kolarz (1998). These instruments have been extensively validated in educational, psychological, and Asian contexts and are widely recognized as reliable indicators of individuals' cognitive and affective evaluations of life quality.

#### c. Foreign Language Enjoyment

Foreign language enjoyment (FLE) was measured using the private enjoyment dimension developed by Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014). The scale captures learners' enjoyment, interest, satisfaction, and positive emotional engagement during language learning activities. Previous studies have confirmed its reliability and validity among Chinese EFL learners and diverse second-language learning populations.

#### d. Academic Achievement

Academic achievement was measured using the Academic Achievement Questionnaire developed by Křeménková and Novotný (2020). The instrument

evaluates learners' perceived academic performance and achievement-related behaviors and has demonstrated satisfactory reliability across diverse student populations.

#### 2.4. Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using SmartPLS 4.0 following a two-stage PLS-SEM procedure. In the first stage, the measurement model was evaluated through indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR), while convergent validity was evaluated through average variance extracted (AVE). Discriminant validity was examined using both the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT), with HTMT values below 0.85 indicating satisfactory construct distinctiveness (Henseler et al., 2015). The examination of cross-loadings further confirmed that all indicators loaded more strongly on their intended constructs than on alternative constructs.

In the second stage, the structural model was assessed using standardized path coefficients, coefficients of determination ( $R^2$ ), predictive relevance ( $Q^2$ ), variance inflation factors (VIF), and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR). The significance of direct, indirect, and moderating effects was evaluated using a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples and bias-corrected confidence intervals. Relationships were considered statistically significant when the corresponding confidence intervals excluded zero (Hair et al., 2022; Sarstedt et al., 2022).

#### 2.5. Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to established ethical principles governing research involving human participants. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained prior to questionnaire completion, and respondents were assured that all information would be treated confidentially and reported only in aggregate form. No personally identifiable information was collected during the study. The research procedures complied with institutional ethical guidelines for educational and social science research.

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1. Measurement Model Assessment

Before examining the structural relationships, the psychometric adequacy of the measurement model was evaluated. The assessment focused on indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. All indicator loadings exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.60, ranging from 0.657 to 0.890, indicating that the observed variables adequately represented their respective latent constructs. These results demonstrate that the measurement items possess sufficient explanatory power to capture the underlying dimensions of linguistic ostracism, subjective well-being, foreign language enjoyment, and academic achievement.

The reliability and convergent validity results further confirmed the robustness of the measurement model. As presented in Table 1, Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.815 to 0.908, while composite reliability values ranged from 0.832 to 0.925,

substantially exceeding the minimum recommended threshold of 0.70. Likewise, all AVE values were above 0.50, demonstrating that the constructs explained more than half of the variance of their indicators.

**Table 1.** Reliability and Convergent Validity Assessment

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Linguistic Ostracism	0.815	0.832	0.572
Life Satisfaction	0.908	0.925	0.646
Positive Affect	0.869	0.882	0.603
Negative Affect	0.823	0.840	0.618
Academic Achievement	0.839	0.857	0.605
Foreign Language Enjoyment	0.855	0.872	0.660

Among all constructs, life satisfaction exhibited the highest reliability coefficient, suggesting a particularly stable and internally consistent representation of learners' cognitive evaluation of life circumstances. Similarly, foreign language enjoyment demonstrated the highest AVE value, indicating that enjoyment-related indicators captured a substantial proportion of construct variance. Collectively, these findings provide strong evidence supporting measurement precision and construct stability.

Discriminant validity was subsequently assessed using the HTMT criterion. All HTMT coefficients remained below the conservative threshold of 0.85, confirming that each construct measured a distinct theoretical domain. Consequently, linguistic ostracism, life satisfaction, positive affect, negative affect, foreign language enjoyment, and academic achievement can be treated as empirically distinguishable constructs suitable for structural analysis.

### 3.2. Structural Model Quality

Following measurement validation, the explanatory and predictive capabilities of the structural model were evaluated. The coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) revealed moderate explanatory power across all endogenous variables. Linguistic ostracism accounted for 34.6% of the variance in life satisfaction, 38.7% in positive affect, and 41.2% in negative affect. Furthermore, the integrated model explained 38.3% of the variance in academic achievement. These values indicate that language-based exclusion constitutes a meaningful predictor of both emotional functioning and educational outcomes among EFL learners.

