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Comparing LESLLA and Non-LESLLA Learners' Emotions Associated with Portfolio-Based Language Assessment

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Abstract

We report findings from a study of a federally mandated portfolio-based language assessment (PBLA) protocol in Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) programs. LINC has two streams: one for students who have well-developed first language literacy and the other for those with beginning levels of literacy (i.e., LESLLA learners). Researchers and LINC instructors have questioned the appropriateness of PBLA for use with LESLLA learners mainly because it is not responsive to their needs (e.g., IRCC, 2020) and causes undue stress (Abbott et al., 2021). Few studies have investigated LESLLA learners' perceptions of PBLA and no research has examined the differential impact of PBLA on students' emotions across the two LINC streams (General and Literacy). Because emotions can influence students' engagement, motivation, and ultimately their L2 learning in the classroom (e.g., MacIntyre et al., 2019), we used positive psychology (MacIntyre, 2021) to guide our exploration of a range of students' positive and negative emotions towards PBLA and compared them across the two streams. LINC students ($N = 109$) from eight high-beginner level classes completed a questionnaire consisting of 18 Likert items designed to measure nine positive and nine negative emotions related to PBLA. Bi/multilingual interpreters assisted the literacy learners. A MANOVA indicated that literacy students reported statistically significantly higher negative emotions scores than those students in the General stream. Post-hoc comparisons revealed that the literacy learners had significantly greater agreement with the items that captured stress and dread. Implications for LINC instruction, programming, and policy are discussed.

Keywords: ESL, literacy, positive psychology, emotions

Introduction

The experience of being a new immigrant may be likened to riding an emotional rollercoaster, particularly for those who are in the process of learning the language of the host country, as the experiences associated with second language (L2) learning can trigger intense positive and negative emotions (MacIntyre & Vincze, 2017) that can significantly influence their L2 learning (Botes et al., 2022). Although some adult immigrant L2 learners have well-developed first language (L1) literacy skills, which can support their L2 learning, others may be developing literacy skills for the first time in any language due to few prior experiences with formal school-based learning (i.e., LESLLA learners: LESLLA, n.d.). When attending formal L2 classes designed to develop proficiency in the official language(s) of the host country, it is likely that LESLLA learners' emotions towards the process of L2 learning may be even more intense than for non-LESLLA learners because LESLLA learners face the complex task of developing literacy skills at the same time as they are learning the L2. Historically, the negative emotion, anxiety, has captured the attention of L2 researchers (Plonsky et al., 2022); however, from the perspective of positive psychology, defined as “the scientific study of what goes right in life” (Peterson, 2006, p. 4), focusing on learners' positive emotions is equally if not more valuable. A key contribution of positive psychology to the field of applied linguistics has therefore “been to highlight the differences between positive and negative emotions” (MacIntyre & Vincze, 2017, pp. 65–66), resulting in a widening of the range of L2 emotions investigated.

In recent investigations of emotions associated with the L2 learning process, both positive and negative emotions (e.g., enjoyment, anxiety) have been reported to influence students' engagement, motivation, and ultimately their learning in the L2 classroom (e.g., MacIntyre et al., 2019). Studies of external sources of L2 emotions have revealed that teacher behaviors (Dewaele et al., 2018; Dewaele, Saito, & Halimi, 2022), and instructional approaches and assessment practices (e.g., Abbott & Lee, 2023a; 2023b) can impact students' emotions; however, to our knowledge, no studies have been conducted to compare potential differences between the emotions that LESLLA and non-LESLLA learners experience when learning in English as a second language (ESL) classes. Because ESL teachers who teach adult immigrants often work with both LESLLA and non-LESLLA learners, a better understanding of the differences in emotions that these two groups of learners experience during the process of L2 learning has the potential to inform effective language programming and instructional practices for these two groups of learners. For example, teachers who are cognizant of potential differences may be better prepared to cater to the diverse emotional needs of their learners and develop targeted strategies and interventions for orchestrating students' emotions, including strategies for boosting L2 emotions such as enjoyment that have been associated with L2 learning achievement (Dewaele, Botes, & Greiff, 2023), or for leveraging potentially maladaptive emotions (e.g., anxiety) that may be triggered by language programming, instruction, and assessment.

In the Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) program, a high stakes assessment protocol is mandated by the federal government for both LESLLA and non-LESLLA learners (see program description in the next section). However, research examining the differential effects of learner-external antecedents (e.g., L2 programming, instructional approaches, and assessment practices) on LESLLA and non-LESLLA learners' emotions in LINC has yet to be examined. The present study was designed to address this gap by comparing LESLLA and non-LESLLA learners' positive and negative emotions triggered by the high stakes

assessment protocol in LINC. Because emotions can influence students' engagement, motivation, and ultimately their L2 learning in the classroom (e.g., MacIntyre et al., 2019), research of this nature has the potential to improve L2 programming, instructional approaches, and assessment practices for both groups of learners.

Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC)

LINC is a federally funded ESL program for adult immigrants and refugees (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada [IRCC], 2020). LINC has two streams: a General stream for students who have well-developed first language literacy and a Literacy stream for those with beginning levels of literacy. Separate classes are provided for the two streams whenever feasible (e.g., when enrollment numbers are sufficient). LINC programming is guided by the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLBs; Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks [CCLB], 2012). The CLBs are a set of competency-based language standards that describe 12 levels of language proficiency. The levels are categorized into three stages: Stage I, beginner - CLB 1 to 4; Stage II, intermediate - CLB 5 to 8; Stage III, advanced - CLB 9 to 12. LINC classes are offered from CLB 1-10 for the General stream, but the majority of classes “focus on lower CLB levels (i.e., CLB 1 to 4)” (IRCC, 2020, p. 27); for the Literacy stream, classes are offered from pre-benchmark to CLB 4L (IRCC, 2020), which is comparable to Pre-A1 to A2 on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (North & Piccardo, 2023) and novice-low to intermediate-mid in the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Proficiency Guidelines (ACTFL, n.d.).

The main goal of LINC is to help immigrants and refugees learn to complete basic tasks (e.g., reading bus schedules and filling out forms requiring personal information before a doctor's appointment) that will help them successfully adapt to life in their new country (Citizenship & Immigration Canada [CIC], 2010). As a result, the prescribed teaching approach in LINC is task-based language teaching and task-based language assessment in the form of portfolio-based language assessment or PBLA (CCLB, 2019). Task-based language teaching is “characterized by activities that engage language learners in meaningful, goal-oriented communication to solve problems, complete projects, and reach decisions” (Pica, 2008, p. 71). PBLA is a highly prescriptive form of teacher-based assessment (Abbott et al., 2021) that is mandated by the federal government (CIC, 2015) and has been described as a “standardized teaching and assessment method” (IRCC, 2020, p. 13). PBLA results are high-stakes in that they are used to determine whether students advance to the next CLB level (CCLB, 2019), and they serve as evidence of language proficiency for citizenship—CLB 4 is required to apply for citizenship in Canada (Government of Canada, 2022). Overall, PBLA results are used to make important decisions that significantly affect immigrant's lives.

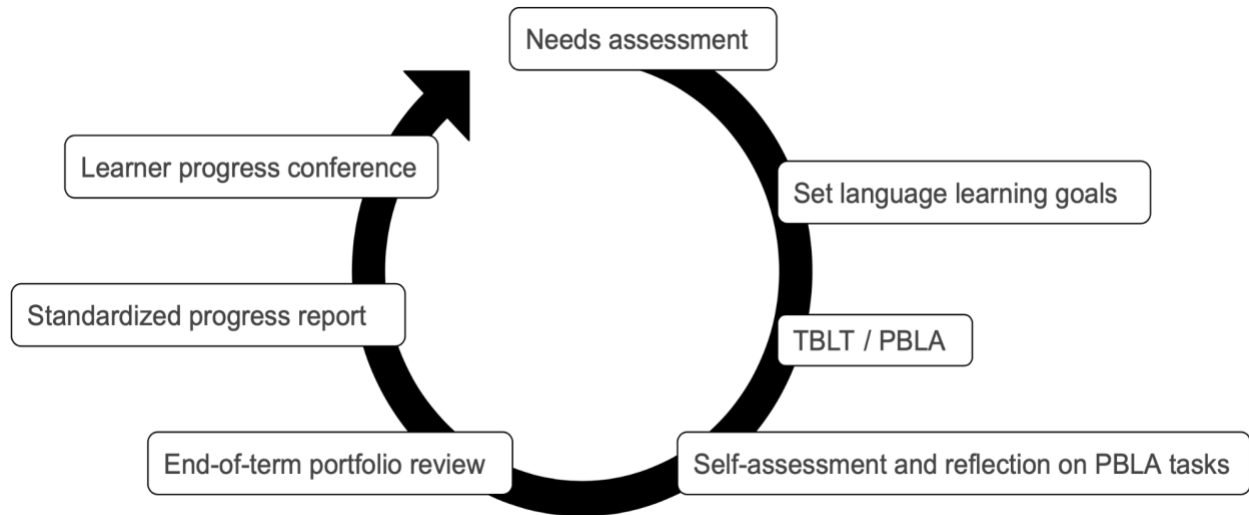
At the beginning of every LINC term¹, PBLA begins with an instructor-designed assessment² of students' needs, then instructors collaborate with their students to set language learning goals and compile, reflect on, and assess 32 to 40 language tasks each term (see Figure 1). LINC instructors are required to teach their students about this process and design lessons to meet the students' learning and settlement needs. Students are presented with a PBLA binder that serves as their portfolio. In the binder they compile their language learning goals, their

¹ A term in LINC is usually 12-14 weeks in length.