**Table 2.** Structural Model Evaluation

Indicator	Value
$R^2$ Life Satisfaction	0.346
$R^2$ Positive Affect	0.387
$R^2$ Negative Affect	0.412
$R^2$ Academic Achievement	0.383
SRMR	0.062

The highest explanatory power was observed for negative affect ( $R^2 = 0.412$ ), suggesting that linguistic ostracism primarily manifests through emotional disruption before influencing broader educational outcomes. In addition, all  $Q^2$  values exceeded zero, confirming predictive relevance, while variance inflation factor values remained below the critical threshold, indicating the absence of multicollinearity concerns. The model also demonstrated satisfactory global fit, as evidenced by an SRMR value of 0.062, which falls well below the recommended cut-off value of 0.08. These indicators collectively confirm the adequacy of the structural model for hypothesis testing.

### 3.3. Direct Effects

The structural model provided strong support for the hypothesized direct relationships. Linguistic ostracism exerted a significant negative influence on academic achievement ( $\beta = -0.284$ ), indicating that students who experienced greater levels of language-based exclusion tended to report lower academic performance. This finding suggests that exclusionary linguistic practices represent not merely a social inconvenience but a substantive educational risk factor capable of impairing learning outcomes.

Beyond its direct impact on achievement, linguistic ostracism significantly undermined all dimensions of subjective well-being. Specifically, linguistic ostracism reduced life satisfaction ( $\beta = -0.313$ ) and positive affect ( $\beta = -0.342$ ), while simultaneously increasing negative affect ( $\beta = 0.400$ ). These coefficients indicate that exclusion through language substantially alters learners' emotional and cognitive evaluations of their educational environment.

Subjective well-being, in turn, emerged as a significant predictor of academic achievement. Life satisfaction demonstrated the strongest positive effect on academic achievement ( $\beta = 0.425$ ), followed by positive affect ( $\beta = 0.356$ ). Conversely, negative affect exerted a substantial detrimental influence ( $\beta = -0.388$ ). The relative magnitude of these coefficients suggests that both emotional experiences and broader life evaluations play crucial roles in shaping academic performance.

**Table 3.** Direct Effects

Path	$\beta$	95% CI
LO $\rightarrow$ AA	-0.284	[-0.351, -0.207]
LO $\rightarrow$ LS	-0.313	[-0.392, -0.222]
LO $\rightarrow$ PA	-0.342	[-0.420, -0.277]
LO $\rightarrow$ NA	0.400	[0.333, 0.476]
LS $\rightarrow$ AA	0.425	[0.351, 0.501]
PA $\rightarrow$ AA	0.356	[0.278, 0.427]
NA $\rightarrow$ AA	-0.388	[-0.467, -0.311]

A comparison of standardized coefficients reveals two important patterns. First, linguistic ostracism exhibited its strongest influence on negative affect, indicating that exclusion primarily triggers adverse emotional responses. Second, life satisfaction emerged as the strongest positive predictor of academic achievement, suggesting that students' broader evaluations of life quality may exert a more enduring influence on educational success than transient emotional experiences.

### 3.4. Indirect Effects of Subjective Well-Being

The mediation analysis revealed that subjective well-being served as a significant explanatory mechanism linking linguistic ostracism to academic achievement. All indirect effects were statistically significant, confirming that the educational consequences of linguistic ostracism operate partly through learners' emotional and cognitive well-being.

**Table 4.** Indirect Effects

Path	$\beta$	95% CI
LO $\rightarrow$ LS $\rightarrow$ AA	-0.197	[-0.253, -0.142]
LO $\rightarrow$ PA $\rightarrow$ AA	-0.212	[-0.278, -0.151]
LO $\rightarrow$ NA $\rightarrow$ AA	-0.155	[-0.224, -0.089]

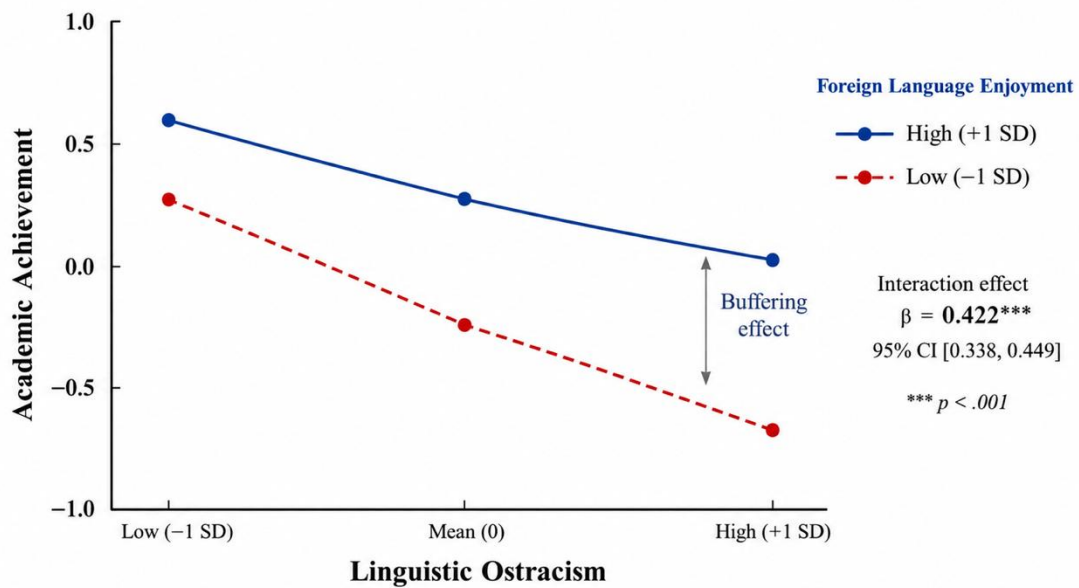
Among the indirect pathways, the strongest mediation effect occurred through positive affect, followed by life satisfaction and negative affect. This pattern suggests that linguistic ostracism influences academic achievement most strongly by diminishing learners' positive emotional experiences. While increased negative affect remains consequential, the erosion of positive psychological resources appears to constitute the more influential mechanism through which exclusion translates into educational disadvantage.

### 3.5. Moderating Role of Foreign Language Enjoyment

To examine whether foreign language enjoyment (FLE) mitigates the detrimental consequences of linguistic ostracism, the interaction effect between linguistic ostracism and FLE was tested. The results revealed a positive and statistically significant interaction effect ( $\beta = 0.422$ , 95% CI [0.338, 0.449]), supporting the proposed moderation hypothesis.

This finding indicates that the negative relationship between linguistic ostracism and academic achievement is not uniform across learners. Rather, its magnitude depends on the level of enjoyment experienced during foreign language learning. Students with higher levels of FLE appear to be less vulnerable to the adverse educational consequences of language-based exclusion than those with lower levels of enjoyment.

Figure 1 illustrates two distinct achievement trajectories. Although academic achievement decreases as linguistic ostracism increases in both groups, the decline is substantially steeper among learners reporting low levels of foreign language enjoyment. In contrast, learners with high levels of enjoyment maintain relatively stable academic performance despite experiencing elevated levels of exclusion. The flatter slope observed in the high-FLE group demonstrates the buffering function of enjoyment within the language-learning process.



**Figure 1.** Moderating role of foreign language enjoyment (FLE) in the relationship between linguistic ostracism and academic achievement. Higher levels of FLE attenuate the negative impact of linguistic ostracism on learners' academic achievement.