² The format of the needs assessment is determined by the instructor. For non-LESLLA learners, the needs assessment usually takes the form of a questionnaire and a class discussion; for LESLLA learners, it is typically a picture based class activity (e.g., learners circling pictures of topics that represent their needs).

assessment tasks, the feedback they receive on the tasks, and their own reflections on the tasks. At the end of term, the instructors fill out a progress report and then meet with each student individually to explain the report using the assessment tasks in their binder.

Figure 1: Fundamental features of the PBLA protocol



For more information, see the *PBLA Practice Guidelines* (CCLB, 2019).

Research on Portfolio-Based Language Assessment in LINC

Several researchers have explored students' perceptions of PBLA in LINC (e.g., Abbott et al., 2021; Drew & Mudzingwa, 2018; O'Shea, 2017). In Drew and Mudzingwa (2018) and O'Shea (2017), the learners were enrolled in intermediate level (CLB 5) or higher general LINC classes and the data were collected in English. These learners reported mixed reactions to PBLA. While the majority valued aspects of PBLA such as goal setting, a large proportion of students indicated that they experienced difficulties with self-assessment and reflection. Very few researchers have examined LESLLA learners' experiences with PBLA. With the assistance of bi/multilingual interpreters, Abbott et al. (2021) and Abbott and Lee (2023a) discovered that LESLLA learners generally held favorable attitudes towards LINC and PBLA, but many of them indicated that PBLA was very stressful. However, research has yet to investigate the differential impact of PBLA on students' emotions across the two LINC streams: General and Literacy.

Emotions and Positive Psychology

According to Reeve (2018), all emotions have the potential to enhance an individual's growth and well-being because both positive and negative feelings can be adaptive. For example, the bodily feelings associated with test anxiety (e.g., increased adrenaline) can actually facilitate an examinee's performance (Brady et al., 2018). Reeve's view aligns with positive psychology, defined as "the scientific study of what goes right in life" (Peterson, 2006, p. 4). Researchers in the field of positive psychology are interested in promoting well-being and positive affect by developing a better understanding of how humans can "thrive and flourish" (MacIntyre & Mercer, 2014, p. 154) in a variety of contexts (e.g., classrooms). Flourishing is the product of "life going well" (Huppert & So, 2013, p. 838). Positive emotions contribute to health and well-being and can undo negative emotions (Fredrickson, 2001) that interfere with goal attainment.

The three pillars of positive psychology are positive experiences (e.g., emotions), positive character strengths (e.g., love of learning; self-regulation), and positive institutions (e.g., classrooms, schools, government). The principles of positive psychology have the potential to inform institutional policies, educational programming, and classroom instruction “to facilitate the flourishing of both students and teachers alike” (MacIntyre, 2021, p. 6).

Emotions in L2 Learning

Discussions of emotions in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) have progressed from considerations of the impact of one negative emotion, anxiety, on foreign language learning (Scovel, 1978) to broader aspects of emotions (Pavlenko, 2013). For example, L2 researchers now recognize the influence of both positive and negative emotions on students’ learning (cf. MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012; MacIntyre, et al., 2019). Research suggests that enjoyment in language learning promotes achievement (Dewaele et al., 2018), and anxiety impedes language learning (Dewaele, Botes, & Greiff, 2023; Horwitz, 2010). The relationship between enjoyment and anxiety in language learning, however, is complex. Investigations of these two L2 emotions have yielded conflicting results: from negative relationships (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Dewaele, Botes, & Greiff, 2023), to no relationship (Li & Wei, 2023), to a dynamic relationship, where emotions fluctuate over time (e.g., high levels of enjoyment and anxiety one second, low enjoyment and high anxiety the next) (Boudreau et al., 2018). Botes et al. (2022) suggested that a circular relationship exists between these two emotions in that anxiety reduction strategies may increase enjoyment and as enjoyment increases anxiety decreases. In classroom-based learning, teachers can assist learners in developing these strategies and impact learners’ emotions.

LESLLA researchers who have investigated aspects of classroom learning have drawn attention to the need to study LESLLA learners’ emotions. For example, some of the LESLLA literature on the impact of trauma on learning (Isserlis, 2010; Schmidt, 2019) has suggested that prior traumatic experiences can contribute to negative emotions such as stress in the classroom. Two recent publications that include strategies for reducing traumatic stress and supporting the socio-emotional learning needs of learners who have experienced trauma are O’Loughlin and Custodio (2021) and Shapiro et al. (2018). Other LESLLA research examining instructional strategies for promoting L2 development in the classroom has indicated that the use of the L1 (Wall & Thapa, 2023), photovoice (Lypka, 2019), and the Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm (Cole & Ellson, 2015) can increase learners’ confidence, which is a positive emotion. Together, this body of literature implies that a focus on the three pillars of psychology can allow learners to flourish by fostering students’ positive experiences/emotions and character strengths (e.g., the five components of social emotional learning theory: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making [Elias et al., 2017], as well as promoting positive institutions (i.e., providing safe classroom environments and instructional strategies that are responsive to the learners’ needs).