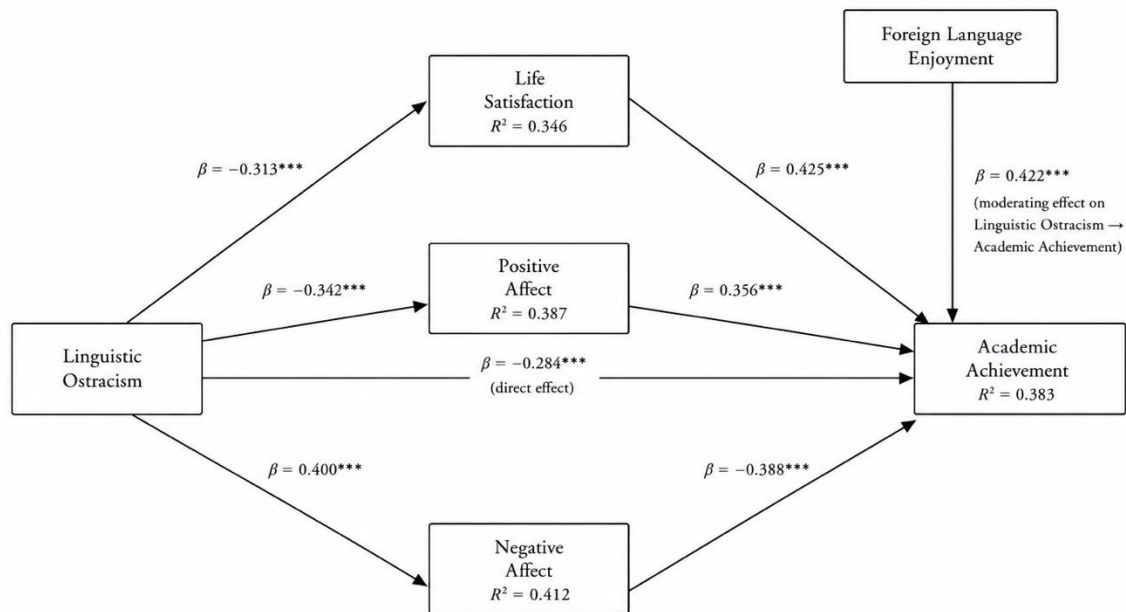
More importantly, the interaction pattern suggests that enjoyment does not merely enhance academic outcomes in a general sense. Instead, it operates as a psychological resilience resource capable of weakening the harmful influence of exclusionary experiences. Learners who derive pleasure, curiosity, and personal satisfaction from language learning may possess broader emotional and cognitive resources that enable them to cope more effectively with social and linguistic barriers. Consequently, the negative impact of linguistic ostracism becomes substantially attenuated in the presence of high foreign language enjoyment.

These findings provide empirical support for the proposition that positive learning emotions serve a protective function in educational settings. Rather than functioning solely as a motivational factor, enjoyment appears to help learners maintain academic engagement and performance even when confronted with exclusionary social experiences.

### 3.6. Integrated Interpretation of Structural Relationships

To facilitate a comprehensive interpretation of the proposed model, the standardized structural relationships are presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2 reveals several important patterns. First, linguistic ostracism exerted significant adverse effects across all dimensions of subjective well-being. Among these relationships, the strongest effect was observed on negative affect ( $\beta = 0.400$ ), followed by positive affect ( $\beta = -0.342$ ) and life satisfaction ( $\beta = -0.313$ ). This pattern suggests that language-based exclusion primarily manifests through emotional disruption before influencing broader cognitive evaluations of life quality.



**Figure 2.** Final structural model depicting the direct, indirect, and moderating pathways linking linguistic ostracism to academic achievement through subjective well-being and foreign language enjoyment.

Second, subjective well-being emerged as a powerful explanatory mechanism of academic achievement. Life satisfaction demonstrated the strongest positive influence on achievement ( $\beta = 0.425$ ), exceeding the effects of positive affect ( $\beta = 0.356$ ). Conversely, negative affect produced a substantial negative influence ( $\beta = -0.388$ ). These findings indicate that learners' emotional and psychological functioning plays a central role in determining educational success within EFL contexts.

Third, the mediation analysis revealed that the effects of linguistic ostracism extended beyond its direct influence on achievement. Linguistic ostracism reduced academic achievement indirectly through diminished life satisfaction ( $\beta = -0.197$ ), reduced positive affect ( $\beta = -0.212$ ), and increased negative affect ( $\beta = -0.155$ ). Notably, the strongest indirect pathway occurred through positive affect, suggesting that the erosion of positive emotional experiences may constitute the most influential mechanism linking exclusion to educational disadvantage. To compare the relative contribution of each pathway, the magnitude of direct and indirect effects is summarized in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Relative Magnitude of Direct and Indirect Effects

Effect Pathway	Standardized Effect ( $\beta$ )
LO $\rightarrow$ AA	0.284
LO $\rightarrow$ PA $\rightarrow$ AA	0.212
LO $\rightarrow$ LS $\rightarrow$ AA	0.197
LO $\rightarrow$ NA $\rightarrow$ AA	0.155

Table 4 demonstrates that the direct effect of linguistic ostracism on academic achievement remained stronger than any individual indirect pathway. Nevertheless,

the combined indirect effects through subjective well-being exceeded the direct effect, indicating that emotional and cognitive well-being constitutes the primary explanatory mechanism through which linguistic ostracism influences academic performance.

Taken together, the findings reveal three overarching conclusions. First, linguistic ostracism directly and indirectly undermines academic achievement. Second, subjective well-being functions as the principal mechanism translating exclusionary experiences into educational outcomes. Third, foreign language enjoyment acts as a protective psychological resource capable of buffering the harmful effects of linguistic ostracism. Collectively, these results demonstrate that language-based exclusion is not merely a social phenomenon but also a significant educational risk factor that influences learners' emotional functioning, psychological well-being, and academic success.

Collectively, these findings indicate that linguistic ostracism operates through a complex network of direct, affective, cognitive, and motivational pathways. The results underscore the central role of subjective well-being and foreign language enjoyment in shaping learners' responses to exclusionary language experiences. These findings are further examined in the discussion section in relation to existing theoretical and empirical literature.

## Discussion

The present findings suggest that linguistic ostracism is far more than an interpersonal inconvenience within EFL settings. Its effects extend beyond momentary feelings of exclusion and reach into learners' academic functioning. Students who reported greater experiences of language-based exclusion also tended to report lower academic achievement, indicating that participation in the social and communicative life of the classroom is closely intertwined with educational success. This pattern resonates with a growing body of evidence showing that exclusion weakens attentional resources, reduces engagement, and undermines the sense of belonging required for sustained learning. In language classrooms, where interaction itself constitutes both the medium and the objective of learning, exclusion may carry particularly serious consequences. When learners perceive that their voices, accents, or linguistic identities are ignored or devalued, the classroom becomes less a space for participation and more a space for withdrawal, thereby restricting opportunities for meaningful learning and achievement (Williams, 2007; Rudert et al., 2021; Hales et al., 2022).

The results further indicate that the psychological consequences of linguistic ostracism are neither peripheral nor secondary. The strongest effect emerged on negative affect, followed by positive affect and life satisfaction, suggesting that exclusion first disrupts learners' emotional equilibrium before influencing broader evaluations of well-being. Such a pattern is unsurprising given that language serves not only communicative purposes but also social and symbolic ones. To be excluded linguistically is, in many respects, to be excluded socially. Repeated experiences of marginalisation may therefore generate frustration, anxiety, embarrassment, or self-doubt, all of which interfere with learners' capacity to participate confidently in

academic activities. Recent work in educational psychology and second-language acquisition has increasingly emphasised that emotional experiences are not incidental to learning but constitute an integral component of it. The present findings reinforce this view by demonstrating that the emotional costs of exclusion are substantial and educationally consequential (Diener et al., 2018; Ryan & Deci, 2020; Dewaele & Li, 2021; Teimouri et al., 2023).

Perhaps the most revealing aspect of the model concerns the mediating role of subjective well-being. The indirect pathways suggest that linguistic ostracism does not undermine achievement solely through direct social barriers; rather, its influence is transmitted through learners' emotional and psychological states. Notably, positive affect emerged as the strongest mediating mechanism. This result implies that what is lost through exclusion may not simply be confidence or motivation, but also the positive emotional energy that sustains curiosity, persistence, and intellectual engagement. Learners who experience enjoyment, enthusiasm, and optimism are generally more willing to participate, take risks, and persist in the face of difficulty. Once these emotional resources begin to erode, achievement may decline even in the absence of overt academic obstacles. In this respect, the findings lend support to the argument that educational success depends not only on the reduction of negative experiences but equally on the preservation of positive psychological resources (Fredrickson, 2001, 2023; MacIntyre et al., 2020; Seligman, 2018).