Recently, L2 researchers have become interested in external predictors of L2 emotions in the classroom. For example, teachers’ use of the target language, predictable routines, and jokes in non-LESLLA contexts have been found to influence foreign language enjoyment but not anxiety (Dewaele et al., 2018; Dewaele, Saito, & Halimi, 2022); teacher friendliness/unfriendliness has been linked to both L2 enjoyment and anxiety (Dewaele, Özdemir, et al., 2022); and good test results have been associated with enjoyment (e.g., Dewaele, Özdemir, et al., 2022). However, there is limited research that has examined “the affective

dimension of learning and assessment” (Turner & Purpura, 2016, p. 268), and even less research related to emotions and PBLA in LINC. In one study conducted with LINC instructors who had experience teaching in the General and/or Literacy streams, most of the instructors expressed that the PBLA tasks are “really stressful” for both instructors and learners (Abdulhamid & Fox, 2020). Findings from interviews specifically with LINC literacy instructors and their students showed that despite favorable emotions towards the PBLA protocol, stress negatively impacted the LESLLA learners’ engagement in the tasks (Abbott et al., 2021): “One student would be shaking, and her page would be blank every time” (p. 246). A better understanding of the differential effects of L2 programming, instructional approaches, and assessment practices on LESLLA and non-LESLLA learners’ positive and negative L2 emotions may ultimately improve learning for both groups of learners, particularly in the ESL context in which research on LESLLA learners’ emotions remains limited. Therefore, the following research questions were explored in this study:

1. What is the relationship between LINC students’ positive and negative emotions associated with PBLA?
2. To what extent do students’ positive and negative emotions associated with PBLA differ across the two LINC streams (General or Literacy)?
3. Which particular positive or negative emotions differ across the two groups of learners (General or Literacy)?

Methodology

Study Procedures and Participants

After receiving institutional ethics approval, convenience sampling was used to recruit participants from five large LINC programs in Western Canada. Eight LINC instructors granted us permission to attend their CLB 4 classes so we could invite their students to participate. We visited the classes with bi/multilingual interpreters who were recommended by immigrant serving agencies and had signed confidentiality agreements. The interpreters ensured that the learners understood (a) the study purpose and procedures; (b) that their participation was voluntary so they could withdraw at any time; (c) that their identity would not be revealed and information provided would be confidential; and (d) that there were no risks to participating in the study, as their participation and the responses provided would not negatively impact their achievement in LINC, but may have to potential to improve LINC programming that may benefit them and other learners in the future. With the interpreters’ assistance, we also introduced ourselves as researchers who were not affiliated with any levels of government or the learners’ ESL institutions and therefore, had no power over their immigration status or program funding. All 109 students agreed to participate: 17 were enrolled in the General stream and 92 were in the Literacy stream. After providing informed consent and demographic information, the participants completed an 18 item positive and negative emotions questionnaire (described below) during class time without the instructors’ presence in the classroom; the literacy learners were assisted by bi/multilingual interpreters who read the items aloud in their L1s and answered any questions that they had. Then we compared the students’ responses to the positive and negative emotions questionnaire items across the two streams. A summary of the participants’ demographic information is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Participants' Demographic Information Across the Two Streams*

	CLB 4 Literacy stream (<i>n</i> = 92)	CLB 4 General stream (<i>n</i> = 17)
Age		
<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	34.8 (10.3)	40.3 (9.5)
Range	17–63	30–64
Self-identified gender		
Female	69.6%	82.4%
Male	21.7%	5.9%
Did not state	8.7%	11.8%
Country of Origin	Ethiopia (22%), Somalia (18%), Syria (14%), Eritrea (10%), Congo (9%), Afghanistan (3%), Kuwait (3%), Burma (2%), Mexico (2%), South Sudan (2%), Albania (1%), Cameroon (1%), China (1%), Colombia (1%), India (1%), Ivory Coast (1%), Libya (1%), Nigeria (1%), Saudi Arabia (1%), Sudan (1%), Turkey (1%), Vietnam (1%), Yemen (1%)	Eritrea (18%), Ukraine (18%), Syria (12%), Colombia (6%), Congo (6%), Ethiopia (6%), Iraq (6%), Morocco (6%), North Congo (6%), Romania (6%), Sudan (6%), Venezuela (6%)
Length of residence in Canada		
<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	3.3 years (2.9 years)	2.4 years (1.7 years)

Positive and Negative Emotions Questionnaire

To measure students' positive and negative emotions associated with PBLA in LINC, we adapted Bai et al.'s (2009) bidimensional affective questionnaire (see items in Table 2), which was originally designed to measure seventh and eighth grade students' feelings associated with their mathematics classes. Bai and colleagues (Bai, 2011; Bai et al., 2009) reported that their 18 Likert item questionnaire had a clear two-factor structure and good psychometric properties ($\alpha = .84$ to $.91$). When the data for the study reported in this paper were collected, short, concise scales that would be appropriate for use with LESLLA learners had yet to be developed for examining learners' emotions during the process of L2 learning associated with particular language programs, instructional approaches and assessments, such as LINC. Other emotions questionnaires such as the one developed by Pekrun et al. (2023) which contains 79 questions is not contextualized to a specific learning context, and Shao et al.'s (2023) "Achievement Emotion Questionnaire – Second Language Learning," contains 102 items; we deemed 79 or 102 items as too many for use in our study with LESLLA learners. Therefore, we chose to adapt Bai et al.'s (2009) questionnaire by replacing the subject "math" with PBLA.