A particularly noteworthy finding concerns the buffering role of foreign language enjoyment. Although linguistic ostracism was associated with lower academic achievement, this relationship became considerably weaker among learners who reported higher levels of enjoyment. Enjoyment appears to function as a form of psychological protection, reducing learners' vulnerability to exclusionary experiences. One possible explanation is that enjoyment broadens learners' willingness to engage with the language-learning process despite social challenges. Students who genuinely enjoy language learning may be more likely to interpret setbacks as temporary, maintain motivation in difficult circumstances, and continue participating even when social interactions are less than ideal. Rather than merely contributing to achievement directly, enjoyment seems to alter how learners respond to adversity. This interpretation aligns with recent scholarship positioning foreign language enjoyment as one of the most influential positive emotions in second-language learning, capable of sustaining engagement, resilience, and long-term development (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2016; Li et al., 2022; Botes et al., 2023).

Taken together, these findings contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how social experiences shape educational outcomes in multilingual learning environments. Previous research has typically examined ostracism, well-being, and foreign language enjoyment as separate strands of inquiry. By integrating them within a single explanatory framework, the present study demonstrates that academic achievement is shaped not only by learners' cognitive abilities or instructional conditions but also by the quality of their social and emotional experiences. The findings highlight a chain of influence in which exclusion diminishes well-being, weakened well-being constrains achievement, and enjoyment serves to interrupt this process. From a practical perspective, the results underscore the importance of

creating classroom environments in which learners feel recognised, included, and emotionally supported. Educational interventions aimed at strengthening positive emotional experiences may therefore be just as important as those designed to improve linguistic competence itself.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This study demonstrates that linguistic ostracism constitutes a significant educational and psychological challenge in EFL learning contexts. The findings indicate that linguistic ostracism not only directly reduces academic achievement but also indirectly undermines achievement through diminished subjective well-being. Specifically, exclusionary language experiences lower life satisfaction and positive affect while increasing negative affect, thereby weakening learners' academic functioning. Among the mediating pathways, positive affect emerged as the strongest mechanism linking linguistic ostracism to academic achievement, highlighting the importance of positive emotional experiences in sustaining educational success. Furthermore, foreign language enjoyment was found to mitigate the adverse effects of linguistic ostracism, suggesting that learners who experience greater enjoyment are better equipped to cope with exclusionary experiences and maintain academic performance.

The study contributes to the literature by integrating linguistic ostracism, subjective well-being, foreign language enjoyment, and academic achievement within a single explanatory framework. The findings provide empirical support for the view that academic outcomes are shaped not only by cognitive and instructional factors but also by learners' social and emotional experiences. From a practical perspective, the results underscore the need for language educators and institutions to foster inclusive classroom environments that promote belonging, emotional well-being, and positive learning experiences. Future research may extend this work by employing longitudinal designs and exploring additional protective factors that strengthen learners' resilience in multilingual and multicultural educational settings.

#### **Author Contributions**

Zhixun Luo: Conceptualization, methodology, investigation, data curation, formal analysis, visualization, and writing – original draft preparation.

Rui Zhang: Validation, supervision, interpretation of findings, writing – review and editing, and manuscript refinement.

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#### **Institutional Review Board Statement**

The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles for research involving human participants and complied with institutional guidelines governing educational research.

### **Informed Consent Statement**

Informed consent was obtained from all participants involved in the study prior to data collection.

### **Data Availability Statement**

The datasets generated and analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

### **Conflicts of Interest**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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### **Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process**

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used generative artificial intelligence tools solely for language refinement, grammar checking, and editorial assistance. All conceptual development, research design, data analysis, interpretation of findings, and final manuscript preparation were conducted by the authors. The authors reviewed and edited the content as necessary and take full responsibility for the content of the published article.

### **Ethical Approval**

All procedures performed in this study involving human participants were conducted in accordance with institutional ethical standards and with the principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki. Participation was voluntary, anonymity was guaranteed, and no personally identifiable information was collected.

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