Interpreters who were working at immigrant serving agencies translated and back translated our adapted questionnaire into the following languages: Amharic, Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, Edo, French, Hindi, Karen, Nepali, Oromo, Persian, Punjabi, Romanian, Russian, Somali, Spanish, Swahili, Thai, Tigrinya, Urdu, and Vietnamese. Then the questionnaire was piloted with 77 LESLLA learners in a pilot study with a similar cohort to the participants in this study. Nine of the items in the questionnaire were designed to measure the positive emotions of enjoyment, interest, enthusiasm, ease, satisfaction due to relevance, comfort, confidence, relaxation, and clarity associated with PBLA in LINC; nine negative emotions items were designed to measure a sense of tension, stress, worry, dread, difficulty, nervousness, uneasiness, confusion, and irrelevance associated with PBLA in LINC. In this study, both these scales had good internal consistency ($\alpha = .76, .77$, respectively) (Hair et al., 2010).

Data Analysis

SPSS (Version 28.0) was used to conduct our data analyses. First, we calculated descriptive statistics for each of the emotions questionnaire items. Then we summed and averaged the individual positive and negative emotions item scores to create two scale scores: one for positive emotions and the other for negative emotions. Next, we conducted correlation analyses to identify the relationships between the positive and negative emotions scale scores for all participants, for the General stream, and for the Literacy stream. Then we confirmed that the data met the assumptions for multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) and performed a one-way MANOVA using the positive and negative emotions scale scores as the dependent variables and the two LINC streams as the independent variable. Finally, we conducted post-hoc comparisons of individual questionnaire item means across the two LINC streams.

Results

Descriptive statistics for the learners' responses to individual questionnaire items and results from the post-hoc comparisons are shown in Table 2.

Table 2*Descriptive Statics and Post-hoc Comparisons of Literacy and General Learners' Responses to Individual Items*

Questionnaire items	Literacy Stream		General stream		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>	95% CI
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>				
Positive emotions subscale								
1. I find PBLA interesting.	4.32	0.69	4.29	0.17	0.12	.454	0.03	[-0.49, 0.55]
3. I think that I will use my PBLA portfolio in the future.	4.24	0.78	4.00	1.27	1.04	.150	0.28	[-0.24, 0.79]
5. PBLA relates to my life.	3.75	1.03	3.76	1.20	-0.05	.479	-0.01	[-0.53, 0.50]
10. I would like to do more PBLA tasks.	3.86	1.08	3.47	0.80	1.42	.080	0.37	[-0.15, 0.89]
12. PBLA is one of my favourite activities.	3.93	0.91	3.82	0.81	0.47	.320	0.12	[-0.39, 0.64]
13. I enjoy learning with PBLA.	4.07	0.94	4.06	0.43	0.05	.489	0.01	[-0.51, 0.53]
15. PBLA procedures are clear to me.	3.86	0.98	4.18	0.73	-1.27	.103	-0.34	[-0.86, 0.18]
16. PBLA results are low stakes.	2.51	1.20	2.12	1.05	1.26	.105	0.33	[-0.19, 0.85]
18. I like using PBLA in my class.	4.24	0.78	4.18	0.39	0.50	.309	0.09	[-0.43, 0.60]
Negative emotions subscale								
2. I get uptight during PBLA tasks.	3.49	1.27	3.12	1.22	1.11	.134	0.29	[-0.23, 0.81]
4. I am unable to think clearly when doing a PBLA task.	2.86	1.39	1.76	0.97	3.96	<.001	0.82	[0.29, 1.35]
6. I worry about my ability to complete PBLA tasks.	2.93	1.22	2.65	1.22	0.89	.187	0.24	[-0.28, 0.75]
7. I get a sinking feeling when I try to do PBLA tasks.	2.93	1.22	2.41	1.00	1.66	.050	0.44	[-0.08, 0.96]
8. I find PBLA challenging.	3.09	1.23	2.82	1.38	0.80	.214	0.21	[-0.31, 0.73]
9. PBLA makes me feel nervous.	2.39	1.18	2.18	1.19	0.69	.246	0.18	[-0.34, 0.70]
11. PBLA tasks make me feel uneasy.	2.60	1.13	2.24	1.15	1.21	.114	0.32	[-0.20, 0.84]
14. PBLA makes me feel confused.	2.46	1.19	2.00	1.06	1.60	.061	0.39	[-0.13, 0.91]
17. PBLA results are not useful.	2.04	1.02	1.76	1.15	1.02	.155	0.27	[-0.25, 0.79]

Note. *N* = 109 (*n* = 92 for Literacy stream, *n* = 17 for General stream). Scores ranged from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*).

The Relationships between Positive and Negative Emotions

Pearson correlation analyses between the positive and negative emotions scale scores showed a lack of statistically significant relationships for all 109 participants ($r = .050$, $p = .604$, 95% CI [-.139, .236]), for the 17 General stream students ($r = .011$, $p = .963$, 95% CI [-.472, .489]), and for the 92 Literacy stream learners ($r = .004$, $p = .728$, 95% CI [-.169, .240]). These results indicated small effects (cf. Plonsky & Oswald, 2014) in that both dimensions shared only 0.3%, 0.1%, and 0.002% of the variance, respectively.

Differences in Positive and Negative Emotions Across the Two LINC Streams

MANOVA (see Table 3) revealed a statistically significant difference in emotions across the Literacy and General streams, $F(2, 106) = 3.47$, $p = .035$; Wilk's $\Lambda = 0.939$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.06$ [main effect]. Although Literacy stream status did not have a significant effect on the LESLLA learners' positive emotions, there was a significant effect on their negative emotions. Using Cohen's (1988) benchmarks for interpreting eta squared, our results indicated that Literacy status had a medium effect size on negative emotions. In other words, although Literacy status did not differentially affect the students' positive emotions, it did have an impact on their negative emotions in that the LESLLA learners reported higher levels of negative emotions than the non-LESLLA learners.

Table 3. Means, Standard Deviations, and One-Way Analysis of Variance Statistics for Positive and Negative Emotions Scale Scores

Questionnaire scale	Literacy Stream		General stream		$F(1, 107)$	p	η_p^2
	M	SD	M	SD			
Positive emotions	34.77	4.78	33.88	2.96	0.55	.461	0.005
Negative emotions	24.79	5.72	20.94	5.49	6.58	.012	0.058

Note. Maximum scale score = 45.

Differences in Specific Emotions Across the Two LINC Streams

The results of the post-hoc comparisons between the Literacy and General stream learners' responses to the individual questionnaire items (Table 2) revealed that the LESLLA learners reported higher scores (i.e., more agreement) than the non-LESLLA learners on the following items that capture the emotions of stress and dread, respectively:

Item 4. I am unable to think clearly when doing a PBLA task.

Mean difference = 1.09, $t(29.63) = 3.96$, $p = .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.82$.

Item 7. I get a sinking feeling when I try to do PBLA tasks.

Mean difference = 0.52, $t(107) = 1.66$, $p = .050$, Cohen's $d = 0.44$.

Discussion

Our first research question addressed the relationship between LINC students' positive and negative emotions associated with PBLA. Findings from three separate correlations revealed no significant relationships and, more importantly, virtually no shared variance between the two

sets of emotions for all participants, as well as students in the General stream and in the Literacy stream. Li and Wei (2023) also did not find a relationship between positive and negative L2 emotions; however, they only examined two emotions (i.e., enjoyment and anxiety) and their participants were non-LESLLA learners. The lack of relationship and shared variance in our study supports Dewaele et al.'s (2018) argument that "L2 enjoyment and anxiety are separate dimensions" (p. 10) and suggest that LINC students' positive and negative emotions can co-exist rather than on a continuum. Although positive and negative emotions are "often described as if they are in a seesaw relationship when one goes up, the other goes down" (MacIntyre, 2021, p. 10), in reality, "the absence of one does not automatically imply the presence of the other and vice versa" (Dewaele, Botes, & Greiff, 2023, p. 1). Our findings indicate that for both LESLLA and non-LESLLA learners, having high levels of enjoyment, interest, enthusiasm, ease, satisfaction due to relevance, comfort, confidence, relaxation, and clarity does not guarantee that they will not also experience negative emotions such as a sense of tension, stress, worry, dread, difficulty, nervousness, uneasiness, confusion, or irrelevance associated with PBLA.

The mean scores on the individual emotions questionnaire items (see Table 2) and the composite emotion scale scores (see Table 3) indicate that overall, the LINC students experienced high levels of positive emotions while also experiencing a moderate amount of negative emotions. These findings, which are similar to those from studies examining university students' L2 learning enjoyment and anxiety (Boudreau et al., 2018; Li & Wei, 2023) suggest that, in general, learners' positive emotions do not necessarily cancel out the negative emotions elicited by PBLA. The learners in our study appeared to be very happy with the opportunity to attend LINC classes and learn English with PBLA, but the PBLA protocol also elicited negative emotions. Although negative feelings can be adaptive (Reeve, 2018), there exists the possibility "that, beyond a certain threshold, the strength of the negative emotion can override the impact of the positive emotion, such that it is not felt or perceived to be present anymore" (Boudreau et al., 2018, p. 165). Findings from our current study taken together with our previous findings from interviews conducted with LINC literacy learners and their instructors (Abbott et al., 2021) lend support to the possibility that strong negative emotions can undo the impact of positive emotions. Despite literacy learners' favorable attitudes toward PBLA and LINC, at times, PBLA tasks can trigger task withdrawing negative emotions that may prevent them from engaging in the tasks.

The second research question focused on the differences between LESLLA and non-LESLLA learners' positive and negative emotions towards PBLA across the two LINC streams. Our finding that the LINC students' experiences of positive emotions did not differ across the two streams is similar to previous studies that showed that LESLLA (Abbott & Lee, 2023a, 2023b) and non-LESLLA learners (Drew & Mudzingwa, 2018; O'Shea, 2017) alike hold favorable attitudes towards PBLA. The current study extends these previous findings and implies that a range of positive emotions contribute to LINC students' positive attitudes. Students' positive emotions may be related to their LINC instructors' efforts and abilities to create positive learning environments, as previous research with non-LESLLA learners has confirmed that teachers' behaviors and characteristics can positively influence language learners' enjoyment (Dewaele, Saito, & Halimi, 2022; Dewaele et al., 2018; Dewaele, Özdemir, et al., 2022). It is likely that the learners' responses to our questionnaire items such as "I like using PBLA in my class" may have been positively influenced by their instructors' caring demeanors and enjoyable classroom practices. Regardless of the LINC stream, the instructors appeared able to implement PBLA in a manner that fostered their students' enjoyment and other positive emotions in their LINC classes. While there were no significant differences between the students' positive

emotions across the two streams, our results indicated that the PBLA protocol elicited higher levels of negative emotions in the LESLLA learners than the non-LESLLA learners. One possible explanation for this difference may be related to findings from an evaluation of LINC and PBLA conducted by Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (2020) in which it was implied that PBLA is less helpful for learners with literacy needs.

Differences between specific positive and negative emotions associated with PBLA across the two LINC streams were the focus of our third research question. The LESLLA learners experienced significantly higher levels of only two emotions than the non-LESLLA learners (Table 2; item 4 - stress, and item 7 - dread). These differences were likely attributable to an interaction between the learning environment and the LESLLA learners' reading and writing proficiency levels. The PBLA protocol places a heavy emphasis on text-based materials (e.g., task directions), resources, and printed teacher evaluation forms that require written action-oriented feedback. For example, in exemplar CLB 4 speaking assessment tasks³ provided by the Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks (2020), the organization responsible for PBLA training for LINC instructors across Canada, the assessment material presents various issues for LESLLA learners due to the text-heavy task instructions, role-play cards, and feedback forms. Because LESLLA learners are emergent readers, the need to read for task success likely contributes to their higher levels of stress and dread than those reported by the students in the General stream, who have stronger literacy skills and more well developed formal school-based learning strategies. Other studies of LINC students' experiences with PBLA have also identified stress as a product of PBLA (Abdulhamid & Fox, 2020; Abbott et al., 2021). While Abdulhamid and Fox's (2020) findings were based on the perceptions of instructors who taught students in both the general and literacy streams, the current study adds to our understanding of emotions in PBLA from the students' perspective and shows that stress and dread are more profound for learners in the Literacy stream than those in the General stream.

The LESLLA learners' higher levels of stress and dread may also be related to the high-stakes nature and consequences of PBLA results. Although both LESLLA and non-LESLLA learners in LINC face the pressure to do well in order to pass CLB 4 and gain citizenship, we argue that this pressure is qualitatively different as non-LESLLA learners have more skills to cope with the demands and impact of high-stakes assessments. As a result, assessment triggers differential levels of stress in LESLLA and non-LESLLA learners. Whereas stress is the response to a trigger (American Psychological Association, 2022), dread is the "fearful anticipation" (American Psychological Association, n. d.) of a future event (e.g., dreading one's failure to understand the L2 during assessment and also dreading the consequences of failing the assessment). All of the students in the current study were enrolled in CLB 4 classes, and in Canada, a certificate of completion from a LINC CLB 4 course serves as "language proof for citizenship" (Government of Canada, 2022). However, when language test performance is tied to immigrants' access to future education, citizenship, and economic prosperity in the host country, LESLLA learners are at a disadvantage (Carlsen & Rocca, 2021). Considering that Canadian citizenship is connected to the successful completion of PBLA tasks, the possibility of failure likely contributes to the LESLLA learners' higher levels of stress and dread.

Limitations and Implications for Future Research

Like all research, our study has limitations that provide directions for future research.

³ See exemplar assessment materials https://pblapg.language.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/CLB-3-4_-Shopping-for-Groceries_JAN26_2021.pdf

First, because the measures of emotion were collected through a self-reported questionnaire, the limitations of using indirect measures apply, as the participants may have over- or underestimated their emotions. To increase the validity of our self-report measures, however, we hired numerous bi/multilingual interpreters to assist with this project. In future studies, collecting other measures of emotions via observations, interviews, or stimulated recalls would likely enhance our understanding of the differential impact of assessment on LESLLA and non-LESLLA students' emotions during the L2 learning process. Second, although the participants were recruited from five different ESL programs, the participants in the General LINC stream were from only one of these programs; therefore, in future studies, collecting data from a larger sample of LINC students in the General stream and across multiple programs may contribute to a better understanding of the differences in emotions experienced by students in the two LINC streams. Furthermore, due to the lack of LESLLA learners' test literacy, their chances of success on tests are lower than for non-LESLLA learners (Carlsen, 2017; Carlsen & Rocca, 2021), and as a result, tests may be more stressful for LESLLA learners. Therefore, studies of learners' test literacy conducted in conjunction with examinations of the differential impact of high-stakes language assessments on LESLLA and non-LESLLA learners' emotions are needed to examine both the learner-internal and learner-external factors that contribute to emotions in a variety of instructional and assessment contexts.

Preliminary Implications for Practice

Research in positive psychology is concerned with helping individuals improve their well-being and functioning by recognizing the contributions of both positive and negative emotions (e.g., MacIntyre et al., 2019). Whereas research in L2 emotions has historically focused on anxiety (Plonsky et al., 2022), a focus on a wider range of both positive and negative L2 emotions has greater potential for promoting positive experiences, characteristics and institutions that contribute to the L2 learning process in the classroom and beyond. Findings from our study, framed within the principles of positive psychology, provide some preliminary implications for practice.

To address the first pillar of positive psychology, positive experiences (e.g., emotions), LESLLA and non-LESLLA instructors can help students develop emotional awareness. When learners are asked to identify the L2 emotions they are experiencing, this may help them to better understand and objectivize their emotions so they can take steps to capitalize on both their positive and negative emotions. For example, instructors can develop enjoyable activities, which cultivate positive emotions and can help students recognize that a bit of stress can push them to learn and know when they need to use strategies to reframe their negative emotions (see positive psychology activities at <https://www.eltandhappiness.com/> and <https://ggia.berkeley.edu/>).

Regarding the second pillar of positive psychology, positive character strengths, instructors can make assessments more positive particularly for LESLLA learners who are experiencing assessment-related stress and dread by helping them develop the characteristics of people who are adept at dealing with these emotions. Some ways to accomplish this goal include the following:

- asking learners to identify and recognize the aspects of assessment that create stress and dread, and which do not;
- identifying and describing the strategies that students can use to cope with stress and dread during assessment;
- inviting other (higher-level) learners into the class to discuss their coping strategies in the

students' L1s. As a follow-up activity, instructors could ask learners to summarize their discussions in English, and in doing so, instructors might learn some new culturally-responsive strategies as well;

- helping learners make their negative emotions adaptive;
- finding the silver lining (see Gregersen et al., 2019) in assessment (e.g., ask, what is the silver lining for you in completing this assessment task?). Class discussions of their answers to this question could help the learners see assessment as (a) an opportunity to show what they know and (b) a tool for improvement that can help prepare them for the next instructional level.

With respect to the third pillar of positive psychology, positive institutions, our findings suggest that changes to policy and programming (e.g., PBLA requirements; CCLB, 2019) may be needed to better enable the LESLLA learners to flourish in school-based learning environments. A reduction in the number of formal assessments and greater emphasis on learning-oriented assessment (see Abbott et al., 2021) could promote a more positive learning culture for LESLLA learners in LINC. Other researchers (e.g., Altherr Flores, 2017; Gonzalves, 2017) have raised concerns regarding the negative impact of high-stakes assessment on LESLLA learners' anxiety levels and called for a reduced emphasis on formal assessment with this population of learners. Reducing the number of formal assessments would free up time for targeted reading instruction and more spontaneous immediate scaffolded feedback (Abbott et al., 2021). Stronger literacy skills would likely lower the learners' stress and dread associated with assessment as they would be better prepared to read and comprehend the task materials and instructors' action-oriented written feedback. Language programs and funders could also provide the instructors with additional time and resources to better support the learners' literacy development, which would likely result in more positive school-based learning environments/institutions for LESLLA learners.

Conclusion

The present study set out to investigate LESLLA and non-LESSLA learners' emotions associated with PBLA in LINC. The study was guided by three key assumptions: students' emotions can influence their engagement, motivation, and ultimately their L2 learning in the classroom; a better understanding of students' emotions during the teaching-learning process can help instructors, learners, and literacy programs improve this process; and literacy status can have a differential impact on learners' emotions. Our findings indicated that both groups of learners experience high levels of positive L2 emotions, but the LESLLA learners experience higher levels of stress and dread than the non-LESLLA learners. The differential impact of literacy status on negative emotions appears to warrant additional attention from LESLLA instructors and LINC programs. By framing our findings within the three pillars of positive psychology (MacIntyre, 2021), we offered three main solutions for addressing this differential impact and for creating more positive school-based learning environments, particularly for LESLLA learners: (1) foster learners' emotional awareness so they can capitalize on a wide range of positive and negative emotions when learning; (2) promote the development of positive character traits for coping with the stress and dread that learners associate with L2 assessment; (3) revise assessment policies to create a more positive learning environment. The enactment of these solutions would ultimately allow students and teachers to flourish.

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